

# Frequently Asked Questions: Creating a Staff Parental Leave Policy

## What is the current Staff Parental Leave Policy?

Staff that give birth are eligible to take Short Term Disability (STD) Leave, which runs concurrent with Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) of Absence. All staff are eligible to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid FMLA time. The period of disability for a maternity leave is typically 6 or 8 weeks. Therefore, a staff member who gives birth to a child can receive 60% of salary under STD for 5 or 7 weeks following a 5-day unpaid waiting period. Staff members may use PTO or floating holidays for the unpaid waiting period of STD or during the FMLA absence. Staff members who do not give birth to a child are not entitled to any paid leave.

## What is the current Faculty Parental Leave Policy?

A faculty member is entitled to one semester (or approximately 16 weeks) paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

## What are Staff Council's recommendations for an improved Staff Parental Leave Policy?

- The primary caregiver of an adopted or newborn child is provided 12 weeks fully paid leave. A primary caregiver refers to an eligible employee that becomes a parent through childbirth or adoption of a school age child or younger.
- The secondary caregiver is provided 6 weeks fully paid leave. A secondary caregiver refers to an eligible employee and the parent of the newborn or recently adopted child and who is not the primary caregiver.
- Use of paid time off is not required to receive the benefit.
- Primary and secondary caregivers can use their paid leave time intermittently within a 12-month period.

Additionally, the university could consider providing an adoption assistance benefit to employees that adopt and formalizing a flexible or reduced return-to-work schedule for new parents. Providing parents with support, flexibility, and time to bond with their child(ren) and adjust to their new family situation while balancing their professional obligations is the ultimate goal of a parental leave policy.

## Why is Staff Council proposing this policy?

This topic is important to CMU Staff as evidenced by the participation in a questionnaire provided to the CMU community earlier this year that aimed to gather attitudes around the current set of policies related to parental leave. 1,279 CMU employees, approximately one third of the CMU staff, completed the survey. We found that less than 10% of the staff is satisfied with the current leave benefit. Many respondents commented that they are disappointed by the lack of equity between faculty and staff. Other common themes found in the staff comments were lack of support for spouses and parents who adopt, financial hardship during unpaid leave, and the absence of clear information related to the current policy.



*"Attracting and retaining a diverse community remains a significant challenge for Carnegie Mellon, and emerged early on in the strategic plan discussions as a major area of concern for students, faculty, and staff. This will require the creation of a practical process for recruiting and retaining women and under-represented minorities, along with inclusive policies and practices that build a sense of community among people with many backgrounds, skills, and strengths."*

-Goals for the University Community



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## Who does this policy primarily benefit?

This policy will benefit CMU Staff who become parents or add children to their family while employed at CMU. The proposed policy will no longer exclude new parents who do not give birth to a child (e.g., parents adopting children, parents using surrogacy, fathers).

## How does this policy align with the CMU Mission?

We believe that the policy suggested above embodies the spirit of “One CMU” that is part of the university’s Strategic Plan 2025, specifically addressed under “[Goals for the Individual Experience](#),” under “[Personal Development, including Physical and Emotional Health and Well-Being](#),” under “[Holistic Health and Wellness](#).” In addition, we believe these recommendations will help accomplish two of the goals set for the Carnegie Mellon community in the University Strategic Plan. Specifically, it would fall under the first two goals: 1) Create a diverse and inclusive community and 2) Recruit and retain world-class students, faculty, and staff.<sup>1</sup>

## How does this policy benefit the staff?

A parental leave policy will provide value to staff on a personal and professional level. Adding a staff parental leave policy will boost staff morale. There are numerous child and maternal health benefits to a longer, paid leave. Parental leave allows secondary caregivers to take a larger role in parenting, as well as help their partner who may be recovering from childbirth. On a professional level, economists have found that paid leave increases the probability that mothers will return to work, work more hours, and eventually earn higher wages.<sup>2</sup>

## How does this policy benefit Carnegie Mellon University?

Research has shown that implementing paid family leave policies can benefit employers by improving their ability to recruit and retain top talent, reducing the cost associated with employee turnover, and minimizing loss of firm-specific skills and human capital, as well as boosting morale and worker productivity.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a parental leave policy will bolster CMU’s reputation as a premier place of employment in the Pittsburgh region. Work-life policies have been shown to be one of the most important factors in recruiting and retaining women, as well as millennials, which should increase diversity at CMU.<sup>4</sup>

1 Goals for the University Community. <http://www.cmu.edu/strategic-plan/university-community/>

2 Miller, C. “The Economic Benefits of Paid Parental Leave”. The New York Times. Jan 30, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/upshot/the-economic-benefits-of-paid-parental-leave.html>

3 The Council of Economic Advisers. The Economics of Paid and Unpaid Leave. June 2014. [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/leave\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/leave_report_final.pdf)

4 Fouad, Nadya. “Leaning in, but Getting Pushed Back”. American Psychological Association Annual Convention. August 2014.



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