

Improving Staff Retention and Diversity through the Creation of a Parental Leave Policy

Staff Council proposes the implementation of a parental leave policy to ensure the consistent and fair treatment of all employees adding a child to their family while employed at Carnegie Mellon University. We believe that the policy suggested below 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](#).” The chairman of the Board of Trustees, James Rohr, recently expressed his continued commitment to the spirit of “One CMU” with a special emphasis on supporting the university’s faculty, students and staff.¹ For staff growing their families, addressing the effect of this transition on their lives is thus vital to fulfilling the spirit of “One CMU.” In addition, we believe the recommendations below 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
 2. Recruit and retain world-class students, faculty, and staff.²
- By prioritizing parental leave, CMU will maintain its reputation as a leader in the Pittsburgh area and among peer institutions for progressive policies.

The lack of a parental leave policy for staff at CMU means families must only rely on a basic level of support from short-term disability (STD), if eligible, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). 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 who do not give birth to a child are not entitled to any paid leave. As such, this benefit excludes fathers, same sex couples, families who struggle with infertility, and families who adopt. As a result, those staff members must rely on the use of Paid Time Off (PTO) and up to 12 weeks unpaid time through FMLA. Furthermore, due to FMLA regulations, if both parents are university staff they must share the FMLA period. Conversely, a faculty member is entitled to one semester (or approximately 16 weeks) paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

To put that timeframe into perspective, some childcare centers, including notably CMU’s Cyert Center, do not enroll children before

¹ “Leadership”. <http://www.cmu.edu/leadership/president-suresh/campus-comms/2017/2017-06-01R.html>

² Goals for the University Community. <http://www.cmu.edu/strategic-plan/university-community/>



“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



Carnegie Mellon University
staff-council@andrew.cmu.edu
www.cmu.edu/staff-council

12 weeks of age. Therefore, an employee may be required to exhaust all paid time off in order to extend the paid leave provided by STD, if eligible, to close the gap. This leaves a new parent returning to work with limited PTO left to care for a sick infant or attend pediatric appointments.

Earlier this year, 1,279 CMU employees, approximately one third of the CMU staff, completed a questionnaire that aimed to gather information about attitudes and awareness around the current parental leave benefits at CMU. More than half of the respondents were unsatisfied 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.

We understand that CMU typically benchmarks against a published list of peer academic institutions when considering policy changes. Comparing against this list of universities makes sense when recruiting faculty and students as they are typically willing to relocate to join the best academic institution. However, staff evaluate places of employment based on attributes such as location, salary, benefits, workplace culture, and mission. As a result, in terms of recruiting staff, CMU is primarily competing with Pittsburgh-based employers and companies that are the most motivated to hire highly skilled people. Many of CMU's peer institutions and Pittsburgh-based employers have recently recognized the needs of their workforce and have created generous parental leave policies that benefit all parents. Evidence from employers that have paid policies in place has proven to positively impact the organization and their employees. Research has shown that implementing paid leave policies can benefit employers by improving their ability to recruit and retain top talent and boost morale and productivity. At a regional level, the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, University of Pittsburgh, and large local employers such as PNC Bank and BNY Mellon have revised their parental leave policies within the last two years.

The purpose of a parental leave policy is to foster an environment that supports a healthy work-life balance for all community members. The faculty has benefited from a parental leave policy for years. We suggest the following items be considered in a new parental leave and adoption

policy for eligible staff to make the policies more equitable for all families and address the needs of caregivers and their children:

- 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 consider 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.

Staff members are a vital part of the campus community who deserve a level of support comparable to what is provided to other university members. In the spirit of "One CMU," all members of the university community should have comparable benefits, especially in terms of such critical life events as growing one's family. This committee hopes that the evidence presented in the proposal will aid in the creation of a policy that will better address the needs of new parents (regardless of family roles or how families are created) and will promote equity across the university.



Carnegie Mellon University
staff-council@andrew.cmu.edu
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