

## Paid Parental Leave Frequently Asked Questions

### Who is eligible for the paid parental leave benefit?

This benefit is available to employees eligible for comprehensive leave benefits who have been employed with the County for at least six months of continuous service at the time of the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement (“qualifying event”).

Employees eligible for comprehensive leave benefits" means full-time regular, part-time regular, provisional, probationary, and term-limited temporary employees. It does not include short-term temporary employees (STTs) or administrative interns. To be very clear, if you are not eligible at the time of the event (birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt) then you are not eligible for paid parental leave.

To qualify, an employee must be either non-represented or represented by a union that has signed an agreement to participate in the program at the time of the qualifying event. All unions are currently participating in the program.

### Is paid parental leave available to both men and women?

Yes, both mothers and fathers are eligible for paid parental leave including same sex married spouses. If both parents work for King County, they are each eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

### Can an employee receive more than one allotment of paid parental leave in the same 12-month period (i.e., What if an employee has two qualifying events in a 12-month period)?

An eligible employee may receive up to 12-weeks of paid parental leave for each qualifying event. The birth or adoption of multiples (e.g., twins) only qualifies as one event. If a second qualifying event occurs before the end of the original 12-month period, then agency human resource personnel will re-run the PPL calculation to determine new eligible PPL benefits.

### What documentation is required to receive paid parental leave?

Depending on the type of paid parental leave there are several required forms. The employee must inform his or her human resources representative and/or immediate supervisor of the need for paid parental leave at least 30 days in advance. In the rare case when the need for leave is not foreseeable, the employee must provide notice as soon as possible. Notice is typically accomplished by submitting a [Leave Request Form](#).

Additionally, an employee is also required to submit documentation that verifies the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement. If the paid parental leave is for bonding with a foster-to-adopt placement, then a [Foster-to-Adopt Form](#) is also required.

### Can paid parental leave be used on a part-time or intermittent basis?

Paid parental leave may be used all at once (continuously) or on a part-time (intermittent) basis. For paid parental leave to be used on a part-time (intermittent) basis, the leave schedule must be consistent with the department’s operational needs and be approved in writing prior to the beginning of the leave.

### Isn't the benefit unfair or inequitable because people with low leave balances will get a greater benefit? Doesn't this penalize people who “planned” for their leave?

Many different options were considered when researching and developing a paid parental leave program for King County. When selecting which option to use for the pilot program, it was important to the

# Leave Administration | Paid Parental Leave FAQ

## Department of Human Resources (DHR)

---

Executive that the program be financially responsible, equitable, and easy to administer. Ultimately, requiring employees with leave balances to use some of their accrued leave was the option that best meet those goals.

While the benefit may not be equal for all employees, it provides equitable outcomes. This option also supports the County's equity and social justice principles by reducing disparities between how low- and high-wage employees take leave. Additionally, it enables the County to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave for all eligible employees in a way that is cost-effective.

### **Isn't this unfair to employees who don't have children?**

King County offers a substantially similar set of benefits to all employees. However, depending on what stage an employee is at in the employee's life, the employee will use different benefits to different degrees. This is true regarding vacation and sick leave, in addition to health benefits, the employee assistance program, and retirement planning.

The U.S. is the only developed country in the world that does not mandate any type of paid leave for new parents. Science shows that newborns' earliest experiences are the most important to their long-term success. For children to flourish, they need time to bond with their parents. King County is committed to promoting best starts for kids, including our employees' kids.

### **How will this benefit work for employees who work part-time or who don't have a regular schedule?**

If part-time employees meet the other eligibility requirements – that they have been with the County for at least six continuous months, that they are eligible for comprehensive leave benefits, and that they are either not represented or represented by a union that has agreed to participate in the program – then they can receive paid parental leave.

The paid parental leave allotment will be prorated based on the employee's regular schedule. For example, if an employee is scheduled to work 24 hours-per-week (or .6 of an FTE), he or she would still be eligible for 12 weeks of leave, but at 24 hours per week (versus 40 hours for a full-time employee). For employees who work variable hours, it will be calculated based on their average hours over the previous six months.

### **Does this time count towards seniority?**

Whether or not paid parental leave counts toward seniority depends on the specifics of an employee's collective bargaining agreement. Typically, paid leave does count toward seniority, but it is important to check with your department or agency's human resources staff to confirm the details in the individual contracts.

### **Why are an employee's existing leave balances factored into the paid parental leave benefit?**

In analyzing the costs and benefits of a paid parental leave program, staff considered many different options. The Executive had several priorities when considering which option to recommend. Those priorities included that the program have equitable outcomes for employees and be financially responsible and sustainable. The Executive and Council also shared a goal of providing 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

Ultimately, the option that best met those objectives was the one that asked employees to use some of their accrued leave. This is consistent with best practices, achieves an equitable outcome for all

# Leave Administration | Paid Parental Leave FAQ

Department of Human Resources (DHR)

---

employees, and keeps the program affordable.

## How do I calculate how much leave I am eligible to receive?

The amount of leave an employee is eligible for is calculated on the day of the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement. On that day, the employee will receive the amount of supplemental leave that is needed to give the employee a total of 12 weeks when combined with the employee's existing accrued leave (defined as accrued sick leave, vacation leave, executive leave, and Benefit Time). Full-time employees will have their PeopleSoft standard hours entered into the PPL calculator up to a maximum of 480 hours (or maximum standard hours of 40 hours per week).

For example, if an employee has three weeks of vacation leave and two weeks of sick leave, two weeks of his or her vacation and one week of sick leave will be applied towards the paid parental leave, and the employee would receive nine weeks of supplemental paid parental leave, for a total of 12 weeks of paid leave.

To get an idea of how many hours you may be eligible for, you can use the PPL Calculator found on the [Taking Leave](#) website. The calculator automatically reserves one week of accrued sick leave and one week of vacation only for the purpose of the calculation. These weeks of leave can be used at any time and are only for the purpose of calculating the PPL benefit.

## Does PPL provide job protection?

During the time that PPL pay is being received, the employee's job shall be protected to the same extent as under the family and medical leave act.

## Does PPL provide medical benefit protection?

During the use of PPL, an employee will continue to receive medical benefits (medical, dental, vision) while non-medical benefits (life, AD&D, LTD) will continue to be paid through payroll deductions.

## When does my paid parental leave expire?

Paid parental leave expires 12 months from the date of the qualifying event (questions related to the date of the qualifying event should be directed to the DHR Policy team). After 12 months, any remaining unused paid parental leave hours will be unavailable and removed.

## How does the paid parental leave work with respect to Family Medical Leave (FML) and King County Family Medical Leave (KCFML)?

Paid parental leave works in conjunction with other types of protected leave (FMLA, KCFML, WFCA, PFML, etc.) to the fullest extent possible. This means that PPL will run concurrently with other protected leave laws when the condition and the employee are eligible. Employees should discuss available leave options with their agency human resource representative.

## How does my paid parental leave interact with other paid leave accruals?

After the hours have been awarded, the employee can use the leave in any order they choose. The employee may also choose to only use the supplemental leave. If you are a represented employee, be sure to reference your collective bargaining agreement.

# Leave Administration | Paid Parental Leave FAQ

Department of Human Resources (DHR)

---

## **What happens if I choose not to return to work after taking my paid parental leave?**

An employee who does not return to work for at least six months of continuous service after taking his or her paid parental leave will be required to reimburse King County for the salary received while on supplemental paid parental leave. Employees agree to this when signing the *Protected Family and Medical Leave Request Form*.

## **Will I be eligible for paid parental leave if my position will expire before I can return to work for at least six months (e.g., a TLT position)?**

If an otherwise eligible employee will not be able to return to work for six months of continuous service following the leave because the position is scheduled to end, then the employee is not eligible and paid parental leave benefits will not be awarded. This would mainly occur with term-limited positions, but also applies to positions that are scheduled for layoff.

## **What happens if an employee is on special duty when they start taking paid parental leave?**

As required by the special duty policy, if an employee will be on leave for more than 30 days, their special duty assignment will end, and the employee will be returned to their base position. Therefore, in most cases, while out on paid parental leave the employee will be compensated at the rate of their base position (i.e., no special duty pays). Employees need to be re-appointed to the special duty position upon returning to work.

## **Does an employee need to be in a comprehensive leave eligible position for the entire six-month period leading up to paid parental leave?**

To be eligible for PPL, employees must be employed for six continuous months prior to the qualifying event (birth, adoption, foster-to-adopt) and must be in a comprehensive leave eligible position at the time of the qualifying event. Employees are not required to have been in a comprehensive leave eligible position for the entire six-month period leading up to the qualifying event.

## **How is PPL calculated if an employee has donated leave hours available at the time that PPL is calculated?**

Donated leave is not a part of the PPL calculation; it is a separate bank of time. The amount of PPL benefit will depend upon the accrued leave (i.e., sick, vacation/benefit time, and executive leave) available to the employee at the time of the event.

## **What date is used to calculate the PPL hours to be awarded?**

PPL hours are calculated on the date of the “qualifying event.” This is the day that the birth, adoption, or foster-to-adopt placement occurs. To accurately calculate PPL, agencies must consider the balance shown on the most recent pay advice as well as any other accrued leave used between the end of the last pay period and the event date (birth, adoption, foster-to-adopt).

## **Can an employee use PPL when a child has lived with the employee, but is then later adopted by the employee?**

The purpose of PPL is to provide time for a new parent to bond with a newborn or newly placed child. If the child has been living with the employee, this event would not be eligible for PPL.

## **Are there circumstances when an employee must reimburse King County for PPL usage/hours?**

An employee who does not return to work for at least six months of continuous service following the leave

# Leave Administration | Paid Parental Leave FAQ

*Department of Human Resources (DHR)*

---

in a comprehensive leaves eligible position, will be required to reimburse King County for the salary received while using supplemental paid parental leave. This is considered an overpayment of public funds and must be reported to the State of Washington and collected back from the employee.

## **Must an employee return to their original comprehensive leave eligible position to prevent paying back funds received from PPL?**

No. An employee may return to any King County comprehensive leaves eligible position working at least half-time for at least six continuous months to satisfy the requirement.

## **To prevent payback of PPL funds received, when does the six-continuous month window begin?**

Employees are required to work for at least 6 months of continuous service after they return to work after their PPL leave. Employees may be approved for less than full-time schedules based upon the business needs of the agency but must work at least half-time of their full-time position. For example, an employee normally scheduled to work 160 hours a month could be approved by their agency to work a minimum of 80 hours each month.

## **What happens when an employee returns to work from PPL but then takes a long unpaid leave of absence before they have completed six continuous months of work?**

If an employee returns to work from PPL and then takes a longer unpaid leave of absence, then the six-month requirement restarts when they return from that unpaid leave of absence working at least part-time.