

Paid Family Leave changes for 2019



SMALL BUSINESS
Jamie Herzlich

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A heads-up for employers: The new year has brought some key changes to the state's law on an important employee benefit.

■ **More time, higher contribution.** The New York Paid Family Leave Act provides for partially paid, job-protected leave for eligible employees under certain circumstances, and in 2019 the leave period has changed from eight to 10 weeks.

Another key change is an increase in employee contributions, so employers should make sure payroll deductions have been updated and have a contingency plan to cover for employees taking a leave.

As always, preparing ahead for potential change is best, experts advise.

And with paid family leave, employers should look far ahead: The length of available leave will continue to increase through 2021, when employees will be eligible to take up to 12 weeks, says Christina Zaberto, human resources manager with Associated HCM in Plainview.

■ **Circumstances qualifying for leave** include caring for a child following birth, adoption or foster placement in the home, or caring for a close family member with a serious health condition, Zaberto says. Exigencies for those with family members in the military may also qualify, she adds.

Employers can handle their

66%

Percentage of voters who say they would face serious financial hardship if they had to take up to a few months of unpaid leave for family or medical reasons

Source: National Partnership for Women & Families

businesses under these scenarios by establishing a good relationship with a temp agency or cross-training employees, she says.

■ **Weekly pay coverage.** Also among NYPFL changes that took effect Jan. 1, employees taking leave will receive 55 percent of their average weekly wage (up from 50 percent in 2018) up to a cap of 55 percent of the current Statewide Average Weekly Wage (\$1,357.11), says Avrohom Gefen, a law partner at Vishnick McGovern Milizio LLP in Lake Success. That represents an increase in the maximum weekly benefit this year from \$652.96 to \$746.41 per week, he says.

■ **The employee contribution rate** also increased as of Jan. 1 from 0.126 percent to 0.153 percent of an employee's gross wages each pay period capped at the Statewide Average Weekly Wage (determined by the labor department), Gefen says. So the employee's maximum annual contribution increased from \$85.56 to \$107.97, he says.

Employees falling below the Statewide Average Weekly Wage would contribute less, Gefen says, noting this benefit is fully funded through employee payroll contributions.

Because of that "the employees definitely have a stake in the game," says Jason Flinn, manager of human resources and client services for Prestige Employee Administrators in Melville.

So while employers may have to deal with the absence of an employee on leave, they don't have to fund the program, he says.

With that said, "there's a nice middle ground between the employee and employer to provide this benefit," says Flinn, who thinks that in general most firms are prepared to handle it.

"I don't think it's that big a surprise to organizations when people do go out on leave," he says. "Most times they've run into this before."

■ **New health condition.** Just be aware that this year beginning

Feb. 3 the definition of a serious health condition qualifying for paid leave under the law will extend to caring for family members who are organ or tissue donors, Zaberto says.

■ **Paid leave for bereavement does not qualify** under the law. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo vetoed legislation that would have allowed it, says Scott Horton, a principal of Horton Law PLLC in Orchard Park. One of Cuomo's concerns, explains Horton, was that adding paid bereavement leave would have forced an increase in employee contributions to fund the program, creating a significant burden on low-wage workers.

■ **At this point,** companies should have already confirmed their 2019 paid family leave premiums with their insurance carriers (PFL is a rider/addition to their disability insurance policy) and doublechecked payroll updates on employee contribution rates, says Horton.

For more, see <https://paidfamilyleave.ny.gov/2019>.

THE ISSUE: SAVING

Five quick moves that can add up

MONEY FIX

BY SHERYL NANCE-NASH
Special to Newsday

Who says change must be a dramatic, drawn-out process? Small steps can add up, especially when saving. There's plenty you can do in less time than it takes to get a haircut or have your nails done that will pay off financially.

Here are some quick fixes.

■ **Automate:** Set up automatic withdrawals to avoid late fees on bills. "Also round up all your transactions and deposit the change into your savings automatically," says Joshua Zimelman, president of Westwood Tax & Consulting in Rockville Centre. Some vendors, like utility companies may give discounts for automated payments.

■ **Up the ante:** Increase your 401(k) contribution by one percentage point. "You won't notice the smaller

paycheck, and this will have a meaningful impact long term," says Clayton Moyer, a certified financial planner with FCA Corp. in Houston.

■ **Stick to cash:** "It's easy to overspend with a credit card. Carry the amount of cash you know you need," says Riley Adams, a CPA and founder of personal finance blog, youngandtheinvested.com.

■ **Be proactive:** Call your credit card company to negotiate a lower interest rate. Cancel inactive memberships and subscriptions. Switch to a bank that pays higher interest than your current one. If you change jobs, compare your old 401(k) with the new one. Says Michele Lee Fine, a financial representative with Guardian in Jericho, "If the new plan is better, move your assets from your old account."

■ **Age counts:** Neal Stern, a CPA with Greenmeadow Associates in Deer Park, reminds seniors, "Your local supermarket and other merchants may offer a designated day of the week when you can get special discounts just for asking. See if you qualify."

THE WEEK AHEAD

For more events, visit newsday.com

MONDAY

LEARN PUBLIC SPEAKING | Manhasset

Improve communication skills in an interactive and supportive group for all levels, hosted by the Manhasset-Port Washington Toastmasters, 7:30-9 p.m., Shelter Rock Church, 626 Plandome Rd., free, nwsdy.li/mpwtoast, 516-474-1402.

TUESDAY

BALANCE RISK, REWARD AND BEHAVIOR TO IMPROVE YOUR RETURNS | Plainview

Information on the state of the market, a brief on technical analysis and presentation on how to improve returns as investors, presented by Long Island Stock Traders Meetup Group, 6:45-9 p.m., Plainview-Old Bethpage Library, 999 Old Country Rd., free, register, meetup.com/listmg, 516-330-9906.

START A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS | Westbury

Learn the basics of setting up a business, legal entity structures, marketing, paying taxes and more, presented by SCORE, 7 p.m., Westbury Library, 445 Jefferson St., free, register, westburylibrary.org, 516-333-0176.

SOUTH SHORE NETWORKING | Freeport

Connect with other businesses, bring business cards, all industries welcome, 8 a.m., Imperial Diner, 63 W. Merrick Rd., fee for breakfast, call for more information, 516-867-5851.

WEDNESDAY

LETIP BUSINESS NETWORKING | Bohemia

New members looking to grow their businesses are welcome, 7:01-8:31 a.m., Airport Diner, 3760

Veterans Memorial Hwy., no cost for meal, call to reserve, letipbohemia.com, 631-281-6200.

STEPS TO EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS | Huntington

A career coach provides valuable information on resume writing, interview techniques, appropriate business apparel, job search avenues and more, 7-8:30 p.m., Huntington Library, 338 Main St., free, register, thehuntingtonlibrary.org, 631-427-5165.

JOB FAIR | Riverhead

Various businesses including Allstate Insurance, Catholic Charities, Suffolk County Federal Credit Union and more will be on site, bring copies of your resume and dress to impress, presented by Suffolk County One-Stop Employment Center, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Riverhead Library, 330 Court St., free, suffolkcountyny.gov/labor, 631-727-3228.

THURSDAY

PUTTING INFORMATION GOVERNANCE IN ITS PLACE | Hicksville

Networking and educational opportunity, key characteristics of information governance is reviewed, its characteristics and its relationship to records management. Hosted by Long Island Chapter of Association of Intelligent Information Management/Association of Records Managers and Administrators, 5:30-7:30 p.m., National Grid, 175 E. Old Country Rd., aiim.org, \$25, \$15 lecture only and students, register by Jan. 22, 516-545-2262, 516-545-5577. — GINA TABARUS

SEND NOTICES to Business Calendars, Newsday Events, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250; fax 631-843-2688, or email events@newsday.com