

LEAVES FAQ

Q: What leave options are available to me as a County employee?

A: Leave options that may be available to you include:

1. [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) (FMLA) is enforced by the US Department of Labor and is a federally regulated protected leave status.
2. [Washington State Paid Family and Medical Leave](#) (PFML) program administered by the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD).
3. [Pierce County's Humanitarian Catastrophic Leave](#) (aka "CAT Leave") program administered by HR Employee Relations.
4. [Short-Term / Weekly Disability Insurance](#) program. Refer to Finance Department's Risk Management & Benefits Division at PCBenefits@piercecounitywa.gov or (253) 798-7462.
5. [Pierce County's Shared Sick Leave Program](#) administered by HR Employee Relations.

Q: What if I want to take additional leave for family child-bonding time beyond the FMLA exhaustion date?

A: You can apply for an unpaid Personal Leave which requires the [Non-Medical Leave Request Application](#). You may also apply for PFML.

FMLA

Q: What is FMLA?

A: FMLA is the Family and Medical Leave Act which allows employees to take job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons. Employees may be on FMLA intermittently or continuously for up to 12-work weeks during a 12-month period.

Q: Am I eligible for FMLA?

A: You are eligible for job and healthcare benefit protections under FMLA if you meet the following criteria:

1. You have been employed with the County for at least 12 months and have worked a minimum of 1250 hours during the 12 months immediately prior to the start date of your Leave.
2. You have not exhausted your 12-week FMLA entitlement balance per 12-month period, which is measured forward from your first FMLA-qualified time off.
3. The leave is for yourself, spouse, parent, or child (under age 18 and/or incapable of self-care).

Q: How do I apply for FMLA?

A: You can apply by following the below steps or by returning to the [FMLA Home Page](#):

1. At least 30 days in advance, when practicable, of a planned Leave start date:
 - a. Complete and submit the [FMLA/Medical Leave Request Form](#) to your designated Department HR Partner (HRP).
 - b. Please visit this [guide](#) if you are unsure who your department HRP is.
2. Within 15 calendar days of submitting your Leave Request
 - a. Provide the [HR Leave Administrator](#) with the supporting medical document via fax, email or mail. Include your name on the FMLA medical [Certification of Health Care Provider](#) form and provide it to your treating physician, surgeon, or health specialist to complete
 - i. It is recommended that you also provide your health care provider with your job description or list of essential job duties, physical

- requirements, and work environment information.
- ii. You can find your job description [here](#).
3. This [link](#) will direct you to the needed FMLA forms along with general FMLA information.
- a. A doctor's note may suffice in lieu of the 4-page FMLA Medical Certification form if it supports your absence period.
 - b. Keep in mind that for a "continuous" medical leave, when you miss more than 5 consecutive scheduled workdays due to a health reason, a note from your medical provider should be provided to your supervisor prior to returning to work in any capacity.

Q: What are some typical reasons to apply for FMLA?

A: Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- Missing more than 5 consecutive scheduled days of work (planned or unplanned) due to health reasons for self or family member.
- Planned surgery for which there may be a continuous period of incapacity and/or ongoing follow-up medical care during the recovery period.
- Family leave for newborn child, including family bonding time for both adopted and foster children.
- Employee has low or no accruals and needs to be absent continuously and/or intermittently due to health reasons for self or to care for family member(s);
- Employee or family member has a chronic or lifelong health condition which may require intermittent absences due to episodic flares and/or ongoing medical treatment, therapy, health monitoring schedule is anticipated.
- Leave to care for family member who is in the military and will be departing to and/or returning from foreign deployment.

Q: Can I still apply for FMLA even if I have exhausted my accruals?

A: Yes, FMLA allows you to take time off work whether it is paid or unpaid.

Q: Do I still accrue vacation/sick time while on Unpaid FMLA?

A: Yes, as long as you are still within at least 70% paid for the pay cycle.

Q: Am I eligible for holiday pay while on Unpaid FMLA?

A: Yes, as long as you are still within at least 70% paid for the pay cycle **and** as long as those scheduled workdays immediately fall before and after the holiday.

Q: When should I request family leave?

A: At least 30 days prior to a qualifying event such as surgery, the birth of a newborn, or placement of an adopted or foster child. Please submit your [FMLA/Medical Leave Request Form](#) to your department's designated HR Partner who will initiate your leave request in Workday and ensure that your department administration, supervisor, and timekeeper are ready to accommodate your absences and know how to code your time off accordingly.

Q: Where can I get information regarding FMLA?

A: [Here](#) is a link to our HR webpage with general FMLA information and forms, including the necessary form to give to your doctor.

Q: Where and when should I send a doctor's note regarding a pregnancy leave?

A: You should send the supporting medical document (e.g. doctor's note) to HRLeaveAdmin@piercemywa.gov within 15 days after receiving your FMLA Eligibility Notice; the document should indicate who is pregnant and when the baby is due or when childbirth is scheduled.

Q: What do I do if I need to leave earlier than the intended start date?

A: Contact your HR Partner to provide an updated leave date. A medical note may suffice in lieu of the 4-page FMLA Medical Certification form unless there are unusual medical circumstance or health complications that may require an earlier FMLA Medical Leave start date.

Q: Can I take intermittent FMLA leave?

A: Yes, depending on the situation.

- If you want to be placed on an intermittent leave, then you may consider applying for PFML concurrently or consecutively with the FMLA leave period.

Q: Can I be paid while on family leave?

A: FMLA leave may be paid and/or unpaid, depending on your available accruals, and whether you apply for [PFML](#) which may concurrently with the FMLA leave period.

Q: Do I have to use my vacation or sick time?

A: When on FMLA for family leave, you are required to take your available accruals first with the exception of sick time as defined by the Washington State Paid Sick Leave law.

- In order for you to be able to use unpaid time off, you may apply for the optional [PFML program](#). Otherwise, per Section 3.67.030 of the Administrative Guidelines, you must exhaust all of your accruals, with the exception of sick leave, before using any unpaid time off.

WASHINGTON STATE PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE (PFML)

Q: What is PFML?

A: It is a statewide insurance program that provides 12-18 weeks of paid family and medical leave to eligible employees and is paid through contributions by both employees and employers. One of the biggest differences between FMLA and PFML is that FMLA is unpaid, while PFML allows employees to receive partial wages while on leave.

Q: Am I eligible for PFML?

A: In order to be eligible for PFML, an employee must have worked at least 820 hours in the past year. This isn't specific to Pierce County, but rather any employer in Washington.

Q: How do I apply for PFML?

A: You can apply on ESD's PFML webpage: <https://paidleave.wa.gov/>.

- Please contact ESD directly for answers to questions regarding PFML eligibility, benefit payment amounts and/or limits, balance usage and/or balance maximum per claim year, and your PFML application status.
- After you apply:
 1. Email HRLeaveAdmin@piercecountywa.gov or fax to 253-798-8558 a clear image or copy of your PFML "Benefit Application Summary" from your ESD online account.
 - Please redact personal information such as Social Security Number, birthdate, and ethnicity before sending.
 - Include the period start and end dates.
 - Indicate for whom the unpaid leave would be taken for.
 - e.g. Medical recovery for self; medical and/or non-medical family child-bonding with newborn, or for both medical for self and non-medical family child-bonding with baby.
 2. Inform your supervisor and timekeeper ahead of time, in writing/email, regarding which absences should be paid and/or unpaid and which accruals to use, if any.

- Any leave accruals used while on PFML cannot be retracted at a later date.
3. Once received, the HR Leave Absence Partner will record the PFML period in Workday to allow employees to take unpaid time.

Q: What else do I need to know when applying for PFML?

A: You will find answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about PFML on the HR webpage [here](#).

- Please also consider the following:
 - Applying for PFML allows you to use unpaid time offs, consecutively or intermittently, prior to using/exhausting your paid accruals.
 - If you are eligible for FMLA, and the reason you are applying for PFML also qualifies under FMLA, you will also be designated as FMLA approved.
- It is very IMPORTANT to note that paid time off cannot be corrected to unpaid time off AFTER the pay cycle completes.

Q: What is the County's role in PFML?

A: The County does not monitor PFML, ESD monitors this program. However, the County needs to be aware of the following:

- That you applied for PFML, including the date range applied for and whether the request is for yourself or a family member.
- Whether your request has been approved or denied, including the date range approved, whether the leave is continuous or intermittent, and whether the approval was for yourself or a family member.
- The HR Leave Administrator will enter your PFML information into Workday. This will allow you to take unpaid time during the time frame specified on the notice of application/approval.

CONTACTS

Q: How do I submit questions regarding my leaves?

A: You can submit your questions to HRLeaveAdmin@piercecounitywa.gov. This email resource will ensure you get an answer within 24 hours of submitting your question.

Q: Who is the Leaves Administrator?

A: Faith Ferreria is our Benefits Specialist and handles Leave Administration.

- Any questions or leave applications should, however, be submitted via the HRLeaveAdmin@piercecounitywa.gov email box to ensure you receive a response within 24 hours.

Q: How do I submit questions regarding my medical benefits?

A: You can send your questions regarding Pierce County medical Benefits to PCBenefits@piercecounitywa.gov.

Q: Who is Pierce County's Medical Benefits Administrator?

A: Jessie Matsch is the County's Benefits Specialist and handles Insurance Benefits Administration.

- Any questions should, however, be submitted via the PCBenefits@piercecounitywa.gov email box to ensure you receive a response within 24 hours.