



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 20, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:01pm with a roll call vote of four in favor (Councilors Clingan, Mbah, Burnley, Davis), none opposed, and one absent (Councilor Scott).

Others present: Ellen Schneider Collins – Deputy Director of Human Resources, Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees, Brendan Salisbury – Legislative Policy Analyst, Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Matthew Sirigu – Assistant City Solicitor.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and Jesse Clingan
Absent: Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

- Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0646](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of April 30, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**
AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Mbah and Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

- Order (ID # [22-1448](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen
 That the City hereby adopt the provisions of the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 175M: Family and Medical Leave.

Director Gill provided an overview of the proposed changes to the City’s parental and medical leave benefits for City employees and compared it to the State of Massachusetts benefits. She referred to two charts in her presentation. The first chart compared existing and proposed City benefits to State benefits. The second chart provided examples of how the proposed changes would apply to employees in various scenarios. Both charts are available to the public as attachments to this agenda item.

Director Gill stated that the overall intention of the proposed policy changes is to provide City employees with enhanced benefits compared to the existing City policy and compared to State policy. If implemented, the new City policy would provide 8 weeks of paid parental and/or medical leave at 100% of one’s pay rate. Director Gill described the specifics of these policies.

Councilor Clingan asked if the unions have been consulted regarding these changes. Director Gill stated they are in conversation with the unions and that the proposed policy changes outlined in the chart would not apply to unions without their approval. Rather, the policy changes would apply to employees who are not members of unions.

Councilor Burnley stated that he helped bring this item forward in 2022 and that his overarching concerns are whether the City can afford this policy change and whether employees want this policy change. He said that providing 8 weeks of paid leave compared to 2 weeks of paid leave is a significant improvement and would help most employees, but that he would prefer to see a more generous policy implemented. Councilor Burnley noted how under the State policy, employees can use accrued leave to top off their leave time under parental leave or FMLA, and asked whether this was considered when creating the proposed City policy changes.

Director Gill stated that the City policy would allow for employees to top off their leave with accrued vacation time, but that by providing 8 weeks of paid parental and medical leave to employees, she hopes that most employees could avoid having to use vacation time during times of crisis. She also said that the 8 weeks of paid leave applies to both parental leave and medical leave.

Councilor Burnley suggested that members of the public take a look at the second chart with examples of how the proposed policy changes would apply to employees. Chair Davis asked several questions to better understand how employees who have worked for the City for less than a year would be affected by the proposed policy changes. He also asked questions to better understand how the City policy compares to the State policy. There was considerable discussion with Director Gill and Deputy Director Schneider Collins on these topics. The main takeaways from this conversation are that in order to be eligible for the 8 weeks of 100% paid parental leave, employees must have worked for the City for 3 months. In order to be eligible for 100% paid medical leave for one's self or a family member, employees must have worked for the City for 12 months.

Significant attention was given to the "Employee B" scenario in the chart with examples. Director Gill and Deputy Director Schneider Collins confirmed that an employee of 2 months who requires emergency surgery, for example, is not eligible for paid benefits but is eligible for unpaid leave. The exception is this employee might be eligible for paid benefits if they were covered through a previous employer.

Councilor Burnley asked why an employee of 3 months is eligible for paid parental leave, but the same employee would not be eligible for paid leave if they required emergency surgery until 12 months into their employment. He

asked why this difference exists, and asked why the gap could not be closed some. Director Gill stated that this eligibility difference follows existing models within the state and federal government programs.

Councilor Mbah asked if the City's proposed policy is more progressive than the State policy. He stated that he would like to see a policy that helps to attract and retain employees and contribute to employee satisfaction. Director Gill stated that the City's proposed policy changes would provide enhanced benefits for employees at no cost to the employee or the employer. She compared this to employees receiving benefits through the State, noting employees would receive fewer checks and these checks would be taxed if they do not have extra PTO to top off their leave. She stated that the City is trying to prevent this scenario from happening. Director Gill stated that she feels strongly this policy will be well received by employees. Director Schneider Collins also noted that some employment contracts do allow employees to start accruing sick leave after 30 days of employment. Councilor Mbah stated that he looks forward to seeing numbers to ensure this policy is doing what it is intended to do for employees.

Chair Davis asked if the chart with examples of how the policy would affect employees leaves out any scenario in which there would be a substantive difference between the proposed City policy and the State policy. Director Gill and Deputy Director Schneider Collins stated that these examples cover the anticipated scenarios, and reiterated that the City is ready to implement it in July at no cost to employees or the employer.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters - 2024-05-20 Leave Comparison Chart v2 (with 22-1448)
- Legislative Matters - 2024-05-20 Leave Example Chart (with 22-1448)