

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS UNDER THE FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE ACT OF 1993 (FMLA)

The FMLA became effective on August 5, 1993 and entitles eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period for specified family and medical reasons. The FMLA also allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave in the applicable 12-month period for any “qualifying exigency” arising out of the fact that a covered military member is on active duty, or has been notified of an impending call or order to active duty, in support of a contingency operation. In some instances, the FMLA allows eligible employees to take up to 26 weeks of job-protected leave in a “single 12-month period” to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness.

EMPLOYEE ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for FMLA benefits, an employee must:

- have worked for Lee County Sheriff’s Office for a total of 12 months; and
- have worked at least 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months.

While the 12 months of employment need not be consecutive, employment periods prior to a break in service of seven years or more need not be counted unless the break is occasioned by the employee’s fulfillment of his or her National Guard or Reserve military obligation (as protected under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)), or a written agreement, including a collective bargaining agreement, exists concerning the employer’s intention to rehire the employee after the break in service.

LEAVE ENTITLEMENT

Lee County Sheriff’s Office must grant an eligible employee up to a total of 12 workweeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for one or more of the following reasons:

- for the birth and care of a newborn child of the employee;
- for placement of a child with the employee through adoption or foster care;
- to care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a serious health condition;
- to take medical leave when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition; or
- for qualifying exigencies arising out of the fact that the employee’s spouse, son, daughter, or parent is on active duty or call to active duty status as a member of the National Guard or Reserves in support of a contingency operation.

The agency must also grant an eligible employee who is a spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of a current member of the Armed Forces, including a member of the National Guard or Reserves, with a serious injury or illness up to a total of 26 workweeks of unpaid leave during a “single 12-month period” to care for the servicemember.

Spouses employed by Lee County Sheriff’s Office are limited in the amount of family leave they may take for the birth and care of a newborn child, placement of a child for adoption or foster care, or to care for a parent who has a serious health condition, to a combined total of 12 weeks (or 26 weeks if leave to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness is also used). Leave for birth and care, or placement for adoption or foster care, must conclude within 12 months of the birth or placement.

Under some circumstances, employees may take FMLA leave intermittently (taking leave in separate blocks of time for a single qualifying reason) or on a reduced leave schedule (reducing the employee's usual weekly or daily work schedule).

- when leave is needed for planned medical treatment, the employee must make a reasonable effort to schedule treatment so as not to unduly disrupt the employer's operation.
- if FMLA leave is for birth and care, or placement for adoption or foster care, use of intermittent leave is subject to the employer's approval.

Although FMLA is an unpaid leave, Lee County Sheriff's Office allows eligible employees to utilize their accrued time (sick, personal, vacation hours) so income continues while on leave.

"Serious health condition" means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either:

- Inpatient care (i.e., an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical-care facility, including any period of incapacity (i.e., inability to work, attend school, or perform other regular daily activities) or subsequent treatment in connection with such inpatient care; or
- Continuing treatment by a health care provider, which includes:
 - (1) A period of incapacity lasting more than three consecutive, full calendar days, and any subsequent treatment or period of incapacity relating to the same condition, that also includes:
 - treatment two or more times by or under the supervision of a health care provider (i.e., in-person visits, the first within 7 days and both within 30 days of the first day of incapacity); or
 - one treatment by a health care provider (i.e., an in-person visit within 7 days of the first day of incapacity) with a continuing regimen of treatment (e.g., prescription medication, physical therapy); or
 - (2) Any period of incapacity related to pregnancy or for prenatal care. A visit to the health care provider is not necessary for each absence; or
 - (3) Any period of incapacity or treatment for a chronic serious health condition which continues over an extended period of time, requires periodic visits (at least twice a year) to a health care provider, and may involve occasional episodes of incapacity. A visit to a health care provider is not necessary for each absence; or
 - (4) A period of incapacity that is permanent or long-term due to a condition for which treatment may not be effective. Only supervision by a health care provider is required, rather than active treatment; or
 - (5) Any absences to receive multiple treatments for restorative surgery or for a condition that would likely result in a period of incapacity of more than three days if not treated.

MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH BENEFITS

Lee County Sheriff's Office is required to maintain group health insurance coverage for an employee on FMLA leave whenever such insurance was provided before the leave was taken and

on the same terms as if the employee had continued to work. The agency may recover premiums it paid to maintain health coverage for an employee who fails to return to work from FMLA leave.

JOB RESTORATION

Upon return from FMLA leave, an employee must be restored to the employee's original job, or to an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment.

An employee's use of FMLA leave cannot result in the loss of any employment benefit that the employee earned or was entitled to before using FMLA leave, nor be counted against the employee under a "no fault" attendance policy. If a bonus or other payment, however, is based on the achievement of a specified goal such as hours worked, products sold, or perfect attendance, and the employee has not met the goal due to FMLA leave, payment may be denied unless it is paid to an employee on equivalent leave status for a reason that does not qualify as FMLA leave.

An employee has no greater right to restoration or to other benefits and conditions of employment than if the employee had been continuously employed.

NOTICE AND CERTIFICATION

Responsibilities of Employee:

Employees seeking to use FMLA leave are required to provide 30-day advance notice of the need to take FMLA leave when the need is foreseeable and such notice is practicable.

If leave is foreseeable less than 30 days in advance, the employee must provide notice as soon as practicable – generally, either the same or next business day.

When the need for leave is not foreseeable, the employee must provide notice to the employer as soon as practicable under the facts and circumstances of the particular case. Absent unusual circumstances, employees must comply with the employer's usual and customary notice and procedural requirements for requesting leave.

Employees must provide sufficient information for Lee County Sheriff's Office to reasonably determine whether the FMLA may apply to the leave request. Depending on the situation, such information may include that the employee is incapacitated due to pregnancy, has been hospitalized overnight, is unable to perform the functions of the job, and/or that the employee or employee's qualifying family member is under the continuing care of a health care provider.

When an employee seeks leave for a FMLA-qualifying reason for the first time, the employee need not expressly assert FMLA rights or even mention the FMLA. When an employee seeks leave, however, due to an FMLA-qualifying reason for which the Sheriff's Office has previously provided the employee FMLA-protected leave, the employee must specifically reference either the qualifying reason for leave or the need for FMLA leave.

Responsibilities of Lee County Sheriff's Office:

Lee County Sheriff's Office must post a notice approved by the Secretary of Labor explaining rights and responsibilities under FMLA. An employer that willfully violates this posting requirement may be subject to a fine of up to \$110 for each separate offense. Additionally, employers must either include this general notice in employee handbooks or other written guidance to employees concerning benefits, or must distribute a copy of the notice to each new employee upon hiring.

When an employee requests FMLA leave or the Sheriff's Office acquires knowledge that leave may be for an FMLA purpose, the agency must notify the employee of his or her eligibility to take leave, and inform the employee of his/her rights and responsibilities under FMLA.

When the Sheriff's Office has enough information to determine that leave is being taken for an FMLA-qualifying reason, the agency must notify the employee that the leave is designated and will be counted as FMLA leave.

Medical Certification Requirements:

The Lee County Sheriff's Office **requires** that an employee's request for leave due to a serious health condition affecting the employee or a covered family member be supported by a certification from a health care provider. The agency may require second or third medical opinions (at the employer's expense) and periodic recertification of a serious health condition.

The agency may use a health care provider, a human resource professional, a leave administrator, or a management official – but not the employee's direct supervisor – to authenticate or clarify a medical certification of a serious health condition.

The agency has a uniformly-applied policy that requires employees returning from leave for their own serious health condition to submit a certification that they are able to resume work. If reasonable safety concerns exist, the agency may, under certain circumstances, require such a certification for employees returning from intermittent FMLA leave.

UNLAWFUL ACTS

It is unlawful for any employer to interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of any right provided by FMLA. It is also unlawful for an employer to discharge or discriminate against any individual for opposing any practice, or because of involvement in any proceeding, related to FMLA.

ENFORCEMENT

The Wage and Hour Division investigates complaints. If violations cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the U.S. Department of Labor may bring action in court to compel compliance. Individuals may also be able to bring a private civil action against an employer for violations.

OTHER PROVISIONS

Salaried executive, administrative, and professional employees of covered employers who meet the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) criteria for exemption from minimum wage and overtime under Regulations, 29 CFR Part 541, do not lose their FLSA-exempt status by using any unpaid FMLA leave. This special exception to the "salary basis" requirements for FLSA's exemption extends only to an "eligible" employee's use of leave required by FMLA.

For additional information, visit the Wage and Hour Division Website:

<http://www.wagehour.dol.gov> and/or call the toll-free information and helpline, available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in your time zone, 1-866-4USWAGE (1-866-487-9243).