

Applications now open for new paid family and medical leave program in Connecticut. Workers are entitled to up to 12 weeks of time off.

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FULL TEXT

Applications for Connecticut's new paid family and medical leave program opened on Wednesday, a month before employees across the state will begin having access to one of the country's most comprehensive paid leave policies.

"I want to be the most family-friendly state in the country. I want people to know that one more reason you want to come to Connecticut is because we treat workers with respect, we put a big emphasis upon kids and make it easier for you to keep working," Gov. Ned Lamont said Wednesday afternoon during a press conference held outside Claire's Corner Copia, a vegetarian restaurant in New Haven.

Connecticut is one of only a handful of states to enact paid family and medical leave. Under the program, workers in the state are entitled to up to 12 weeks of paid leave for qualifying absences, with the option of two additional weeks of paid time off for employees who experience a serious pregnancy-related health complication. Lamont signed the program into law in 2019.

"Starting today, workers can finally begin to have peace of mind in knowing that when they need time away from work, paid family and medical leave will be there for them," said Janée Woods Weber, executive director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund, which advocated for the creation of program.

By midday, more than 500 people had already applied to the program, which Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz said was an indication of "the need that is out there."

State leaders heralded the program as a vital safety net for workers and families which will help prevent Connecticut employees from having to choose between continuing to work and caring for a sick relative or welcoming a new child, among other circumstances.

"Paid family and medical leave can be transformative in the lives of families who are operating on a very narrow margin, and in some cases, solidly middle class families as well, who are facing deprivation and a terrible choice between taking care of a newborn child or a sick relative and the risk of losing a job," said Senate President Pro Tem Martin M. Looney, a New Haven Democrat.

Qualifying reasons for paid leave include the birth of a child or placement of a child for adoption or foster care; caring for a serious health condition or that of a family member; serving as an organ or bone marrow donor; caring for a family member in the military injured on active duty or being called to overseas active duty; and being impacted by family violence.

Lamont's chief operating officer Josh Geballe, who also chairs the board of directors of the Connecticut Paid Leave Authority, touted the program as launching "on time, under budget" and with the full range of benefits stipulated by the state legislature.

The program currently includes more than 123,000 businesses across the state and has amassed more than \$300 million, raised through employee paycheck deductions that began this past January. The deductions are capped at 0.5% of an employee's wages, up to the Social Security contribution base.

Andrea Barton Reeves, CEO of the Connecticut Paid Leave Authority, said that the program expects to have about

\$410 million in funding by January. She noted that a recent actuarial analysis found that even with high usage, the fund would still be solvent in five years, adding, "We're not concerned about running out of money."

Under the paid leave policy, an employer can compel an employee to use accrued time off, but must allow an employee to keep up to two weeks of accrued leave.

Applications to the program for qualifying absences that occur on or after Jan. 1, 2022 may be submitted at ctpaidleave.org or via email, fax, phone, or mail. The toll-free application hotline is 877-499-8606.

Once all documentation is submitted, the agency will grant decisions on applications within five days, according to Barton Reeves.

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