



# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA LETTER

**Agenda Number:**

**Clerk of the Board of Supervisors**  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Submitted on:**  
**(COB Stamp)**

**Department Name:** Human Resources  
**Department No.:** 064  
**Agenda Date:** June 3, 2025  
**Placement:** Administrative Agenda  
**Estimated Time:** N/A  
**Continued Item:** No  
**If Yes, date from:** N/A  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Department Director(s): Kristine Schmidt, Human Resources Director  
Contact Info: Katie Torres, Benefits & Wellness Division Chief  
Ruthie Rodriguez, Leave of Absence Administrator  
**SUBJECT:** Approve Updated Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence Policy

DocuSigned by:  
Yvonne Torres  
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## County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

## Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

## Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

## Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- Approve an updated County Family and Medical Care Policy, now titled as the Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence Policy, and
- Determine that the recommended actions are not a "Project" that are subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5), because they are organizational or administrative activities of the government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

## Summary Text:

California has enacted several laws expanding employee leave protections in recent years, including broader definitions of "family member," new categories of unpaid leave (such as bereavement and reproductive loss), and increased paid sick leave from 3 days a year to 5. These changes reflect the state's efforts to support workers during personal and family-related events. In response, County Human Resources recommends updating and renaming the former "County Family and Medical Care Leave" Policy (Attachment C) to a more comprehensive "Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence" Policy. (Attachment A) This Leave of Absence policy will incorporate the changes to the

law and help employees and their supervisors to better understand employee rights and comply with employer responsibilities.

**Discussion:**

Several legislative changes have been enacted in recent years related to employee leave of absence rights. In response to these changes, the County has revised its Leave of Absence policy to ensure full compliance with state and federal mandates, while also reflecting best practices in leave administration. The revised policy makes the following changes:

- Incorporates the expanded definitions of family by including grandparents, siblings, grandchildren, domestic partners, and designated persons.
- Describes new categories of existing protected leave, such as Victims of Crime, Reproductive Loss Leave, School or Child Care Activity Leave, Bereavement Leave, Bone Marrow and Organ Donor Leave, and Emergency Responder Leave, which were not included in the previous version of the policy.
- Enhances consistency and clarity in how leave is processed by adding timecard coding guidelines.
- Updates or enhances definitions relevant to leave entitlements.

The revised policy contains a provision allowing the Human Resources Director to approve future changes to the policy to reflect ongoing changes in related laws. The draft revised policy and an explanation of the changes, the Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence Policy 2025 - Update Support Document (Attachment B), were presented to all recognized employee labor groups for meet-and-confer prior to being finalized.

**Background:**

Since 2017, the County has monitored ongoing legislative changes impacting leave of absence policies at both the federal and state levels. While federal regulations under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) have remained relatively stable (except for temporary COVID-19 relief measures such as the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which expired in 2020), California has adopted several new laws that significantly expand employee leave entitlements.

These changes reflect a broader statewide effort to promote worker well-being, equity, and support during personal and family-related events. Key developments include the 2021 expansion of the California Family Rights Act (CFRA), which lowered the employer threshold from 50 to five employees and broadened the definition of family members to include grandparents, siblings, grandchildren, and domestic partners (SB 1383). In 2023, AB 1041 extended CFRA protections to allow leave for a “designated person” chosen by the employee, regardless of blood relation. This marked a significant step in recognizing the diverse support systems in modern families.

Additional legislation has continued to build on this foundation. In 2023, AB 1949 introduced up to five days of unpaid bereavement leave following the death of a family member. In 2024, SB 848 established reproductive loss leave, and the state-mandated paid sick leave requirement increased from three to five days annually. Effective January 1, 2025, employers can no longer require employees to exhaust vacation time before accessing Paid Family Leave (PFL) benefits (AB 2123), and AB 2499 expanded job-protected leave rights for victims and family members impacted by certain crimes.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

This policy update does not expand County employees’ leave entitlements beyond what is already required by law. Rather, it aligns the written policy with the full and current scope of federal and state-mandated provisions to provide clearer guidance. It is important to note that the expanded leave provisions—such as broader definitions of family members and the inclusion of new leave types—resulted in more employees becoming eligible for protected leave. While increased eligibility

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may have led to a modest rise in paid sick leave usage, we anticipate the overall fiscal impact to remain minimal.

**Special Instructions:**

None

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A** – Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence Policy May 2025 Final

**Attachment B** – Santa Barbara County Leave of Absence Policy 2025 - Update Support Doc

**Attachment C** – 2017 County Family and Medical Care Leave Policy

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