

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 594
Finance

(Senator Carozza, *et al.*)

Labor and Employment - Maryland Healthy Working Families Act - Verification

This bill alters the verification requirements when earned sick and safe leave (under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act) is requested during the period between the first 107 and 120 calendar days that an employee is employed by the employer. An employee must still provide verification that the leave was used appropriately if required to do so by the employer; otherwise, the employer may deny *any* request to take earned sick and safe leave during that period of employment (not just a subsequent request). However, the employer may only deny a request for leave during that period of employment if the employer provided written notice about the verification requirement at the time the employee was hired, instead of as mutually agreed upon at the time of hire as specified under current law.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: State operations and finances are not materially affected. The Maryland Department of Labor can implement the bill with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: Under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, an employer may require an employee who uses earned sick and safe leave for more than two consecutive scheduled shifts to provide verification that the leave was used appropriately. If an employee fails or refuses to provide the required verification, the employer may deny a

subsequent request to take the leave for the same reason. When an employee requests leave during the period between the first 107 and 120 calendar days that the employee is employed by the employer, an employer may also require verification, under terms mutually agreed to by the employer and the employee at the time the employee was hired or when the leave is used. If an employee fails or refuses to provide verification under those conditions, the employer may likewise deny a subsequent request to take earned sick and safe leave for the same reason (during that period).

For more information on the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, please see **Appendix – Maryland Healthy Working Families Act.**

Additional Comments: The bill requires employees to provide their employers with verification that earned sick and safe leave was used appropriately under specified circumstances. If the verification is not provided, the bill authorizes an employer to deny the leave request. As the verification is likely provided *after* the leave is taken, it is not clear how the employer would be able to deny the leave request. A provision of current law allows an employer to deny a *subsequent* leave request but that provision does not apply in the circumstance covered by the bill.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 908 of 2020 received a hearing in the House Economic Matters Committee, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, SB 404 of 2020, received a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee, but no further action was taken.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Labor; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland Municipal League; University System of Maryland; Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

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rh/mcr

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Appendix – Maryland Healthy Working Families Act

The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act took effect as Chapter 1 of 2018. Under Chapter 1, an “employer” includes the State or local governments and a person who acts directly or indirectly in the interest of another employer with an employee. Chapter 1 does not apply to employees who regularly work less than 12 hours a week, specified independent contractors, specified associate real estate brokers and real estate salespersons, individuals younger than age 18 before the beginning of the year, workers in a specified agricultural sector, construction workers (not including specified employees) covered in a collective bargaining agreement in which the Act’s requirements are clearly waived, specified employees who work on an as-needed basis in a health or human services industry, or specified employees of a temporary service or employment agency.

Leave Accrual Rates and Use of Leave

Chapter 1 requires an employer with 15 or more employees to have a sick and safe leave policy under which an employee earns at least 1 hour of *paid* sick and safe leave, at the same rate of pay as the employee normally earns, for every 30 hours that the employee works. An employer with 14 or fewer employees, based on the average monthly number of employees during the preceding year, must have a sick and safe leave policy that provides an employee with at least 1 hour of *unpaid* sick and safe leave for every 30 hours an employee works. An employer is not required to allow an employee to earn or carry over more than 40 hours of earned sick and safe leave in a year, use more than 64 hours of earned leave in a year, accrue more than 64 hours at any time, or use earned sick and safe leave during the first 106 calendar days the employee works for the employer. An employer is not required to carry over unused earned sick and safe leave if the leave is awarded at the beginning of each year.

An employer is not required to allow an employee to accrue earned sick and safe leave during (1) a two-week pay period in which the employee worked fewer than 24 hours total; (2) a one-week pay period if the employee worked fewer than a total of 24 hours in the current and immediately preceding pay period; or (3) a pay period in which the employee is paid twice a month and the employee worked fewer than 26 hours in the pay period.

An employer must allow an employee to use earned sick and safe leave:

- to care for or treat the employee’s mental or physical illness, injury, or condition;
- to obtain preventive medical care for the employee or employee’s family member;
- to care for a family member with a mental or physical illness, injury, or condition;
- for maternity or paternity leave; and

- for specified circumstances due to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking committed against the employee or the employee's family member.

An employer is not required to compensate an employee for unused earned sick and safe leave when the employee leaves the employer's employment. An employer that rehires an employee within 37 weeks after leaving employment is required to reinstate any unused earned sick and safe leave that had accrued at the time of separation unless the employer voluntarily paid out the unused earned sick and safe leave. An employer is not required to modify an existing paid leave policy if (1) the terms and conditions are at least equivalent to those under the law or (2) the paid leave policy does not reduce employee compensation for an absence due to sick or safe leave. An employer is not prevented from establishing a policy that allows employees to voluntarily exchange assigned work hours. An employer is not prohibited from adopting and enforcing a policy that prohibits the improper use of earned sick and safe leave. An employer may deny a request to take earned sick and safe leave under specified circumstances related to the disruption of the employer's business or provision of services to an individual with a developmental disability or mental illness.

An employer may require an employee who uses earned sick and safe leave for more than two consecutive scheduled shifts to provide verification that the leave was used appropriately. An employer may also require verification under specified circumstances when an employee uses leave during the period between the first 107 and 120 calendar days that the employee was employed by the employer.

Required Recordkeeping

An employer must keep relevant records for at least three years, and the Commissioner of Labor and Industry may inspect an employer's records regarding earned sick and safe leave. There is a rebuttable presumption that an employer has violated the earned sick and safe leave provisions if the employer fails to either keep records or allow the commissioner to inspect records. The commissioner may waive a civil penalty if the penalty was assessed for a violation that was due to an error caused by a third-party payroll service provider with whom the employer in good faith contracted for services.

Enforcement Provisions

If an employee believes that an employer has violated the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, the employee may file a written complaint with the commissioner. The commissioner must conduct an investigation and attempt to resolve the issue informally through mediation within 90 days of the written complaint. If the commissioner is unable to resolve the issue through mediation and determines that an employer has violated a provision of the law, the commissioner must issue an order, subject to the hearing and

notice requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act. The order must describe the violation and direct the payment of the full monetary value of any unpaid earned sick and safe leave and any actual economic damages. The order may, in the commissioner's discretion, direct the payment of an additional amount of up to three times the value of the employee's hourly wage for each violation and assess a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 for each employee for whom the employer is not in compliance. If an employer does not comply with an order within 30 days of the issuance of the order, the commissioner may ask the Attorney General to bring an action – either on behalf of the employee (with the employee's written consent) or to enforce the order for the civil penalty – in the county where the employer is located.

In addition, within three years of the order, an employee may bring a civil action to enforce the order in the county where the employer is located. If an employee prevails in such an action to enforce an order, the court may award three times the value of the employee's unpaid earned sick and safe leave, punitive damages in an amount determined by the court, reasonable legal fees, injunctive relief if appropriate, and any other appropriate relief.

A person may not interfere with the exercise of, or the attempt to exercise, any right given under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act. An employer may not take adverse action or discriminate against an employee because the employee exercised in good faith the rights granted by the Act. Additionally, an employer may not interfere with, restrain, or deny an employee exercising rights provided under the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act or apply a specified absence control policy that could lead to adverse action. An employee who mistakenly, but in good faith, alleges a violation under the Act is protected. An employee may not, in bad faith, file a complaint with the commissioner alleging a violation, bring an action, or testify in an action regarding earned sick and safe leave. An employee who violates these provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a maximum \$1,000 fine.