

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Expanding Eligible Uses of Sick Leave for School Employees

07/3/2023

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed a bill (A-5060/S-3440) to expand eligible reasons for which a school district employee may use their sick leave.

Previously, school employees could only use their sick leave in connection with a personal disability due to an illness or injury, or if they or someone in their immediate household needed to quarantine due to a contagious illness. The new law expands the list of permissible uses for these employees.

“The past several years have highlighted just how crucial it is to prioritize the health and wellness of our residents, including the hardworking employees who educate New Jersey students and keep our schools running,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Recovering from a significant and sudden illness or injury is not the only reason an employee may need to take time off. Being able to get preventative health care, address mental health needs, care for a family member, take time to grieve the loss of a loved one, or be there for a child in times of need all play an important part in a person’s overall well-being. This bill recognizes that reality and allows school employees to take the time they need when they need it.”

“Expanding the scope of school district employee sick leave is a crucial step to continue fostering a compassionate and supportive educational environment,” **said Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner of Education**. “By broadening the permitted reasons for sick leave, we empower our educators to take care of themselves and their loved ones during critical times. This expansion not only promotes a healthier school community, but also demonstrates our commitment to supporting New Jersey’s educational workforce.”

Under the new law, school district employees may use sick leave for the following reasons:

- To recover from a physical or mental illness, injury, or other health condition and/or take the time to have it diagnosed, treated, or cared for;
- For preventative medical care;
- To assist a member of their immediate family – including parents, spouses, siblings, and children – with the diagnosis, treatment, and/or care of a physical or mental illness, injury, or other health condition;
- For circumstances related to domestic or sexual violence;
- For the death of an immediate family member, for up to seven days;
- To attend school-related conferences, meetings, functions, or other events for their child;
- In connection with a closure of the school or facility caring for their child.

Employees may be required to obtain a doctor’s note if they take sick leave for their own illness/injury or to provide reasonable documentation if sick leave is claimed for three or more consecutive days for a purpose permitted under the law.

Prime sponsors of the legislation include Senator Vin Gopal and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, as well as Senator Shirley Turner and Assembly Members Pamela Lampitt, Anthony Verrelli, and Linda Carter.

“This legislation is a practical solution to support our educators in their daily lives, and to help retain experienced teachers at a time when our schools are facing severe personnel shortages,” **said Senator Gopal**.

“Allowing teachers to use their sick time to care for their loved ones or their children is the right thing to do. No teacher should have to miss a parent-teacher conference for their own child, or be unable to take bereavement leave,” **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson**. “We need to support our teachers, who are devoted to and always there for our children.”

“Earned sick leave has always been about making sure that those who need to address critical issues in their lives have the opportunity to do so without fear of retribution or financial hardship,” **said Assemblywoman Lampitt**. “In the face of a growing shortage of teachers, this is especially important, as inability to manage their personal lives, causes many to leave the profession. This is compassionate policy, and I hope it will serve as a reason for our teachers to remain in the classroom.”

“This is a win for parents, educators, students and public health. We learned many important lessons over the last three years, including that time to care for a sick child or family member is not a luxury, but a necessity,” **said NJEA President Sean M. Spiller**. “By signing this bill today, the Governor provided equity for school employees. It is a smart change that will make our schools safer and healthier. We thank the Legislature and the Governor for this important step that demonstrates respect for our educators.”

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[Home \(/governor/\)](/governor/)

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[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

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[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation \(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

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[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000