



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE IS COMMON SENSE

The Tennessee General Assembly has introduced Senate Bill 2566 and House Bill 1759 that requires each local board of education to adopt a bereavement leave policy that authorizes an employee three days of bereavement leave for the death of a member of the employee's immediate family.

The legislation specifies that the adopted bereavement leave policy must authorize an employee one day of bereavement leave for the death of a member of the employee's family who is not immediate family. We are grateful to Senator Rusty Crowe and Chairman John Ragan for this necessary legislation for school employees.

Grief is not a topic of in-depth discussion at most schools, districts, or even the state legislature. But it is a reality that all of us face at some point in our lives. Grief is not a state, but rather a process.

If a family member has just passed away, work is probably the last thing on your mind. Fortunately, most organizations recognize that employees need time and space to grieve. It is important to realize that each individual's grief process is unique.

Bereavement leave refers to the time off granted to employees who have recently experienced the death of a loved one. Taking bereavement leave does not count toward other forms of scheduled leave. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that life is precious and that the death of a loved one can happen at any point in time, often unexpectedly.

The time around the loss of a loved one is challenging. Not only do you have to contend with overwhelming feelings of loss, but the practical challenges of arranging the funeral and the estate. It cannot be expected that you can work at your best at this time.

According to Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) in 2018, the percentage of businesses offering paid bereavement leave currently stands at almost 90%. Whereas most districts may already offer some form of bereavement leave, this legislation offers clarity, consistency, and direction to provide a guideline that can be replicated statewide. In a mobile workforce such as education, this is much needed.

SUMMARY

"Educators can feel more confident in asserting their need to take time off during times where their families and themselves most desperately need it."

An updated Bereavement policy is desperately needed by school employees across Tennessee. It will bring clarity and consistency to this process. This legislation brings awareness of the need surrounding grief and mental health. Educators can feel more confident in asserting their need to take time off during times where their families and themselves most desperately need it.

We urge passage of Senate Bill 2566 and House Bill 1759. We know it will help educators statewide. As Dr. Laura Thompson, a grief expert points out, “We are a quick-fix society yet healing is often a complex process that takes time. We can’t rush grief, and trying to do so only seems to prolong it.” This is common-sense legislation, with minimal cost and helps keep our educators feeling valued by schools and school districts. Professional Educators of Tennessee urges its passage by the Tennessee General Assembly.

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