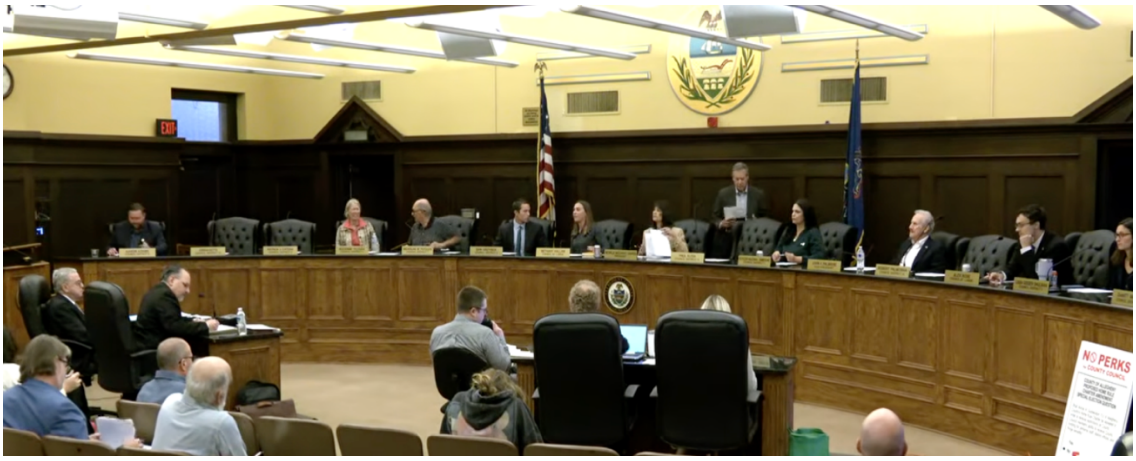
Allegheny County Council introduces paid parental leave policy



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The updated proposal would require businesses with 15 or more workers to provide 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

PITTSBURGH - Allegheny County Council introduced a revised paid parental leave policy Tuesday, which Council President Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis advanced to Allegheny Council's health committee.

County Executive Sara Innamorato's policy must now be approved by the health committee before council takes a final vote, of which a majority is needed to pass.

If passed, Allegheny County would be the first in Pennsylvania to require paid parental leave. According to Allegheny County Health Director Dr. Iulia Vann, preliminary data suggests only about 42% of those who give birth in the county have access to some kind of paid leave.

This policy would require 12 weeks of paid leave — full-time employees would qualify after six months of employment, and part-time employees qualify with 625 hours worked. It will apply to businesses with 15 or more employees, and businesses will have one year after the legislation passes to meet these requirements. The proposal currently states employees will not receive more than $4,200 per week, but the Board of Health might adjust this amount in the future.

At Tuesday's packed council meeting, Allegheny County residents shared pleas to enact this legislation. Of 13 speakers, only four opposed the passage.

Billy Hileman, president of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, gave a speech in support of the policy. Hileman said health researchers, statistics, and expert testimony should not be necessary to show newborns being with their mothers in the first weeks of their lives is a good thing.

“As if human beings haven’t known that for untold millennia,” Hileman said. “Now, we have to prove it to our employer.”

John Graf, president and CEO of Priory Hospitality Group, opposed the policy’s implementation. He said the burden is placed too heavily on employers of small businesses, leading to a slowing or reversing of economic growth. Graf warned this will cause small businesses to collapse, deter people from opening them, and move business to neighboring counties.

Graf would like to see a different system – one set up like a payroll tax or unemployment compensation. “Everybody is saying this is a public good,” Graf said. “Then have the public pay for it.”

Graf expressed his disappointment in what he sees as the inevitable passage of this policy and predicts legal action by small businesses immediately to follow.

Allegheny County Councilwoman-At-Large Bethany Hallam also said the legislation will undoubtedly pass, something that she has been awaiting. Hallam said anything legislators can do to make people’s decision to have children a personal choice rather than an economic one is what they should be doing.

“[This policy] is a no-brainer,” Hallam said. “The legislation is so long overdue, and I’m glad we’re finally taking it up.”

The specifics of the policy remain controversial, but even dissenters clarified their support for paid leave overall. A 2024 University of Michigan report analyzed existing studies on paid parental leave, finding increasingly positive impacts on employees *and* businesses. It reduces employee turnover, lowering costs and increasing productivity for businesses.

In 2022, an American Psychological Association study reported paid leave also decreased the risk of mood disorders and rehospitalization for the birthing parent, and strengthened parent’s ability to bond with their children.

The Allegheny County health committee will vote on whether or not to advance the legislation Thursday.