USM Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML)

Employee FAQs

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Quick Orientation

Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) is a new paid, job-protected leave benefit available to eligible University System of Maryland (USM) employees beginning July 1, 2026.

This benefit allows you to take paid time away from work for certain family, medical, or military-related reasons, while protecting your job and your benefits. This FAQ provides a brief overview; please read USM VII-7.51 Policy on Paid Family and Medical Leave for USM Employees and consult your institution for details.

1. Here's what's most important to know upfront:

- PFML is paid. You are paid at your regular rate and are not required to use your accrued leave first.
- Your job is protected. When approved, you generally have the right to return to the same or a comparable position with the same pay and benefits.
- Parental leave is now provided through PFML.
- Eligibility is broad. There is no minimum length of service or FTE requirement for PFML eligibility.
- Every situation is different. While this FAQ covers common questions, individual circumstances can be complex.

2. When should I contact HR?

You should contact your Human Resources office if:

- You are planning or considering time away from work for a qualifying reason.
- You are unsure whether your situation qualifies.
- You have questions about timing, documentation, or how PFML works with other leave (such as FMLA).

HR is your best resource for guidance specific to your situation.

What is Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML)?

Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) is a paid benefit that allows eligible University System of Maryland (USM) employees to take time away from work for qualifying family, medical, or military-related reasons while maintaining job protection. This means that while you are on approved PFML, your position is protected and you have the right to return to the same or a comparable position with the same pay and benefits when your leave ends. PFML is paid at your regular rate of pay, and you are not required to use or exhaust your accrued leave before using PFML. PFML is a benefit provided directly by USM and is not an insurance-based program.

3. When can I request PFML?

The law and USM policy take effect July 1, 2026. If you are aware that you may need to take leave that will begin around the policy's implementation date or continue through it, consult with your institution's HR department.

On that date, eligible employees receive a new bank of up to 12 weeks of paid leave to use for qualifying family, medical, or military-related reasons. Leave taken before July 1, 2026, does not count against this benefit. Everyone begins with the full amount when the program starts. If you exhausted your Parental Leave entitlement in the 12-months prior to July 1, 2026, you will not be eligible to use PFML for Parental Leave until one year from the date you began Parental Leave.

4. Who is eligible for PFML?

You may be eligible if you are a USM employee in an eligible employment category, including:

- Faculty,
- Exempt staff,
- Nonexempt staff, and
- Contractual staff employees.

There is no minimum length of service or "hours worked" requirement.

You are not eligible for PFML if you are:

- A student, including student help, graduate assistants, teaching assistants, research assistants, and post-doctoral students;
- A volunteer or unpaid affiliate; or
- Receiving workers' compensation benefits during the same period.

This exclusion also includes certain trainee roles, such as Residents, Research Fellows, and Clinical Fellows.

5. What situations qualify for PFML?

You may request PFML for the following reasons:

Parental Leave

- To care for your newborn during the first year after the child's birth,
- To care for or bond with a child the first year after placement for adoption, foster care, or kinship placement.

Your own serious health condition

A serious health condition is an illness, injury, impairment, or condition that:

- Requires inpatient care, or
- Requires ongoing or periodic treatment by a licensed health care provider.

Caring for a family member with a serious health condition

Family members include:

- Child (of any age),*
- Parent, Stepparent or parent-in-law,
- Spouse or domestic partner,
- Grandparent or grandchild,
- Sibling, or
- Other qualifying relationships defined by law.

* Note: Unlike Federal Family Medical Leave, PFML covers a "child" regardless of age or disability status.

Certain military-related reasons

PFML may be available for:

- Caring for a covered service member with a serious health condition resulting from military service when the employee is the service member's next of kin, or
- Addressing a qualifying exigency related to a family member's military deployment.

6. How much PFML can I use?

Up to 12 weeks (480 hours) of PFML in a PFML Application Year.

In limited situations, up to 24 weeks (960 hours) in the same Application Year when both parental leave and your own serious health condition occur in the same year, regardless of the order in which the leave is taken.

PFML is tracked in hours and is prorated based on your full-time equivalency (FTE). Except in the limited situation described above, employees may not use more than 12 weeks in an Application Year.

7. What is a PFML Application Year?

A PFML Application Year is a 12-month period that begins on the Sunday of the calendar week when your PFML starts. Once that period ends, a new qualifying event may initiate a new Application Year.

8. Is PFML paid?

Yes. PFML is paid at your regular rate of pay, based on your base salary or base hourly rate. PFML pay does not include:

- Overtime,
- Overload pay,
- Shift differentials, or
- Special allowances.

Pay adjustments related to overload assignments or special allowances may be impacted during PFML if those payments are tied to active job duties.

9. Do I have to use my accrued leave before I can access PFML?

No. You cannot be required to use or exhaust your accrued annual, sick, or personal leave before or during PFML.

Holidays that occur during a continuous PFML absence count toward your PFML leave time.

If the institution is officially closed and employees are not expected to work (such as certain closures), how time is recorded may vary based on your schedule. Your Human Resources office can provide guidance for your situation.

10. Can PFML be taken intermittently?

Yes. PFML may be taken as continuous leave or on an intermittent or reduced-schedule basis.

Intermittent PFML:

- PFML must be used in amounts of at least 4 hours at a time.
- You may take more than 4 hours based on your scheduled work time (it is not limited to fixed 4-hour blocks).
- You should provide reasonable advance notice, when possible.

If you need leave in increments of less than 4 hours:

- That time does not qualify for PFML pay.
- You must use accrued leave or take unpaid time.
- It may still qualify and be counted toward FMLA, if eligible.

11. Do I need to provide documentation?

Yes. Documentation is required and may include:

- Proof of birth or placement.
- Certification from a licensed health care provider.
- Military orders or related documentation.

Your institution will tell you what is required and when it is due.

12. Will my job and benefits be protected?

Yes. Approved PFML is job-protected leave.

While on PFML:

- Health insurance generally continues under the same terms.
- You remain responsible for your share of premiums.
- You will generally return to the same or an equivalent position, unless an exception applies under law or policy.

13. Do I continue to earn leave while on PFML?

No. You do not earn annual or sick leave for hours covered by PFML. Leave accrues only for hours actually worked.

What happened to Paid Parental Leave?

Beginning July 1, 2026, Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) replaces the existing USM parental leave policies. Leave for bonding with a child following adoption, foster placement or kinship care (previously referred to as “parental leave”) is now provided through PFML.

As a result, the parental leave provisions previously contained in Board of Regents Policies II-2.25 and VII-7.49 no longer apply.

14. What happens if I am currently on parental leave when PFML begins?

If you are currently on an approved parental leave, your leave will continue up to the 12-week (480-hour) maximum for the total leave period. Beginning July 1, 2026, any remaining portion of your leave will be paid as PFML, and you will no longer be required to exhaust accrued leave balances.

15. What if I had a child before July 1, 2026, but did not take leave?

If you are an existing employee who had a child prior to July 1, 2026, and have not previously taken leave for that qualifying event, you may begin a 12-week parental leave under PFML. If the newborn turns 1 year old during the parental leave period, PFML will no longer apply.

16. What if I am a new employee who had a child within one year of my start date?

Because you were not a USM employee at the time of the qualifying event (such as the birth or placement of a child), you may not begin parental leave after your start date, even if the event occurred within the past year.

What is FMLA?

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal law that provides employees with unpaid, job protected leave under certain circumstances. USM administers FMLA through Board of Regents Policy VII7.50 for staff and Policy II2.31 for faculty.

17. How is FMLA different from PFML?

PFML and FMLA are different laws, but they often apply to similar situations.

PFML (Maryland / USM)

- Paid, job-protected leave.
- Up to 12 weeks (or up to 24 weeks in limited situations).
- No minimum service or hours requirement.

FMLA (Federal)

- Unpaid, job-protected leave.
- Up to 12 weeks (or up to 26 weeks for military caregiver leave).
- Requires 12 months of service and, under USM policy VII-7.50, requires at least 1,040 hours worked.

18. Do PFML and FML run concurrently?

Yes. If you are eligible for both, PFML and FMLA will generally run concurrently. This means:

- The same absence may count toward both PFML and FMLA.
- PFML provides pay and job protection; FMLA provides job protection.
- Your institution will notify you if your leave qualifies for both.

Can I choose *not* to have PFML and FMLA run concurrently?

If your leave qualifies for both PFML and FMLA, USM is required to designate the leave under both programs.

While you may choose to use accrued leave or take unpaid leave, your PFML entitlement will still be reduced by the amount of leave taken for the qualifying reason.

19. How are USM's FML policies changing?

Beginning July 1, 2026, USM will move from a "look-back" method to a "look-forward" method for measuring the FMLA leave year. All employees will receive a new 12-week FML entitlement effective July 1, 2026, regardless of any leave used before that date. Going forward, an employee's FML entitlement will be measured as 12 weeks during a 12-month period that begins with the first instance of FMLA-qualifying leave.

Why was this change made?

This change better aligns FMLA with Maryland's PFML requirements and allows for easier coordination between the two leave programs.

How do I request PFML?

Notify your supervisor or Human Resources office.

- Submit a PFML request using your institution's approved form or via your HR System (e.g., Workday, PeopleSoft, etc.).
- Provide required documentation.
- Provide advance notice when the need for leave is foreseeable. Otherwise, notify HR as soon as practicable.

For foreseeable events, such as a planned surgery or birth, employees are generally expected to provide 30 to 60 days' advance notice, when practicable.

20. When do I need to submit documentation for my PFML request?

The PFML process generally happens in two steps.

Step 1 – Submit your PFML request

Start by submitting a PFML request to notify your institution of your need for leave. At this stage, you do not need to submit all supporting documentation.

Step 2 – Provide required documentation

After your request is reviewed, your Human Resources office will tell you what documentation is required, such as medical certification or proof of relationship.

- You should provide the requested documentation as soon as possible.

- If your request is incomplete, you will be notified of what information is missing and given up to 10 business days to provide it.

Failure to submit required documentation within the allowed timeframe may result in a delay or denial of your PFML request, unless there is good cause for the delay.

21. How long does it take to get a decision?

Once your request is complete, your institution will generally issue a written decision within 10 business days.

22. What if my PFML request is denied?

You will receive a written notice explaining the reason and your options.

Reconsideration

- Request within 10 business days.
- Reviewed by staff not involved in the original decision.

Appeal

- Available if reconsideration is denied.
- Decisions are final.
- While under review, you may use accrued leave or request unpaid leave.

Who should I contact with questions?

Contact your institution's Human Resources office for help with:

- Eligibility.
- Forms and documentation.
- Pay, benefits, and leave coordination.

HR can help you understand your options and guide you through the process.