

Congress, White House Reach Tentative Deal Over Paid Parental Leave for Federal Workers

Agreement would provide paid parental leave to 2.1 million civilian federal employees



Under current law, civilian federal employees get 12 weeks leave without pay to care for a new child. PHOTO: AURORA SAMPERIO/NURPHOTO/ZUMA PRESS

By [Lindsay Wise](#) and [Michael C. Bender](#) — [Wallstreet Journal](#)

Updated Dec. 6, 2019 11:23 pm ET

WASHINGTON—Congress struck a tentative bipartisan agreement that would authorize 12 weeks of paid parental leave for all federal workers, in a potentially historic deal negotiated with the White House.

Draft language for a must-pass annual defense policy bill includes a provision that would allow 2.1 million civilians who work for the U.S. government across the country to take paid leave to care for a new baby after birth, adoption or the initiation of foster care, according to multiple people familiar with the agreement.

Under current law, military service members can take as much as 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child, while civilian federal employees get 12 weeks leave without pay. Civilian employees are paid during that 12-week period by using accrued annual or sick leave.

To get the new benefit, employees must have worked for the government for one calendar year and stay for at least 12 weeks after taking the leave. A waiver of this requirement would be allowed for a physical, mental or other issue outside of parents' control that prevents them from returning to work.

Lawmakers are awaiting a cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office. Supporters contend the program would save money on recruiting and retention. And whatever the cost, they

say it is worth it to provide equal benefits to civil and military public servants. Some conservatives have in the past been skeptical of similar proposals, saying that such programs are too expensive.

If approved by Congress in the coming weeks, the measure would go far beyond the existing unpaid family leave for civilian federal workers and paid parental leave now offered to military service members. Proponents hope it will set a new standard for the private sector to match.

“This will be a crucial win for federal employees and their families and a significant development in our ongoing fight for comprehensive paid family and medical leave for all Americans,” said Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D., N.Y.), who sponsored an amendment that served as the basis for the parental leave language in the defense bill.

A cosponsor of that amendment, Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D., Pa.), called the proposed provision instituting paid parental leave “monumental.”

“As we have more women and moms in Congress and other places, that’s the kind of great legislation that I hope we can all work together on, because it makes families stronger, and as a consequence, it makes our nation stronger,” she said.

Eric Ueland, White House legislative affairs director, said Ivanka Trump, the president’s daughter and senior adviser, played a key role in negotiating the tentative deal “and lobbied extensively for the provision.”

Ms. Trump said the proposal will help the federal government “lead by example.”

“This will mark a huge step forward towards making paid leave a reality for all Americans,” she said. “This new policy represents another incredible win for millions of hard-working American families, courtesy of President Trump.”

To become law, the language would have to be agreed upon by the leadership of both chambers of Congress and the chair and ranking members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees.

It also will have to receive signatures from a majority of members of Congress tasked with negotiating the deal and survive floor votes in the House and Senate.

But with sign-on from the White House, Democrats who have been pushing for paid family leave are optimistic it will pass.

The tentative deal also would establish the Space Force as a separate military service but still inside the Department of the Air Force—similar to how the Marine Corps exists as its own branch within the Department of the Navy. If passed, the Department of the Air Force will have two military services in it: the Air Force and the Space Force.

The Space Force and paid leave were two out of a handful of final sticking points for the defense policy bill—it was either both or neither, a person familiar with the negotiations said.

Write to Lindsay Wise at lindsay.wise@wsj.com and Michael C. Bender at Mike.Bender@wsj.com