
Catastrophic Leave Program

1. Purpose

The Catastrophic Leave Program is designed to assist regular employees who have exhausted all leave accruals due to the employees' or eligible family members' serious illness or injury. This program allows other regular employees to donate time to the affected employee so that they can continue to receive compensation during the catastrophic period, thus partially reducing the financial impact of the illness or injury.

The absence during Catastrophic Leave will conform to other rules for leave set forth in the Personnel Rules.

2. Background

From time to time, an employee experiences a qualifying medical need to take time away from work. Occasionally, the necessary time needed exceeds their accrual banks. In such circumstances, an employee may request that Human Resources distribute a Catastrophic Leave Request.

This program helps support employees in times of crisis, providing financial relief by enabling them to maintain their income and benefits during extended absences from work; promotes solidarity and compassion in the workplace, allowing coworkers to help each other in times of need, fostering a sense of community and mutual support; and provide stability, reducing the stress on employees facing significant life events, helping them focus on recovery or dealing with personal challenges without worrying about losing their job or income.

3. Definitions

- A. **Catastrophic Illness or Injury** – A catastrophic illness or injury is considered to be potentially life threatening such as a heart attack, stroke, cancer, or severe injury requiring hospitalization and/or long-term care by medical personnel; non-work related medically certified illness, injury, impairment, physical condition of the employee that prevents an employee from returning to work for a period of thirty (30) calendar days or more.

Pregnancy is specifically excluded from this policy unless there are catastrophic complications, as verified by the employee's physician that preclude the employee from working for one month or more.

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Catastrophic Leave requests while on a pending or accepted work-related injury will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

- B. **Leave Accruals/Accrued Leave:** Sick, Vacation, Compensatory time, Administrative Leave, and other available paid leaves.
- C. **Eligible Employee:** To be eligible for Catastrophic Leave, the employee must be a regular employee who has passed probation, worked for at least 1,250 hours during the 12-month period immediately preceding the request, and has exhausted all accrued leave balances.
- D. **Doctor:** A licensed medical professional able to practice medicine in the state in which treatment is received. The term “doctor” not only includes a licensed physician who can prescribe medication, but also includes osteopaths and chiropractors performing eligible services within the scope and limitations of their license.
- E. **Regular Employee:** The employment of a person in a position which works an ongoing schedule and for which the City Council has authorized the providing of health and welfare benefits.

4. Eligibility

4.1 Donors

- A. Only regular employees are eligible to donate accrued leave.
- B. A minimum donation of one (1) hour of Vacation, Sick Leave, Administrative Leave, or Compensatory Time Off (“Comp Time”) is required.
- C. Donors must retain a balance of 80 hours in Vacation and/or Sick Leave after donation (no minimum balance is required on Administrative Leave of Comp Time).

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4.2 Recipients

- A. Certification from a physician that the illness/injury will preclude the employee from returning to work for at least thirty (30) calendar days must be submitted to the Human Resources Department.
- B. All available leave accruals (sick leave, vacation, administrative leave, comp time, and other available paid time off balances) must have been exhausted.
- C. Request for participation in the program shall be made on the Catastrophic Leave Application Request Form, available from the Human Resources Department.

5. Policy

- A. A Catastrophic Leave Application Request Form must be completed and approved.
- B. Donations must be a minimum of one (1) hour and submitted on the appropriate Catastrophic Leave Donation Request Form.
- C. Time donated will be converted to sick leave and credited to the recipient employee's sick leave balance on an hour-for-hour basis.
- D. Donated leave shall be paid out at the receiving employee's normal pay rate and is subject to normal payroll deductions. The recipient employee has sole responsibility for assessing any potential impact on their taxes and benefits.
- E. Donations are voluntary, irrevocable, and deducted at time of donation. See Workers' Compensation for an exception.
- F. Catastrophic Leave runs concurrently with any other approved leave of absence without pay, Pregnancy Disability Leave laws, the Family Medical Leave Act and/or the California Family Rights Act.
- G. Employees may not remain on Catastrophic Leave or receive leave donations for a continuous period exceeding six (6) calendar months.

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- H. The employee may not be concurrently receiving short or long-term disability or similar benefit. If the employee is receiving short or long-term disability or a similar benefit, they are to surrender the paid benefit to the Finance Department to ensure proper adjustments are made to payroll payments.
- I. Medical certification must be submitted by a licensed medical professional to the Human Resources Department. If the medical certification provides work restrictions and the City has appropriate and productive work available to accommodate, catastrophic leave donations shall be unavailable for the accommodation period.

Ex. If an employee is regularly scheduled for an eight (8) hour workday and the medical certification states the employee may only work four (4) hours per day, the employee shall work four hours and may utilize catastrophic leave donations for the remaining four hours.
- J. Donors who have submitted their resignation and/or retirement notice before a Catastrophic Leave Request has been submitted and approved are ineligible to donate to the recipient employee.

6. Workers' Compensation

When an employee files a workers' compensation claim that results in a "delayed" or "denied" status, that employee shall be eligible for Catastrophic Leave donations upon exhaustion of their own leave accruals.

Should a claim later be accepted, and the injured employee becomes eligible for Labor Code 4850 (sworn) or Salary Continuation (non-sworn), donated leave accruals shall be returned to the donor(s).

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- A. **Human Resources Department** is responsible for working with the requesting employee to ensure a medical certification is received for each Catastrophic Leave Application and for sending Donation Requests.

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B. Finance Department is responsible for receiving Catastrophic Leave Donation forms and applying donations to the recipient.