



July 29, 2022

University of Missouri Board of Curators
316 University Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211

Board of Curators,

We are writing to express our thoughts regarding the proposed leave changes for staff at the University of Missouri system. In particular we are concerned about the effect it will have on staff wellbeing, recruitment to the University of Missouri, and equity for employees who will be losing leave with no compensation for doing so.

We'd like to begin with what we believe are the benefits of the proposal. We applaud the goals of modernizing the University's leave program, improving its effectiveness, and promoting work-life balance. We agree that new employees should not have to suffer a lack of leave to care for themselves or their families when needed.

However, we have concerns and questions about the effect some proposed changes will have on existing staff members.

Interference with Retention and Recruitment

The university employees who would be affected by this change are widely varied. They include all benefit-eligible administrative, service and support staff and certain non-regular academic employees. Since this proposal was first envisioned, the labor market has changed radically. The pandemic pushed many long-time University employees to retire. Nationally, we are seeing employers struggle to replace staff. University staff are well educated and have many opportunities to move to different employers who will offer better benefits. Reducing a decent benefit package will only encourage strong employees to look elsewhere and discourage recruitment to the University of prospective employees. Some positions are recruited nationally and cannot rely on local talent. Particularly in a low-tax state with lower government wages, offering a better benefit package is one of the ways that we can remain a strong recruiter.

We understand the Curators concern that the University only needs to be competitive with local businesses in order to retain talented staff but three of the four campuses compete with large and well-funded corporations or state governments for those staff. For example, Columbia is located within 30 minutes of Jefferson City and many citizens commute to the state capital for jobs. The State offers (page 121) 44 total days at hire of paid time off. The proposal also states that the State of Missouri does not offer parental leave, but it now does ([see Executive Order 17-09](#)). This leave includes 6 weeks of paid leave at 100% salary. In this way, the State of Missouri can recruit talented individuals, even though it may not offer extremely high wages. We should continue to do the same with the competitive benefits the University offers.

Loss and restricted use of sick leave

The materials posted online do not explicitly communicate the real loss of benefit to employees who have worked for the University for more than 5 years. It is clear that the program as proposed would remove 10 days of paid time off for those employees with no clear compensation for this loss of time. We recognize that not all staff are protected by employment contracts, but some are. Whether short term disability, parental leave, or caregiver leave (yet undefined) are adequate for this loss of sick leave remains to be negotiated. However, this type of leave is described as one that would need to be approved by higher authorities and is not readily available to the employee to use at their will as they would use accrued sick leave. It also would only be covered at a 60% rate of salary, unlike the use of sick leave which covers all of the salary lost and does not have to be defined as a “serious health condition.” Again, we applaud the addition of short-term disability, but do not think it equitable to remove an employee’s sick leave as a replacement.

In the proposal (page 115), the stated principles include “reduces abuse of sick time” and “promotes scheduling time off in advance.” These are not goals that can be addressed by removing an employee’s benefits. Instead, these are management issues that should be addressed within the administrative unit where the employee works. It is unfair to punish all University employees for a manager’s failure to effectively supervise their employees.

Additionally, it cannot be an abuse of sick time *to use* the time given to an employee for this purpose. While it may be true that most University employees do not use all of their sick time, responsible employees who reserve this time for emergencies should not be penalized for doing so. If a PTO plan would improve trust between an employee and the University for use of time off as needed, that same trust can be preserved without reducing the employee’s benefits. It is demeaning to suggest otherwise.

Budget concerns

The third goal of the proposal is to realize cost savings. We wish to be clear: University employees are keenly aware of the University’s need and efforts to save money. Most staff members (and some faculty) have been asked to take on the tasks of two or more colleagues who have retired or left the University. Usually the additional workload comes with no additional remuneration for the added work and stress. Instead, this proposal *removes* time off for employees who have stayed and been loyal to this institution. It is also counterproductive. If employees do not feel free to take time off when they are sick, they will come to work sick. The pandemic has shown us how ill advised this tactic is. Similarly, employees who are ill do not work as productively as when they are well. Short term disability benefits do not meet this need as they are designed to address serious health conditions. If employees use their valuable ‘vacation time’ (no distinction made in a PTO plan) for everyday illnesses, then they do not have time to take needed vacations to rest.

A [recent article from Deloitte](#) states, “Only 56% of employees think their company’s executives care about their well-being, while 91% of the C-suite think their employees believe they care about it.” The proposal to remove 10 days of sick time does not reassure employees that the University of Missouri System is concerned with their wellbeing as much as it is concerned with saving money or meeting a perceived market standard for employee benefits.

We look forward to the discussion meetings. We ask that the Curators and University HR personnel consider our questions and concerns.

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