



Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the Family and Medical Leave Act: Results from the 2018 Surveys

SUMMARY

The 1993 [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) allows eligible employees working for covered employers to take up to 12 work weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for certain family and medical reasons. To gain knowledge of how employees and employers understand and experience FMLA, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) surveyed employees and employers in 1995, 2000, 2012, and 2018. The fourth wave, the 2018 FMLA Surveys, consisted of two separate surveys, one for employees and one for worksites. Each survey was conducted with a combination of phone and web responses.

The 4,470 employees surveyed were working-age adults employed in the public or private sector in the 12 months prior to the survey. The worksite survey consisted of 2,206 worksites, both covered and uncovered by FMLA.

The 2018 FMLA study includes a final report, a methodology report, and multiple study briefs that summarize various aspects of FMLA Survey findings. The study also includes a public use dataset of 2018 survey findings. Datasets from past surveys waves can be found on the [CEO website](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Workers' perceptions of FMLA:

- **Overall, 56 percent of U.S. employees surveyed were eligible for FMLA** on the basis of employees' report of their employment tenure, hours worked, and worksite size.
- **Fifteen percent of U.S. employees surveyed reported taking leave** for a qualifying FMLA reason in the past 12 months. However, low-wage employees reported needing but not taking leave for a qualifying FMLA reason more often than other employees.
- **Eighty-seven percent of employees surveyed reported returning to the same employer and position after taking leave (whether FMLA-designated or not)**, while 18 percent of low-wage workers reported losing their job due to taking leave.
- **Almost three-quarters of employees (73 percent) surveyed reported having access to paid leave for their own illness or medical care.**
- **Most employees surveyed who reported taking leave in the past 12 months had full or partial pay.** Forty-two percent received full pay, 24 percent received partial pay, and 34 percent received no pay while on leave.



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- **Two-thirds of employees surveyed who received partial or no pay while on leave reported experiencing financial difficulty**, with most limiting spending to compensate. Other strategies included: using savings, borrowing money, delaying bill payments, cutting leave short, and going on public assistance.
- **Many employees surveyed did not fully understand FMLA**, with about 27 percent incorrectly believing they meet eligibility requirements and 56 percent believing FMLA covers more than it does.

Employers' perceptions of FMLA:

- **More than 95 percent of worksites surveyed reported positive or neutral perceptions of the overall effect of FMLA** on their productivity, profitability, and employees, with 4 percent reporting negative effects.
- **More than 90 percent of worksites surveyed reported no difficulty in complying with FMLA requirements overall.**
- **Some worksites surveyed reported difficulty covering work during employees' leave**, although the level of difficulty varies by the type and length of leave taken.
 - Eleven percent of worksites surveyed reported it is "very difficult" to deal with planned short-term leave.
 - Thirteen percent reported it is "very difficult" to deal with planned intermittent leave.
 - Twenty-five percent reported it is "very difficult" to deal with unplanned intermittent leave.
 - Twenty-nine percent reported it is "very difficult" to deal with planned long-term leave.
 - Worksites surveyed reported that requests for unplanned intermittent leave and planned long-term leave are less common.

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STUDY TIMEFRAME: 2018
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