

Location	Teleconference
Time	10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Attendees (all on the phone)	Paid Family and Medical Leave Interim Director: John Mattes Employee's Interests Representative: Maggie Humphreys Employee's Interests Representative: Marilyn Watkins Employee's Interests Representative: Samantha Grad Employer's Interests Representative: Tammie Hetrick Employer's Interests Representative: Bob Battles Employer's Interests Representative: Christine Brewer Paid Family and Medical Leave Act Ombudsman: Edsonya Charles
Guests	Paid Family and Medical Leave Director: Lisa Kissler PFML Interim Operations Manager: Leah Coberly PFML Data and Research Manager: Rebecca Grady PFML Business Systems Product Manager: Matt Buelow PFML Policy Manager: April Amundson ESD Director of Public Affairs, Nick Demerice ESD Communications Director, Clare DeLong
Members Absent	Employer's Interests Representative: Julia Gorton Employee's Interests Representative: Joe Kendo
Scribe	Linda Kleingartner

Introductions - Members introduced themselves. John Mattes introduced Lisa Kissler as the new Paid Family and Medical Leave Director as of 12/1/2020, who joined the call.

October and November 2 Meeting Minutes – both approved.

Marking the Paid Leave 1st Anniversary – Nick Demerice and Clare DeLong acknowledged the unexpected challenges in 2020 interfered with the opportunity to celebrate the first-year milestone for Paid Family and Medical Leave. The Department is interested in marking the first anniversary by sharing stories via work sessions during the next legislative session (early January). Maggie would like to hear both the celebrations and the challenges with the program. Any additional feedback on the planning for the Anniversary activities can be directed to Nick or Clare.

The group discussed the progress made on the Program's report to Legislature due 12/1/2020. Rebecca Grady acknowledged the feedback from the Advisory Committee review during the week of 10/19/2020, the report is going through internal review and plans to follow the normal Legislative submission process through the Department.

Language Access Planning – Matt Buelow shared about current activities for language access in conjunction with the Governor's Office and Department of Labor. He shared some current activities planned and asked the Advisory Committee to share the challenges they are aware of.

Maggie Humphreys noted she has been working with Columbia Legal Services, Northwest Justice Project and Perigee and flagged the following significant issues:

- Biggest barrier is the process for filing for weekly claims since only option is by phone (and the phone line is an issue, cannot get into a queue, at best waiting for a couple hours);
- Difficulty in finding information in native language; and
- Delays in securing the translation services.

Bob Battles noted the Department of Labor & Industries went through an extensive language access study and changes and encouraged ESD to leverage this research and experience.

Marilyn Watkins is aware of small business owners who are non-English speakers, and not certain the Program has done enough to encourage their participation in the Program offerings, specifically opting in for elective coverage.

Edsonya Charles is concerned about whether sufficient outreach to non-English speaking communities.

Matt acknowledged the weekly claim process appears to be the greatest area of need, and before the department engages in the planning, wanted to share a couple ideas with the Advisory Committee (phone filing or alternate paper filing process). Feedback provided:

- Translate the weekly claim into all the supported languages.
- The phone system option has limitations as the scheduled call back can be difficult to navigate.
- Alternate dedicated number sounds great so long as its protected for weekly claim purpose and supported by translators.
- Consider the use of a dial pad or text to complete a form to file the weekly claim.
- Mail will delay benefits receipt.
- Access to printers can be a barrier (libraries closed due to pandemic).
- Would like to see a technology light option offered; rather than a single path.
- Have the language access plan vetted with experts in this area and who have been working on this.

More updates on the language access planning at future Advisory Committee meetings.

Upcoming Releases – Communications Plans

Matt shared the communications plans for the new functionality being added to the program in December and January.

- **Small Business Assistance Grants in December 2020**
(See slide 10 for Communications Plan). December 9 is a big communications date where the website will be updated along with the supporting publications. The Advisory Committee will receive an email containing sharable information along with key messages to assist with the Communications. December 15 the targeted employer communications begin, first round will focus on those small businesses that are known to be eligible. In January, communications will be sent to all small businesses (under 150

employees) and a notice to the small business list-serv to announce the program. Matt reiterated the applications can be retroactive to 1/1/2020, and guidance will be provided for businesses to do this retroactive. Premium assessment is prospective after their application per statute (they will not have to back pay premiums). Tammie Hetrick asked about premium payments made by small businesses, and Matt clarified the technology doesn't offer the option for these employers to pay these premiums unless they are approved for a small business assistance grant.

Action Rebecca -Provide additional data on applicant's, broken down by employer size, the percentage of people who have applied for benefits who worked for employers under 150 employees, and those who have worked for fewer than 50 employees. Also provide data on the length of leave at a future meeting.

- **Issuing 1099Gs by end of January 2021**

(See slide 11 for Communications Plan). Website updates planned for December 1, to include notice that the benefits may be taxed. The 1099G and accompanying explanatory materials will be mailed by the end of January 2021.

Edsonya inquired how voluntary plan employers be communicated to.

Action Matt to follow up with Edsonya after the meeting.

Bob Battles asked the Department to consider the following when communicating about 1099s: How will the Department learn the benefits are taxable? The IRS will not tell us who is taxed or not, due to privacy. Do we have a plan if people report these benefits are taxable?

Customer Service Processing Update – Leah Coberly covered the highlights from the Customer Care Team over the past month (see presentation slides 12 – 18). Applications continue to increase, reaching levels previously seen in late March 2020. The team continues to meet the 2-week processing goal however, processing times have increased over the past two weeks. Leah reported last month the email backlog was at 6,000 so the Customer Care Team focused on this and reduced the backlog to 1,638 as of 11/16/2020.

Matt shared the Program is doing the necessary planning should there be an uptick in application levels. Bob anticipates as people's Unemployment Insurance benefits expire, there could be additional people seeking Paid Family and Medical Leave benefits.

Action Leah / Rebecca: In future presentations, include the number of people actually getting benefits in comparison to the number of people who have applied- and reflect week over week data (as opposed to the cumulative weekly reporting view).

2021 Advisory Committee: Dates have been scheduled and will be remote for the foreseeable future. If specific dates do not work, just email Liz Merrick to advise and we can look for alternate timeframes.

The Paid Family and Medical Leave team shared the benefit cap for 2021 is \$1,206 and begins on 1/1/2021. Public materials and website updates are planned to reflect on this.

Open Comment –

Alyson Dimmett Gnam, Northwest Justice Project – appreciate the information on language access plan. The data shared does not reflect the number of possible applicants. She is encouraged and supports the Department's effort, and requests those planning engage Limited English Proficiency (LEP) experts in the community to assist. She also noted those that have received the benefit have experienced significant delays in their payments.

Trish Denigo – Please make the legislative reports available to the general public.

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 17, 10:00 am - Noon | This meeting will be held via WebEx.