

Three Jurisdictions, Three Timelines: What the DMV's Shifting Leave Laws Mean for Employers

July 6, 2026

By Sarah Goodman



For years, employers in the Washington metropolitan area could treat paid family and medical leave as a “somewhere else” problem, an issue for companies with workforces in California, New York, or New Jersey. That era is over. As of this spring, an employer with even a handful of employees spread across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia is now managing three separate leave regimes, each built on a different funding model, each carrying different obligations, and, perhaps most challenging of all, each operating on its own clock.

The result is a compliance puzzle that a single, one-size-fits-all leave policy simply cannot solve. Below is a snapshot of where each jurisdiction stands and what the calendar looks like heading into 2027 and 2028.

Washington, D.C. The Established Program You Cannot Put on Autopilot

Of the three jurisdictions, the District's program is the most mature, and, for that reason, the one employers are most likely to take for granted. D.C.'s Paid Family Leave program has been paying benefits since 2020 and is administered by the Office of Paid Family Leave within the Department of Employment Services.

A few features distinguish it from its neighbors. First, D.C.'s program is funded entirely by employers; there is no employee payroll deduction. The current contribution rate is 0.75% of each covered employee's gross wages, remitted quarterly through the Employer Self-Service Portal, with payments due at the end of the month following each quarter (April 30, July 31, October 31, and January 31). Second, eligible employees can access up to 12 weeks each of family, medical, and parental leave, plus two weeks of prenatal leave, with partial wage replacement up to a weekly maximum that the District adjusts periodically.

The compliance trap here is complacency. The contribution rate has changed more than once in recent years, the maximum weekly benefit is adjusted over time, and the D.C. PFL statute itself does not provide job protection, that has to be layered in through the D.C. and federal FMLA. Employers who set up their payroll years ago and stopped paying attention are the ones most likely to be out of step. Ongoing obligations still require ongoing attention: timely quarterly filings, current rate application, and the required employee notice.

Maryland A Long-Delayed Launch That Is Finally on the Horizon

Maryland's Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program has been a moving target in the region. Enacted in 2022, its implementation dates have been repeatedly pushed back; most recently, in response to federal actions affecting the timeline. For employers who tuned out during the delays, now is the moment to tune back in, because the runway is getting short and the final regulations took effect March 30, 2026.

Here is the current timeline that matters:

- **Fall 2026:** Employer registration opens. Any employer with at least one employee in Maryland will be required to register (there are no exceptions) and will need to designate an Authorized Officer and decide between the State Plan and an approved private plan.
- **January 1, 2027:** Payroll contributions begin. The total contribution rate is 0.9% of covered wages, split evenly between employer and employee (0.45% each). Small employers with fewer than 15 employees are exempt from the *employer* share, but their employees still contribute.
- **January 3, 2028:** Benefits become available. Eligible employees (generally those who have worked at least 680 hours in Maryland over the prior four quarters) can receive up to 12 weeks of paid leave (with the possibility of an additional 12 weeks for parental bonding in certain circumstances), capped at \$1,000 per week.

The practical takeaway for Maryland employers is that the meaningful work happens well before benefits ever get paid. Registration this fall, payroll-system readiness for the January 2027 contribution start, the State-Plan-versus-private-plan decision, and employee notices all land in the next several months (and not in 2028).

Virginia The Newcomer That Changes the Regional Calculus

The biggest development of 2026 came out of Richmond. In April, Virginia became the first state in the South to enact a statewide paid family and medical leave program, and it paired that with a significant expansion of paid sick leave. Employers who have long viewed Virginia as the “light touch” jurisdiction in the region will need to recalibrate.

Paid Family and Medical Leave. Administered by the Virginia Employment Commission, the PFML program will begin collecting payroll contributions on April 1, 2028, and will begin paying benefits on December 1, 2028. When it takes effect, eligible employees may receive up to 12 weeks of leave per year with wage replacement of 80% of average weekly wages, subject to a cap tied to the statewide average weekly wage (roughly \$1,500 per week under current figures, adjusted annually). Contributions are shared between employers and employees; employers with 11 or more employees must remit both portions (deducting up to half from employees), while employers with 10 or fewer are not required to pay the employer share. The program includes job-protection and benefit-continuation rights for employees who have been on the job at least 120 days, and it offers a private-plan alternative for employers who prefer to self-administer. Contribution rates have not yet been set—the VEC must finalize regulations and rates before the program launches—so the exact cost remains to be seen, though early estimates put it under 1% of wages.

Paid Sick Leave—and this one comes sooner. Just as important for planning purposes, Virginia’s new paid sick leave mandate takes effect July 1, 2027. It expands the state’s existing sick-leave requirement (which previously reached only certain home health workers) to nearly all private-sector employees and state and local government employees. Employees will accrue at least one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked, and the law expressly covers “safe leave” for employees dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Notably, the enforcement provisions have teeth: aggrieved employees may recover double the amount of any unpaid sick leave plus actual damages, and the law prohibits retaliation.

Because the sick-leave obligation arrives in mid-2027 (well before the PFML program goes live), Virginia employers effectively have two distinct deadlines to manage, not one.

Why the Differences Are the Whole Point

It would be convenient if these three programs converged. They do not. Consider just a few of the fault lines a multi-jurisdiction employer has to navigate:

- Who pays. D.C. is employer-funded only. Maryland and Virginia split contributions between employer and employee, but with different rates, different small-employer carve-outs (fewer than 15 in Maryland, 10 or fewer in Virginia), and different

wage caps.

- Job protection. Maryland and Virginia build reinstatement rights into their statutes. D.C.'s PFL does not, leaving job protection to the FMLA framework.
- Timing. An employer running payroll across all three is looking at ongoing quarterly obligations in D.C. right now, Maryland contributions starting January 2027, Virginia sick leave in July 2027, and Virginia PFML contributions in April 2028.
- State plan versus private plan. Both Maryland and Virginia allow approved private plans as an alternative to the state program. That decision, which carries cost, administrative, and renewal implications, needs to be made deliberately, not by default.

Layered on top of all this is the coordination problem: each of these programs interacts with the federal FMLA, with existing employer PTO and short-term disability policies, and with one another. Getting the concurrency and stacking rules wrong is where liability tends to accrue.

What Employers Should Be Doing Now

The through-line across all three jurisdictions is that the compliance work front-loads. Waiting until benefits start paying is waiting too long. In the coming months, employers with a regional footprint should be inventorying which employees fall under which program, confirming payroll readiness for the Maryland and Virginia contribution start dates, evaluating private-plan options, updating handbooks and leave policies to reflect the new entitlements, preparing the required employee notices, and training HR and managers on the accrual, coordination, and anti-retaliation rules.