

Item Title: Amendment of the Wake County Personnel Code of Ordinances for the Establishment of Wellness Leave

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners amends the Wake County Personnel Code of Ordinances for the establishment of Wellness Leave to provide two workdays of paid leave annually effective January 1, 2023.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Board of Commissioners review and approve changes to the personnel ordinance.

Background: Supporting the mental health of Wake County's employees is key to maintaining a talented and high-performing workforce. Mental health continues to be a public health concern with an estimated 1 in 5 individuals living with a mental health condition, 17 million adults in the United States living with depression, and suicide being a leading cause of death in the United States. Wake County provides several existing programs that support the mental health of it's employees including employee assistance programs, psychological services available to public safety personnel, and the mental health services as part of the health insurance benefit.

To further support employees' mental wellness and attract and retain a talented workforce, staff recommends the establishment of Wellness Leave and provide two workdays of paid Wellness Leave annually. This leave strives to further destigmatize finding support for mental health concerns and aims to increase workforce productivity by allowing employees to rejuvenate and renew to bring enhanced creativity and focus to their roles.

Board Goal: This action supports Great Government Goal 3: Maintain a culture that values and supports our employees.

Fiscal Impact: Salaries and benefits are appropriated in the annual operating budget. The creation of two days of Wellness Leave does not require additional funds in the fiscal year.

Additional Information:

Supporting employees' mental health is a responsible and high-value action. Doing so demonstrates that an organization respects its employees and also is a proven manner to increase the productivity of its workforce.

Mental health and wellness are a major public health concern. The National Alliance on Mental Illness states that 1 in 5 people live with a mental health condition. The

American Psychiatric Association Foundation estimates 17 million adults in the United States are living with depression. The Centers for Disease Control also reported that for 2019, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death overall in the United States and the second leading cause for individuals between 10 and 34.

Wake County provides several avenues of support for its employees' mental health.

Mental Health Benefits

Wake County's health plan offers mental health coverage via in-person care, telehealth, and online behavioral health apps. In 2021, 33% of health plan members had a behavioral health diagnosis, which is higher than the national average of 25%. The top conditions include anxiety, depression, and reactive stress disorders. Additionally, the Employee Health Centers offer virtual and in-person mental health counseling. In 2021, there were 687 provider visits at the Employee Health Centers for behavioral health concerns.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The EAP provides free professional and confidential services designed to help employees meet a variety of life challenges through one-on-one in-person counseling, 24/7 telephone support from expert mental health clinicians, and online resources to help support work-life balance. In 2021, the EAP provided 510 hours of services to 523 individuals. Of those, the primary presenting problems were critical incident response due to traumatic events in the workplace, stress, depression, anxiety, legal issues, relationships, and grief.

Public Safety Psychological Services

Public Safety employees have access to an on-site psychologist. In 2021, a total of 518.25 hours of counseling was provided.

Providing Wellness Leave is another key benefit Wake County can offer to support its current employees, increase productivity, and reduce the stigma related to receiving support for mental health issues. By providing two workdays of paid leave annually, employees can utilize this resource to renew and rejuvenate from professional or personal stressors and bring enhanced creativity and focus to their roles. In addition, Wellness Leave is another tool to help recruit and retain top talent in a competitive environment.

The annual cost for this benefit is limited as salaries and benefits are fully appropriated in the annual operating budget. Other financial impacts may be nominal.

For the revised ordinance, subsection (N) *Administration of leave policies* is included. This language was labeled subsection (M) previously; no changes are requested to this language and is included for the renaming of the subsection only.

Attachments:

1. Presentation
2. Revised Ordinance: Section 31.08 (M) and (N)