

SB26-087: Legislative Leave

Sens. Wallace & Pelton, B. and Reps. Nguyen & Lindsay

What the bill does: This bill provides unpaid leave from outside employment for members of the Colorado General Assembly while they are serving in regular or special legislative sessions. Members will be allowed to return to the same position and salary-level at their outside employment upon completion of the legislative session.

Why this bill: A representative democracy works best when the people making decisions reflect the full range of experiences, backgrounds, and economic realities of the communities they serve. The General Assembly should include working-class residents, caregivers, public service employees, small business owners, and people in hourly or nontraditional jobs - not just those who can afford to serve.

Legislative compensation alone does not provide a livable income for many residents of this state. As a result, talented and qualified individuals from a wide-array of backgrounds are often effectively prevented from serving in office, simply because they cannot afford to step away from their primary employment. This law would help those individuals keep both roles, allowing them to serve while maintaining a living wage.

This law would only apply to the 100 current members of the General Assembly who are legally mandated to be from a diverse array of geographic areas, and leave will only take place during legislative sessions. Therefore, the burden on any one employer anywhere in Colorado would be very minimal.

While the ask of employers is low, the impact for folks across our state is profound: Allowing members of the General Assembly to maintain outside, non-legislative employment is essential to making public service accessible. Protecting the ability to hold outside employment reduces financial barriers, broadens participation in public service, and ensures that legislative service is a realistic option for people from diverse economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

By supporting outside employment protections, we strengthen the representativeness of our legislature, promote broader civic participation, and reinforce public confidence in a government that truly reflects the people it serves.

Demographics of Our Current Representation:

- The average age of the legislature is 54, while the average age of those living in Colorado is 38.

- 26% of the state legislature are retired, while only approximately 15% of Colorado's population is aged 60 or older and thus are more likely to fall into the retired demographic.
- 5% of General Assembly members are attorneys, while attorneys make up roughly only .43% of the Colorado population.
- At least 57% of state legislators are single home owners and 30% own more than one home.

States with Similar Policies:

- Maine, Minnesota, South Dakota: Unpaid leave for all employers
- Vermont: Unpaid leave for employers with 6 or more employees
- Oregon: Unpaid leave for employers with 10 or more employees
- Connecticut: Unpaid leave for employers with 25 or more employees
- Nevada: Unpaid leave for employers with 50 or more employees