

**PAID TIME OFF (PTO)
TASKFORCE
RECOMMENDATIONS**



DECEMBER 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2021 Meet and Confer Agreement negotiations between the Houston Organization of Public Employees (HOPE) and the City, Paid Time Off (PTO) was identified as a topic for discovery and discussion. Accordingly, Article 12.06 was placed in the contract to address this identified topic:

“Within 30 days after the effective date of this Agreement, the parties shall establish a task force....which shall explore the feasibility of adopting a Paid Time Off (PTO) program to replace or modify the current vacation and sick leave programs offered. The PTO task force shall have a goal of making a recommendation by December 31, 2021 with the goal of implementing a PTO program by September 1, 2022.”

PROJECT OVERVIEW

PTO TASKFORCE REPRESENTATIVES

HOPE Representatives

Roy Sanchez, HOPE President	Houston Public Works
Daniel Coleman	Housing and Community Development
Cheryl Murray	Houston Police Department
Marcela Orozco	Houston Public Works
Jose Soto	Municipal Courts

City Representatives

Aubrey Bruce-Tagoe	Finance
Karen Davidson	Administration & Regulatory Affairs
Kimberly DeLeon	Legal
LaKeisha Dixon	Human Resources
Janet McCown	Human Resources

Special Consultant

Dwayne Santa Cruz	Houston Information Technology Services
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This Taskforce represented employees from eight different City departments with varied tenure and experiences with the current paid leave programs. This provided varied insight and perspectives on paid leave programs.

PROJECT SCOPE OF WORK

The PTO Taskforce met regularly since October 7, 2021. The team discussed and developed project goals to serve as the foundation for its recommendation:

GOAL STATEMENT:

Our goal as a taskforce is to craft a Paid Time Off (PTO) plan which works for every employee of the City of Houston. We seek to improve the current system where deficiency exists. We will focus on increased flexibility and decreased complexity to complement the schedules and lives of our City's dynamic workforce. We will not propose any changes which negatively impact any current employee. We will propose a plan which enhances the City's competitiveness in the labor market by providing a robust and flexible PTO plan to attract new public servants. We aim to retain the invaluable institutional knowledge and wisdom of our longstanding public servants with a plan that considers whether an employee may opt out. We aim to propose a financially responsible sustainable program which will serve employees, the City, and Houstonians for years to come.

Finally, we echo the 2021 Meet and Confer Agreement by recognizing, emphasizing, and applauding the positive roles municipal employees play in effective and efficient administration for the good of all Houstonians. It is our sincere hope that our proposal is worthy of this incredible and dedicated workforce.

The PTO Taskforce compiled the following information to review, analyze and/or compare to explore the feasibility of adopting a PTO program:

1. History and overview of the City's current vacation and sick programs;
2. Houston Police Department's PTO program and transition process;
3. Houston Fire Department's vacation program; and
4. Paid leave programs of other entities to identify "best practices" and to determine competitiveness.
 - a. Cities of Arlington, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio (PTO)
 - b. Counties: Harris and Fort Bend
 - c. City and County of Denver (PTO)
 - d. Harris Health System (PTO)
 - e. Trinity River Authority Survey

In addition, the Taskforce conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis of the current vacation and sick leave programs to identify items to keep, improve or remove in the development of a PTO program:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Paid sick and vacation leave exists	New hire cannot use vacation for 6 months
Additional leaves: wellness, personal, holiday	Benefit year does not correspond with any other operational year within City
Clearly defined, not arbitrary	Disparate plans based on longevity
Competitive for long-tenured employees	Less competitive for recent hires
Sick leave usable to care for family members	Sick leave accrual is low (Covid, catastrophe)
Accruals carry over	
Leave donation program and FMLA	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Personal leave: instead of based on sick usage (encourages employees to come in sick), base incentive awards on scheduled vs. unscheduled leave	Potential costs
Pandemic/emergency “relief valve” for employees without enough accrued leave	IT system infrastructure limits
Align with HPD PTO or HFD to ease administrative burden	Turnover of employees if not comparable
Leave donation program to include sick	Employees hoard time for vacation instead of using leave when sick
Communicate to employees how program change is an improvement (prevent turnover)	

Finally, HOPE asked for feedback from its members on interest for a Paid Time Off (PTO) program and/or any changes to the existing vacation and sick leave programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the compiled information, the PTO Taskforce recommends not to transition to a Paid Time Off (PTO) plan at this time.

Paid leave is a valued benefit provided by the employer and earned by the employee as part of the employer-employee relationship. It is used to provide a healthy work-life balance, which ensures a more productive, engaged, and healthier workforce to serve the city. A competitive leave program in any form is essential for recruiting the next generation of public servants. In this spirit, the PTO Taskforce recommends the following improvements to the current sick and vacation leave programs:

1. Remove 6-month wait for new hires to use vacation leave. Supervisors and managers are already able to deny leave requests and should be able to exercise discretion in determining whether a new hire going on leave is appropriate.
2. Improve vacation hours earned to be more competitive to attract/retain new employees.
3. Expand donation opportunities to the Donation Leave Program by allowing more pools of accrued leave to be eligible for donation to sick coworkers who have exhausted their own leave.
 - a. Accrued sick hours.
 - b. Vacation hours that would otherwise be “lost” by employees at maximum.
4. Create a Paid Family Leave program. Anticipate the possibility of new parents who both work for the City and might both need Family Leave.
5. Create a policy that ensures time off for victims of domestic violence. The policy will cover employees who are (or whose immediate family member is) the victim of domestic abuse or any domestic violence-related crime. The employee will be permitted to take leave (accrued vacation/sick hours or unpaid hours) to obtain medical attention or psychological counseling, and to seek a protective order, legal assistance or other services to help ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the employee and/or the employee’s immediate family. Such a policy will serve to affirm to both the employee and employee’s supervisor that time off (whether scheduled or unscheduled) is permissible in these circumstances. The Taskforce has sources to assist with the creation of this policy. Further, it is recommended to revise the Donated Leave Program to include employees without paid leave hours who need to take domestic violence leave.
6. Offer telecommuting and expanded opportunities for alternative work schedules for appropriate positions in keeping with the City’s adopted Climate Action Plan and as a recruitment incentive.

7. Promote and encourage the use of the HOPE Community Action Leave Pool by simplifying its use and proactively providing regular opportunities for employees to get involved in the community beyond their regular job duties.
8. Adjust the Personal Leave incentive program to only count unscheduled leave when calculating awards. Sick time scheduled more than a day in advance should not negatively impact employees' ability to earn personal days.

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