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Pittsburgh's new prescription for paid sick leave

Summary: Pittsburgh's Ordinance 11 of 2025 amends the city's Paid Sick Days Act (act). At the start of 2026, employees subject to the act will work fewer hours to attain an hour of paid sick leave and will have a higher maximum number of hours of paid sick time per calendar year. This is another significant detriment to achieving the goals of growing jobs, population and economic activity in the city.

Note that independent contractors, federal and state workers, those in a construction union covered by collective bargaining and seasonal employees are exempt from the provisions of the act. Businesses that must comply with the act will face additional requirements like posting new notices and becoming familiar with the changes along with making their own decisions on pay, benefits and staffing.

	Current Policy		***As of January 1, 2026***	
Employee Threshold	**Employee Earns 1 hour of paid sick time for every…**	**Maximum Accrual in Calendar Year**	**Employee Earns 1 hour of paid sick time for every…**	**Maximum Accrual in Calendar Year**
< 15	35 hours worked in City	24 hours	30 hours worked in City	48 hours
15 or >	35 hours worked in City	40 hours	30 hours worked in City	72 hours

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld the act after years of litigation, ruling that it was more a public health regulation than a duty imposed on businesses. Thus, the provisions of the act—accrual rate, definitions of employers and employees and all other provisions—can be altered by City Council action any time in the future.

It is difficult to determine how businesses have reacted to the requirement to provide paid sick time or how they will respond to the more costly provisions of the act when it goes into effect in 2026. A sponsor of the ordinance mentioned in a news article that grants or subsidies from the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) or private funders could be provided to offset the costs of paid time off, possibly tailored to "mom and pop shops." If

the URA funds the effort, this is after the URA laid off some of its staff and is worried about funding cuts. And what fairness is there if a business with four employees gets help when one with 10 might not? For that matter, what business do taxpayers have subsidizing such a dubious public policy for any size private employer?

It is also difficult to determine what the fiscal impact on the city will be. As noted in *Policy Brief Vol. 16, No. 21,* a fiscal impact statement is to accompany city ordinances, resolutions and executive orders. That requirement came after the act's 2015 passage. But, curiously, no fiscal impact statement was provided with the new ordinance.

What is known is that enforcement is handled by the Office of Equal Protection in the mayor's office. This was made official on Sept. 6, 2023 through a memo from the mayor to City Council. Based on city operating budgets, there were three full-time equivalent employees (FTE) in the Office of Equal Protection in 2023 and 2024, which fell to two FTE in 2025 with job titles changing along the way. Salaries and wages were $229,537, $237,603 and $136,739, respectively. In 2025 there are 39 FTE in the mayor's office and a total budget of $4.7 million.

An open records request seeking information on 2024 enforcement activities pointed to a publicly available website (last updated in April 2025) that shows the Office of Equal Protection "initiated a food and beverage industry zip code campaign" and "contact[ed] every [Allegheny County Health Department] licensed business in the city for a Compliance Check". This effort appears to have concentrated on roughly 3,000 establishments and their paid sick-leave policies and posting of notices (which will need to be amended for January). As of last summer, about 18 percent of the businesses had submitted policies. Over 200 businesses have been recognized by the city (this appears to be voluntary on the part of the business) if they meet or exceed the policy and are labeled either "Safe Workplaces" or "Thriving Workplaces." There are 589 businesses with a review pending.

Businesses that are negatively affected by the city's paid sick-leave requirements, or may find the changes an additional burden, always have the option of relocating outside the city limits. Allegheny County has paid sick-leave requirements which apply to businesses outside Pittsburgh with 26 or more employees and the accrual rate and maximum allotment are less generous than the city's 2026 changes.

In Pennsylvania, paid sick-leave ordinances are in effect in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County and Philadelphia. Although there were efforts in the General Assembly of specifically preempting local governments from enacting paid sick-leave policies, that ship appears to have sailed. For legislators concerned about the business climate, perhaps this would be an opportune time to revisit the issue.

Failure to address these types of anti-growth, anti-business issues is unfortunate as there is never a shortage of efforts to enact new subsidies and incentives while not addressing policies that hold back growth.

Eric Montarti, Research Director **Alex Sodini, Research Associate**

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Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234
Phone (412) 440-0079
E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
Website: www.alleghenyinstitute.org
X (Twitter): AlleghenyInsti1