MANAGING LEAVES UNDER THE ADA, FMLA, AND WORKERS’ COMP

MARK WILETSKY
HOLLAND & HART LLP
OCTOBER 12, 2017
Mark Wiletsky
Holland & Hart employment lawyer
WE WILL EXPLORE:

- Limiting FMLA Abuse
- Disability Accommodations
- Interactive Process
- Overlap with Workers’ Comp
- When FMLA Ends and ADA Leave Begins
- Effect of Medical Marijuana on Leaves and Accommodations
This presentation is similar to any other seminar designed to provide general information on pertinent legal topics. The statements made and any materials distributed as part of this presentation are provided for educational purposes only. They do not constitute legal advice nor do they necessarily reflect the views of Holland & Hart LLP or any of its attorneys other than the speakers. This presentation is not intended to create an attorney-client relationship between you and Holland & Hart LLP. If you have specific questions as to the application of the law to your activities, you should seek the advice of your legal counsel.

All Presentations and Materials © 2017 Holland & Hart LLP
LIMITING FMLA ABUSE
RED FLAGS FOR ABUSE

- Use of intermittent leave increases over time
- Use of leave exceeds what was anticipated in certification
- Pattern of use suggests abuse
- New information suggests fraudulent use of leave (e.g., co-worker sees employee skiing while on leave for a bad back)
TIPS FOR LIMITING ABUSE - POLICIES

Attendance Policy
- Tight call-in procedure

No Moonlighting Policy
- Prohibit working another job while on FMLA leave

Substitution of Paid Leave
- All accrued paid time off must be used to run concurrently with FMLA (where permitted by law)

Provide Job Descriptions
- Have employee provide job description showing essential functions to health care provider when completing medical certification
Use Medical Certifications

- Clarify incomplete or illegible certifications
- Seek second opinion
SECOND (AND THIRD) OPINIONS

• Permitted when employer “has reason to doubt the validity of a medical certification”
• Employee is provisionally entitled to FMLA leave while second/third opinion sought
• Employer may select health care provider to furnish second opinion, but cannot be employed by employer
• Third opinion permitted if first two differ – becomes binding
• Second/third opinions at employer’s expense
Recertifications:

- **30-day rule**: No more often than every 30 days
- **If original certification was for longer than 30 days**, must wait until that period expires
- **At least every 6 months**, regardless of duration
TIPS FOR LIMITING ABUSE

Recertifications in less than 30 days:
• If employee requests extension of leave
• If circumstances significantly change
  – E.g., medical certification stated that 1-2 days leave needed whenever employee suffers migraine, but employee’s absences for migraines last 4-5 days each
• If you have reason to doubt validity of reason for leave
  – E.g., employee on 4 weeks of FMLA leave for knee surgery is seen playing soccer
ADA REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

• Must accommodate a “known” disability
  – obvious disability (e.g., in a wheelchair, etc.)
  – upon request by applicant or employee – No “magic words” must be used

• Triggers Interactive Process
INTERACTIVE PROCESS FOR DISABILITIES

Discuss with employee

Evaluate essential job functions

Identify limitations/restrictions
INTERACTIVE PROCESS CONTINUED

Determine range of possible accommodations

Evaluate, considering undue hardship and direct threat

Tell employee and document
EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

• Change to job application process
• Leave of absence
• Part-time or modified job schedule
• Job restructuring
• Acquiring or modifying equipment or the workplace
• Changing non-essential policies
• Reassignment to a vacant position
RESPONDING TO AN ACCOMMODATION REQUEST

- Respond promptly
- Be interactive with employee
- Keep medical information confidential
- Be patient – process can take awhile
- Document
ADA, FMLA & WORKERS' COMP

- 3 independent laws
- Some overlap of coverage
- Different benefits and protections

Diagram showing the overlaps between FMLA, ADA, and WC.
# DISTINGUISHING WHEN EACH APPLIES

## ADA
- Employers with 15+ employees
- Disability: Physical or mental impairment
- “Regarded as” disabled
- Record of disability

## FMLA
- Employers with 50+ employees
- Birth/placement of a child
- Employee’s serious health condition
- Family member’s serious health condition
- Qualifying military exigencies
- Service member or veteran care

## Workers’ Comp
- All employers with 1+ employee
- On-the-job injury
- Occupational diseases
ADA, FMLA AND WC – WHICH APPLIES?

- Did Health Condition Arise from an on-the-Job Illness or Injury?  
  If No, WC Doesn’t Apply

- Is Employee’s Health Condition and Need for Leave FMLA Qualifying?  
  If No, FMLA Doesn’t Apply

- Is Employee Substantially Limited from Major Life Activity by Health Condition?  
  If No, ADA Doesn’t Apply

- Is Disabled Employee Qualified to Perform Essential Functions of Job with or without Accommodations?  
  If No, ADA Doesn’t Apply
Employer-Provided Leave and the Americans with Disabilities Act[1]

(May 9, 2016)

Introduction
The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment and requires that covered employers (employers with 15 or more employees) provide reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities that require such accommodations due to their disabilities.

A reasonable accommodation is, generally, "any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities."[2] That can include making modifications to existing leave policies and providing leave when needed for a disability, even where an employer does not offer leave to other employees. [3] As with any other accommodation, the goal of providing leave as an accommodation is to afford employees with disabilities equal employment opportunities.
When FMLA Ends . . .

If employee cannot return after 12 weeks of FMLA is exhausted:

• Does employee have a disability?
  – If no disability, no job protections (unless provided by state laws or your own policies)
  – If disabled, employee may be entitled to additional accommodations
WHEN FMLA ENDS FOR DISABLED WORKER

• Engage in interactive process to determine possible reasonable accommodations
• May need to offer additional time off
  – Leave need not be for indefinite time
PARAMETERS OF LEAVE AS AN ACCOMMODATION

- Multi-month leave is unreasonable (Seventh Circuit)
- Short term or intermittent leave probably reasonable (Seventh, Tenth, and other circuits)
- Six month leave (provided under employer’s policy) need not be extended as an accommodation (Tenth circuit)
- EEOC: definite period of leave can be reasonable accommodation if would enable employee to return to work
DIFFICULT DECISIONS

• Return-to-work date continues to be pushed back – how much is enough?
• Employee returns for short periods of time but then needs to take more time off - ongoing problem
• Are you setting a precedent that must be offered to other employees?
MARIJUANA – ACCOMMODATIONS?
At least eight states include some type of ban on employer discrimination against legal users of medical marijuana:

- Arizona
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Illinois
- Maine
- Nevada
- New York
- Minnesota
Some states with legalized medical marijuana require an accommodation

- Nevada: employer must reasonably accommodate the medical needs of an employee who uses medical marijuana, absent undue hardship, direct threat of danger or prohibit employee from fulfilling duties
- New York: “certified patient” under NY medical marijuana law deemed disabled
MASSACHUSETTS CASE (2017)

- Employee suffered from Crohn’s disease
- Permitted to use medical marijuana under Massachusetts law
- Fired under her employer’s policy when she tested positive for marijuana
- MA Supreme Court: employee can sue employer for disability discrimination
  - the fact that marijuana use violates federal law does not make off-site use per se unreasonable as a disability accommodation
COLORADO CASE (2013)

- Employee suffered from hepatitis C, osteoarthritis and pain
- He used medical marijuana off-duty in compliance with CO law
- He was fired after he tested positive which violated employer’s written drug policy
- Federal court rejected his claim for disability discrimination under Colorado law
  - “anti-discrimination law does not extend so far as to shield a disabled employee from the implementation of his employer’s standard policies against employee misconduct”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

• Hospital has very detailed attendance policy, including specific call-in procedures
• RN was approved for intermittent FMLA leave for migraines but failed to meet call-in requirement
• Can the hospital discipline or terminate her based on attendance policy for absences that otherwise qualify as FMLA leave?
ANSWER THOSE EMAILS?

- Physician’s assistant broke her foot and can’t work while on crutches
- Hospital asks if she can keep up with her emails from home, including requests for Rx refills, responding to patient calls, reviewing lab tests, and sending messages
- PA didn’t object
- Interference with FMLA leave?
QUESTIONS?

Mark Wiletsky
MBWiletsky@hollandhart.com
303-473-2864