

Why GAO Did This Study

Beginning October 1, 2020, eligible federal employees were able to use up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave for the arrival of a new child by birth, placement for adoption or foster care. Studies cited by OPM indicated that paid parental leave can help increase bonding time between parent and child, improve the desirability of federal employment, and increase employee retention.

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 directs GAO to review federal paid parental leave. This report (1) describes OPM data on paid parental leave and (2) assesses OPM and selected agencies' efforts to raise awareness of the program, among other objectives.

GAO analyzed OPM data on the government-wide use of paid parental leave. GAO also selected three agencies for review based on workforce size and use of paid parental leave. GAO analyzed relevant documents and interviewed officials from OPM, the selected agencies, and employee unions at the selected agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that OPM update its 2015 Handbook and associated fact sheets on its "Leave Administration" webpage to include current and accurate paid parental leave information. OPM concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-24-106654](#). For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-6806 or locked@gao.gov.

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

OPM Should Take Steps to Further Raise Awareness of the Program

What GAO Found

The Federal Employee Paid Leave Act of 2019 (FEPLA) provided a new paid parental leave benefit to most federal civilian employees. FEPLA amended the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which provided a federal entitlement of up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to most federal employees for a variety of caregiving and medical purposes. Eligible federal employees were able to substitute up to 12 weeks of qualifying FMLA unpaid leave with FEPLA paid parental leave.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) collected and analyzed data on the government-wide use of paid parental leave from the 2021 Federal Employee Benefits Survey, 2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), and other sources. FEVS 2022 data showed that 96 percent of federal employees who used paid parental leave used it for the birth of a child (see table). A total of 557,778 employees completed the 2022 FEVS.

Responses to Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) Question Related to Use of Paid Parental Leave by Qualifying Event, 2022

Question 100a: For what purpose did you use Paid Parental Leave?	Percent Response
Birth of a child	96
Adoption placement of a child	2
Foster care placement of a child	2

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management 2022 FEVS data. | GAO-24-106654

OPM and three selected agencies—Department of Justice (DOJ), Small Business Administration (SBA), and Social Security Administration (SSA)—found no significant obstacles to employees using paid parental leave. Selected agencies used multiple channels, such as hosting information sessions, to communicate paid parental leave to their employees. However, GAO found that selected agencies' public-facing webpages did not reflect current paid parental leave policies. During the course of GAO's review, DOJ, SBA and SSA agreed and updated the relevant webpages accordingly.

OPM's Leave Administration webpage includes handbooks and fact sheets intended to provide information on leave administration for federal employees. GAO found the webpage directs users to outdated information about FMLA before FEPLA went into effect. Specifically, the webpage directs users to the 2015 Handbook on Leave and Workplace Flexibilities for Childbirth, Adoption, and Foster Care, which does not reflect the availability of paid parental leave provided under FEPLA. The webpage also does not include FEPLA fact sheets. OPM officials told us that they had not yet completed updating the Handbook and fact sheets on its webpage because they had competing priorities and limited staff available. OPM intends to update the relevant documents as staff resources and workload permit. Without current information on its public webpage, OPM is missing an opportunity to help raise awareness of paid parental leave and ensure that federal employees understand their eligibility.