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To: Dane County Board Supervisors

From: Greg Brockmeyer
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Subject: Proposed 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook

Since June, the Employee Relations Division and the Department of Administration have been conducting the process to update the Employee Benefit Handbooks for 2026. Over the course of that process, we have heard seventy-six proposals for consideration and held many discussions about these proposals.

The Department of Administration has compiled the result of those proposals and discussions into an updated Employee Benefit Handbook in which all interested stakeholders have found consensus.

As required under County Ordinance, the updated Employee Benefit Handbook was presented to County Executive Agard for review and advice. Following that review, a draft resolution was prepared to authorize changes to the Employee Benefit Handbook. This resolution was introduced at the December 4, 2025 County Board Meeting. The resolution is scheduled to come before the Personnel and Finance Committee on Monday, December 8 and the full County Board on Thursday, December 18. When the Personnel and Finance Committee and the full County Board considers these resolutions, the Ordinance requires that those bodies vote on the resolutions as a whole package.

This memo explains the changes that are provided in the 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook and how the recommendations of the Personnel and Finance Committee are being addressed.

Further, for transparency, the final handbooks are posted in several online locations. One location is: <https://admin.danecounty.gov/News-from-the-Director>. Further, the final handbooks will be attached to the resolution to approve the changes to the handbook. As these are technical documents, please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about the provisions.

Changes to the 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook

Expands Sabbatical (previously Vacation Bank)

Under the current Employee Benefit Handbook, employees earn vacation time. If vacation time is not used by one year after it was earned, that unused time is transferred into a sabbatical account. (Previous handbooks referred to this as Vacation Bank, but that name was changed in 2024 to avoid confusion with earned vacation). The previous Sabbatical cap was 892 hours. The 2026 Handbook increases this cap to 1040 hours.

Child Care Workgroup

2026 Employee Benefit Handbook calls for the county to create a new workgroup to develop a report to the DOA Director. The report will identify potential options to improve access to child care and to help employees find affordable child care.

Safety Committee to Review Air Quality and Extreme Temperatures

The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook includes a provision for the Safety Committee to review the policies related to air quality and extreme temperatures and develop a report regarding these policies.

Judicial Authority

Judges in the State of Wisconsin have broad powers to determine who works in their courtroom. The current Employee Benefit Handbook did not address what happens when Judges decide to exercise their judicial authority to determine who works in their courtroom. Employee Relations and the Employee Groups worked together to develop language to address this gap in the Handbook and a Temporary Exception was issued in February 2025. Updated Employee Benefit Handbooks now include that Temporary Exception.

Worker's Compensation Language included in the Retirement Enhancement Plan

The current Employee Benefit Handbook include a Retirement Enhancement Plan to assist retirees with medical costs in retirement. Under that plan, employees with ten years of verified service, but less than twenty years of service, the county will provide the retiree with five annual payments of \$5,500 each. For employees with twenty years of verified service or more, the county will provide the retiree with ten annual payments of \$5,500 each. During collective bargaining with the Wisconsin Professional Police Association in 2024, language was added to their agreement to allow eligible employees who are injured at work, are no longer able to perform their job, and are receiving Worker's Compensation to be able to receive the REP. The 2026 Employee benefit handbooks have now been updated to include that provision.

Standardize Re-Employment Categories

The current Employee Benefit Handbook includes provisions for layoffs, and mandatory and permissive re-employment. There were some aspects of that language that were unclear and potentially contradictory between the mandatory and permissive re-employment. Employee Relations and the Employee Groups worked together to develop revised language that clarifies how these provisions work across the categories.

Program Leader

During the 2024 process to update the Employee Benefit Handbook, a proposal was presented to include promotional language for Senior Quality Assurance Specialists and Senior Program Leaders. These proposals were mistakenly left off of the 2025 Employee Benefit Handbook and a Temporary Exception was issued in December 2024. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook now includes the provision that was added via a Temporary Exception.

Deferred Prosecution Case Manager

The current Employee Benefit Handbook includes language for Social Workers and Case Managers to promote to Senior Social Workers and Senior Case Managers. The Deferred Prosecution Case Managers in the District Attorney's Office currently do not have this senior promotional language. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook provides for this classification of employees to receive the senior promotional language, similar to other case managers or social workers.

Job Interviews

The current Employee Benefit Handbook allows employees seeking a promotion or another job with the county to receive work time to attend to the interview or job examination. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook expands upon this benefit by providing for compensation time for employees who are attending such an interview outside of their normal shift. This was done to provide a benefit to 2nd and 3rd shift employees, as it is often difficult for employees working these shifts to schedule an interview during their normal business hours.

895 Group Seniority

The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook cleans up language related to Employee Group 895. EG 895 was previously with SEIU and sometime later became affiliated with AFSCME. As a result, the handbook for 895 did not include references to the other AFSCME locals. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook addresses this and ensures that EG895 has the same language as the other AFSCME Employee Groups.

Parking Ramp

Employees currently pay \$15 per month to park in the Dane County Parking ramp. In order to address the Budget deficit and to reflect the recent improvements to the ramp both of which require ongoing revenue, the Department of Administration introduced a proposal to increase that fee to \$20 per month. This increased rate is reflected in updated Employee Benefit Handbook. This rate is still well below the market rate for parking in downtown Madison and is below comparable entities from the City of Madison and the University of Wisconsin.

Disability Layoff

Employees with a disability can receive a leave of absence without pay for a period of time, subject to certain provisions. After that time has lapsed, the employee is placed in a disability layoff status for a period not to exceed 18 months. The updated Employee Benefit Handbook for 2026 includes a provision for employees who have exhausted their 18 months of disability layoff to receive two additional 3-month extensions.

Waste and Renewables Job Assignments

The Employee Benefit Handbook provides Acting Class Pay Hourly (ACPH) for employees that operate certain kinds of machinery. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook provides ACPH for semi-skilled laborers and skilled laborers to receive this benefit at the Department of Waste and Renewables.

Hours of Work – Highway Department

The updated Employee Benefit Handbook modifies the hours of work at the highway department to reflect a “Straight 8” hour schedule. The Highway Department and Employee Group 65 worked together to develop this modified schedule.

Janitors 720

Janitors in Employee Group 720 are paid slightly less than Janitors in Employee Group 65. The Janitors in EG 65 start at \$29.46 per hour and the Janitors in EG 720 start at \$29.06. This wage information is prior to the 2026 Budget’s 1% reduction. The 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook corrects this wage inequity and ensures that Janitors are paid the same rate for the Janitor 1 classification.

Personnel and Finance Committee Recommendations

At the August 11, 2025 meeting of the Personnel and Finance Committee, the Committee recommended four areas for consideration “that the Committee believes are important.” Those recommendations were:

- Employee Group Representatives should have the right to assist employees with the preparation and conduct of reclassification and reallocation hearings and appeals.

- The existing telework policy, currently incorporated as a temporary exception should be made permanent.
 - Disputes concerning telework should be incorporated into the grievance process, or other third-party resolution process.
 - The rescission of a telework agreement for discipline and/or performance should be directly related to telework-specific concerns.
- All employees should be made aware of their rights to representation and the role of employee representatives in meetings with managers/supervisors where discipline or a change in working conditions is a potential outcome.
- Employees should benefit from additional policy clarity related to:
 - the circumstances and related procedures for employees during hazardous air quality conditions;
 - the circumstances and related procedures for employees during extreme heat and cold conditions;
 Procedures for making whole an employee whose private vehicle is damaged while being used for county business.

The consensus updates to the 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook address the Committee's fourth recommendation by directing the Safety and Working Conditions Committee to Develop a Report on the topic. The other recommendations are actively being pursued, but were not included in the 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook. A summary is provided for each of those items below.

Reclassification and Reallocation

Benefits under the Employee Benefit Handbook are provided to all employees, regardless as to whether they become a part of the Represented Employee Group. Generally speaking, the County operates from a principle of uniformity, meaning that the benefits are uniformly applied to all employees within an Employee Group. The County's position is that providing Employee Group Representatives with paid time to participate in reclassification/reallocation appeals is a violation of that uniformity clause. Unrepresented employees could not receive a similar benefit.

Maintain Telecommuting

The current Temporary Exception on Telecommuting expires at the end of the 2025 payroll year (December 13, 2025). The Department of Administration is in discussions with Stakeholders to extend the current exception for another year.

Employee Representation (Weingarten Rights)

During the Annual Update Process for the 2026 Employee Benefit Handbook, Stakeholders proposed adding language regarding Weingarten rights, beyond what is already in the Employee Benefit Handbook. The County is supportive of this proposal, but we have yet to reach language that would be acceptable for all parties. Discussions with Interested Stakeholders are continuing.