



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 24, 2026
TO: Forest Preserve District Finance & Administration Committee
FROM: Jennifer Clough, Director of Human Resources
VIA: Ben Haberthur, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Presentation and Approval of the 2026 Employee Handbook Revisions

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Committee with information to consider the approval of revisions to the Employee Handbook.

BACKGROUND:

Best practice in human resources management is to review employment policies on a regular basis. Human Resources and legal counsel have completed a full review of the Employee Handbook, which was most recently revised in February, 2024. The recommended revisions ensure compliance with state and federal statutes, clarify policies for ease of interpretation, and align with current practices.

Below is a summary of the proposed changes to the document:

A. Format and Language Changes

- First person references were removed.
- Formal terminology was revised to encourage readability, such as replacing the word “shall”.
- Department and position titles were updated to align with current assignments and to reflect the recent re-organization and addition of the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer (CFAO) position.
- References to the District payroll and benefits providers and their technology systems were updated to reflect current vendors (ADP/ADP Workforce Now for payroll and IPBC/PlanSource for benefits).
- The term civil union partner was replaced with domestic partner throughout and holiday categorization has been re-defined by Major/Non-Major rather than by the titles Family/Non-Family.

B. Policy Changes

- The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement and Americans with Disabilities (ADA) practices were updated throughout to reflect additional recognized protections and accommodations.
- *1.4 Training and Orientation Period:* Upon approval of the 2024 compensation and classification study, the District stopped its practice of providing a merit increase after the first six months of employment.
- *1.5 Career and Professional Development:* The FY26/27 annual budget includes a request to increase tuition reimbursement from \$1,000 to \$2,500 annually based on an external review for competitiveness and a survey of the cost of education at area community colleges.
- *1.6 Performance Evaluation System:* The step system for compensation approved in 2024 is referenced and the language was modified to accommodate upcoming programmatic changes to the tool as a result of the District’s contract with ADP for performance management technology.
- *1.7 Operating a District Vehicle:* The mileage reimbursement policy was expanded for clarity and a reference to the current practice of conducting annual driver’s license abstracts for employees

operating District vehicles was included.

- *1.8 Workplace Safety:* The District maintains a separate safety handbook to meet the District's Risk Insurance Carrier's (PDRMA) requirements. Duplicative procedures already cataloged in the safety handbook were removed.
- *1.9 Travel and Other Expense Reimbursement:* The language in this policy was clarified to require the most conservative action where the policy is silent to provide for ease of administration.
- *1.10 Employee Records and Verification of Employment:* Employee access to records has been expanded to comply with the Illinois Personnel Records Review Act requirements.
- *2.1 Hours of Work and Compensation:* The implementation of ADP timekeeping technology requires revision to reflect the new timeclock system processes. In addition, meal break compliance was clarified for shifts lasting over eight (8) hours in duration.
- *2.2 Health and Welfare Benefits:* The District paid a portion of health insurance premiums for retirees electing to continue coverage prior to 2017. There are no longer qualifying employees participating in the plan; accordingly, the policy can now be removed.
- *2.3 Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF):* IMRF, which is established and governed by state law, has specific minimum hours standards for participation that are not at the District's discretion. The policy was edited to clarify.
- *2.4 Vacation Time & 2.5 Sick Leave:* The per month accrual awards were removed due to the District's migration to ADP for payroll processing, through which accruals will be awarded on a bi-weekly basis. Total annual accruals for both vacation time and sick leave remain the same.
- *2.7 Holidays:* The list of days on which District offices are closed was updated to reflect those approved by the board in the two previous calendar years. The method of computing employee compensation on actual holidays was revised to accommodate ADP system limitations.
- *2.8 Paid Leave for All Worker's Act:* This state act requires the District to provide a copy of its notice as an attachment or link in its Employee Handbook. In addition, language was added to clarify use.
- *2.9 Compensation Plan:* The Commission approved the District's Classification and Compensation Study and Plan in August of 2024. Revisions made to the policy reflect details of the plan including its step-system design and performance-based increases to employee pay.
- *3.1 Coordination of Leave and Benefits:* Employee compensation increases approved in the annual budget are not currently delayed by leaves of absence.
- *3.6 Jury Duty:* In response to some Judicial Circuit Courts providing jury duty payments electronically, the policy has been updated to revise reimbursement practices.
- *3.9 Blood and Organ Donation Leave:* Effective January 1, 2026, the Illinois Employee Blood and Organ Donation Leave Act expanded paid, job-protected leave to part-time employees.
- *3.10 Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA):* Effective January 1, 2026, amendments to VESSA prohibit employers from disciplining, retaliating against, or discriminating against employees for using company-issued technology (phones, laptops, tablets) to document or communicate about domestic, sexual, or gender-based violence.
- *3.11 Work Related Injuries:* Language related to the state mandated waiting period for work related injury payments was expanded for understanding.
- *4.3 Workplace Violence:* This policy was expanded to include District employee's responsibilities to report abuse or suspected abuse against children and vulnerable adults, a policy requirement of the District's risk insurance provider PDRMA.
- *4.9 Drug Free Workplace:* The District provides employees with access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which includes drug and alcohol counseling and treatment options. The policy language has been amended to remove the expectation the District offer participation in lieu of disciplinary

action following a positive test result based on the recommendation of the District's risk management provider.

C. New Policies

- *3.13 Military Funeral Honors Detail Leave:* As of August 1, 2025, Illinois law requires employers with 51 or more employees to provide up to 40 hours of paid leave annually (max 8 hours/month) for eligible employees to serve on a military funeral honors detail.
- *3.14 Neonatal Intensive Care Leave:* Effective June 1, 2026, Illinois law requires employers with 51 or more employees to provide up to 20 days of unpaid leave for parents with a child in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

D. Removed Policies

- *2.3 Transportation Benefits:* As of January 1, 2024, Illinois law requires employers with 50 or more employees in specific RTA regions to offer pre-tax transit benefits for commuting. District office locations do not meet the act's requirements; this benefit has been offered to employees without participation and at an annual fee of \$300 since 2024.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

One revision to the Employee Handbook has a potential financial impact. If the Board authorizes a Tuition Reimbursement Program increase, additional funding would be budgeted in the next fiscal year. A FY26/27 budget request will be incorporated into the budget to allocate an additional \$3,000 in tuition reimbursement funds for a total budgeted amount of \$5,000, compared to the FY25/26 budgeted amount of \$2,000. This increased amount would provide financial reimbursement for up to two (2) eligible employees with a maximum reimbursement amount of \$2,500 for each employee.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approving the 2026 revisions to the Employee Handbook.

ATTACHMENTS:

Draft 2026 Employee Handbook