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Key Connecticut Employment Law Developments Employers Should Address in 2026

Key Takeaways

- **Minimum wage increased to \$16.94 per hour effective January 1, 2026**, with automatic annual increases tied to the federal Employment Cost Index continuing each January 1.
- **Connecticut's Paid Sick Leave Law continues to expand**, covering employers with 11 or more employees as of January 1, 2026, and all employers with at least one employee beginning January 1, 2027.
- **Paid sick leave eligibility and usage rules were significantly broadened**, including expanded employee coverage, increased accrual rates, additional permissible reasons for leave, and new limits on employer documentation requests.
- **New anti-discrimination protections and leave rights for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking took effect October 1, 2025**, requiring updates to equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies and leave practices.

Connecticut saw a relatively quiet year on the employment-law front, but there were several meaningful developments that employers should promptly address, including continued minimum wage increases, the expanded Paid Sick Leave Law, and new anti-discrimination protections and related leave obligations for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking.

Below is a summary of these key developments.

Minimum Wage Increases

As we previously reported in our alert, "[A Mostly Quiet Year for Employment Laws During Connecticut's 2024 Legislative Session](#)." Connecticut's minimum wage continues to rise automatically each year based on the federal Employment Cost Index (ECI). After increasing to \$16.35 per hour on January 1, 2025, the Connecticut minimum wage increased again to \$16.94 per hour on January 1, 2026. Going forward, annual increases will happen on January 1 of each year based on the U.S. Department of Labor's calculation of the ECI for the 12-month period ending on June 30 of the preceding year.

As we start 2026, employers should audit their pay practices to ensure they are compliant with the increased minimum wage requirements, and employers can anticipate that indexed increases to the minimum wage will be a recurring compliance item each year.

Connecticut Paid Sick Leave Expansion

As we previously reported, [Connecticut's Paid Sick Leave Law changed significantly on January 1, 2025](#), expanding coverage in ways that will ultimately impact nearly all private-sector employers, including out-of-state employers with just one employee working in Connecticut.

On employer coverage, the law is being phased in over several years. As of January 1, 2025, it applied to employers with 25 or more employees. Coverage expanded again on January 1, 2026, with that threshold dropping to 11 employees. Beginning

January 1, 2027, the law will apply to all employers with one or more employees, covering virtually all employers in Connecticut.

On employee coverage, one of the biggest changes to Connecticut's Paid Sick Leave Law is the elimination of the prior "service worker" concept. Covered employers now are generally required to provide paid sick leave to all employees, subject to limited exceptions, including employees who work fewer than 120 days in a year.

The law also updates how sick leave is earned and used. The accrual rate increased to one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked, up to 40 hours of leave per year, and employees are permitted to begin using accrued leave after 120 calendar days of employment. In addition to accrual and eligibility changes, the statute includes certain employee protections and employer restrictions—employers may not require an employee to provide documentation to prove that leave is being taken for a permitted purpose and also may not require an employee to find a replacement to cover scheduled hours while the employee uses paid sick leave. The law also includes notice obligations, and the [Connecticut Department of Labor has published on its website](#) sample notices and posters that employers may use to comply with the notice requirements.

Finally, the law expands the reasons employees may use paid sick leave. It broadens the definition of "family member" beyond the employee's spouse or child to include siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, parents, and those with a close family-like relationship. It also adds new permissible reasons for leave, including certain closures tied to a public health emergency and leave related to exposure to a communicable illness, even if the employee does not ultimately become sick.

Employers should review whether their existing policies satisfy these requirements. In many cases, employers can comply with the sick leave mandates through a general paid-time-off policy, but only if the policy is at least as generous as the statute in terms of accrual, carryover and usage rules, and permissible reasons for leave.

New Anti-Discrimination Protections and Leave for Victims of Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking

Effective October 1, 2025, Connecticut expanded its anti-discrimination law to protect individuals based on their status as victims of sexual assault or human trafficking. In practical terms, the new protections are the same as those that already apply to victims of domestic violence under Connecticut law.

This development has both discrimination- and leave-related implications. Employers may not discriminate against applicants or employees based on their status as a victim of sexual assault or human trafficking. In addition, employers must provide a reasonable leave of absence to enable an employee to address needs arising from that status, which may include medical care, counseling, relocation or safety planning, and participation in legal services or proceedings. The statute does not set a fixed number of days for what is "reasonable," so employers should approach these requests thoughtfully, considering the facts and circumstances and documenting the process in a manner similar to how employers often handle leave or accommodation requests.

The law allows employers to request appropriate certification supporting the need for leave, including documentation from a licensed medical professional or a counselor. In updating their handbooks and policies, employers should ensure that EEO statements, anti-discrimination provisions, and leave policies reflect these new requirements.

Connecticut Case Law Spotlight: *Long v. Town of Putnam*

Connecticut case law also offered a practical reminder of how post-leave decisions can be scrutinized in connection with discrimination claims. In [Long v. Town of Putnam](#), the Connecticut Appellate Court reversed summary judgment for the employer where the employee alleged that she returned from maternity leave with the same job title but diminished responsibilities, fewer hours, and reduced pay. The employee also alleged that she received positive feedback before going out on leave, and the employer argued that post-leave changes were tied to performance issues, including the failure to complete a particular audit prior to leave.

The Appellate Court's decision underscores that timing of post-leave changes can support an inference of discrimination—particularly where an employee returns from protected leave and experiences immediate, tangible reductions in pay, hours,

or responsibilities. The case serves as a reminder that pregnancy leave should be treated like other forms of job-protected leave, adverse employment actions must be able to withstand scrutiny based on credible evidence, and maintaining the same job title will not insulate an employer from claims that the employee was effectively demoted.

Next Steps

Connecticut's new employment laws warrant attention as we start 2026. Employers should ensure compliance with the indexed minimum wage increase effective January 1, 2026. Employers should also review their leave policies and practices to ensure they align with the expanded Paid Sick Leave Law. Finally, employers should update their EEO and leave policies to reflect Connecticut's new protections and leave obligations for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking, and use the lessons from *Long v. Town of Putnam* to ensure careful, well-documented decision-making around employees returning from pregnancy-related and other protected leaves.

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