



## Resolution to Support Inclusive and Caring Bereavement Leave for Faculty and Staff (Senate Document #24-25-18)

**SUMMARY** A non-binding resolution to call upon the University System of Maryland (USM) and the State of Maryland to better care for members of the University community experiencing bereavement and to be more inclusive of diverse bereavement needs in bereavement leave policies. The resolution urges USM and the state to extend bereavement leave duration and broaden the definition of "close relative" to recognize diverse familial relationships. The text of the resolution is below.

**WHEREAS** USM Policies II-2.30 §III.D.3 (Faculty)<sup>1</sup> and VII-7.45 §III.A.4 (Staff)<sup>2</sup> establish procedures for up to 3 days (5 days if traveling overnight) of sick and safe leave in the event of the death of a "close relative," defined narrowly as a "a spouse, child, stepchild, parent (or someone who took the place of a parent), mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother, sister, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, or other relative who permanently resided in the faculty member's household"; and

**WHEREAS** the inaugural consolidated collective bargaining Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the USM and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) §13 designated up to 7 days (10 days if traveling overnight) of accrued leave for bereavement in the event of the death of a "close relative," narrowly defined as "spouse, child, step-child, foster child, mother, father (or someone who took the place of a parent), mother-in-law, father-in-law, grandparent of the employee or spouse, grandchild, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother, sister, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, or other relative who permanently resided in the employee's household";<sup>3</sup> and

**WHEREAS** requiring employees to use sick and safe leave and/or accrued leave for bereavement may negatively impact newer employees or employees who have been unable to accrue leave to use for bereavement; and

**WHEREAS** an estimated 1,205,773 people in the U.S. have died due from COVID-19 pandemic as of September 28, 2024,<sup>4</sup> highlighting the need for compassionate systems of bereavement support in the face of ongoing, collective experiences of loss and grief;<sup>5</sup> and

**WHEREAS** the share of people living with "traditional" family models dropped from 67% in 1970 to 37% in 2021,<sup>6</sup> while the number of people living in multigenerational households doubled during the same timespan,<sup>7</sup> increasing the likelihood that individuals are in close relationships with people who fall outside narrow "close relative definitions."

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionII/II230.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVII/VII745.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.usmd.edu/usm/adminfinance/employee\\_and\\_labor\\_relations/USM-AFSCME-Consolidated-MOU-Signed.pdf](https://www.usmd.edu/usm/adminfinance/employee_and_labor_relations/USM-AFSCME-Consolidated-MOU-Signed.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps\\_deaths-total](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_deaths-total)

<sup>5</sup> Verdery, A. M., Smith-Greenaway, E., Margolis, R., & Daw, J. (2020). Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117(30), 17695–17701. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2007476117>

<sup>6</sup> Aragão, C., Parker, K., Greenwood, S., Baronayski, C., & Mandapat J. C. (2023). *The modern American family: Key trends in marriage and family life*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/09/14/the-modern-american-family/>

<sup>7</sup> Cohn, D., Horowitz, M. J., Minkin, R., Fry, R., & Hurst, K. (2022). *The demographics of multigenerational households*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/03/24/the-demographics-of-multigenerational-households/>

**WHEREAS** narrow definitions of “close relative” may disproportionately harm people from marginalized communities, especially for LGBTQ+ communities who may rely on “chosen” or “found” family for support<sup>8</sup> and communities of color who may rely on more extended kinship ties for support;<sup>9</sup> and

**WHEREAS** 3-5 days of leave (as is policy for Faculty) is insufficient for people who must travel long distances for bereavement and whose cultural practices around bereavement require a longer period of mourning;<sup>10</sup> and

**WHEREAS** failing to support members of our community appropriately in the bereavement process can impact their longer-term health (e.g., contribute to complicated grief/prolonged grief disorder); and

**WHEREAS** the UMD Strategic Plan articulates the institution’s commitment to being a “connected, coordinated, and effective community of care that supports the success and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.”

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the University Senate of the University of Maryland calls upon the USM and the State of Maryland to adopt revisions to the bereavement leave policies and/or engage in future collective bargaining negotiations, as applicable, to center considerations of care, inclusion, and justice for all State employees; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** these policies should provide bereavement leave separately from sick and safe leave or accrued leave; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** these policies should remove the strict definition of “close relative” and provide more days of leave for bereavement, with a minimum of one full week and additional days for related travel; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** these policy revisions should provide for a process to obtain additional leave on a case-by-case basis, including after the initial period of loss, as grieving is not a linear process and feelings around bereavement may come up at different points beyond the initial loss;<sup>11</sup> and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the University Senate of the University of Maryland calls upon the University administration to advocate for these changes in collaboration with relevant stakeholders across system institutions and State entities.

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<sup>8</sup> Hull, K.E., Ortyl, T.A. (2019). Conventional and cutting-edge: Definitions of family in LGBT communities. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 16, 31–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0324-2>

<sup>9</sup> Gerstel, N (2011). Rethinking families and community: The color, class, and centrality of extended kin ties. *Sociological Forum*, 26(1) 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01222.x>

<sup>10</sup> Oyeboode, J. R., & Owens, R. G. (2013). Bereavement and the role of religious and cultural factors. *Bereavement Care*, 32(2), 60-64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2013.812828>

<sup>11</sup> Saltzman, L. Y. (2019). It’s about time: Reconceptualizing the role of time in loss and trauma. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*, 11(6), 663–670. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000435>