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“Pawternity” Leave is Coming!

California Employment Law Update on **May 4, 2026**

Across the Atlantic, Italy is redefining what counts as a legitimate reason to step away from work. Recent developments in Italian law allow employees to take paid leave to care for sick pets, up to three days per year, with appropriate microchipping and veterinary certification.

This shift builds on an earlier Italian judicial decision recognizing that failing to care for a suffering animal could violate animal welfare laws—effectively placing employees in a bind between legal obligations and job duties.

This new law reflects a growing legal and cultural recognition of pets as part of the family unit. Much to the chagrin of cats, the city of Emeryville already allows employees to “use [paid] sick leave to aid or care for a guide dog, signal dog, or service dog…” *See* Emeryville Municipal Code § 5-37.03. (When we last checked, Bay Area felines were in contact with the SEIU for some much-needed representation to secure equal rights.)

According to a recent survey, the number of people who would call themselves “pet parents” has increased with every generation — Boomers (44%), Gen X (47%), Millennials (54%). As such, the concept of “pawternity leave” is already emerging in employer-driven benefits programs—suggesting that Italy and Emeryville may be signaling where workplace norms are headed, even if not yet where the law requires them to be. For employers, the implications are both practical and strategic:

- **Operational adjustments:** Tracking, verifying, and managing a new category of leave.
- **Talent strategy considerations:** Flexible, empathetic policies may serve as a competitive advantage in recruitment and retention.

We will continue to monitor developments in this area.

Related Professionals

- **Anthony J. Oncidi**

Partner

- **Ariel Brotman**
  Associate
- **Michelle L. Lappen**
  Associate