

UI Ad-hoc Domestic Partnership Benefits Task Force Meeting
Friday, April 20, 2007

Present Via Teleconference: *Joe Bohn, Allan Cook, Patrick Finnessy, Jim Hall, Rita Hunt, Pat Langley, Larry Mann, Jason Pierceson, Steve Rugg, Scott Shippy, Laura Stempel, David Stewart, Liz Thomson, Patrick Tranmer, Curt Winkle*

The meeting began at 1:35 p.m.

- A number of accomplishments to date: created a process for Family Medical leave, which isn't currently possible in CMS; will extend DP affidavit to other UI campuses outside of Chicago (which recognizes Cook County Registry); reduced number of affidavit documents needed from three to two; developed a process for dept communication and uniformity; updated forms; and are in process of communicating all of this to various audiences
- It is anticipated that all of this information/explanation/approval will be sent to the UI community by July 1, 2007
- The issue of reimbursement for taxable DPB was raised, but the current response was that this is not possible, because other groups also receive taxable benefits; said there is currently HR 1820 by a representative to amend IRS tax code, and this bill recognizes the tax inequity
- While it was previously stated that the current UI reimbursement plan would be terminated as of June 30, 2007, this is NOT the case. UI will continue to offer the State of Illinois plan AND the UI plan for one more year. However, the UI plan *will* terminate as of June 30, 2008.
- The Federal FMLA does not include domestic partners; the University FMLA exceeds federal coverage by continuing employer premium payments during unpaid leave. This will be updated to include DP's.
- The question was asked about the number of people using DPBs; response-it is currently uncertain; the suggestion was offered that there be a system-wide e-mail in clear and simple language asking whether or not people would be interested in an "extended" FMLA domestic partnership program; It was noted that the numbers in the beginning will be small but could potentially grow slightly over the years

Other Pending State Legislation:

Those of note for this committee: 1) State Employee Group Insurance Act; wanting a definition of DP; 2) Joint Resolution of Constitutional Amendment; making marriage be between one man and one woman; 3) Illinois Religious Protection of Civil Union Act; 4) Family Leave Insurance Program (FLIP); extended leave for newborn child; 5) Religious Freedom and Fairness Act. These can be tracked at www.ilga.gov and clicking on "Bills and Resolutions."

The question was asked what role the University plays in legislation/lobbying; response- not a lot

- in general, if there is a bill that affects the University, it is sent out to the appropriate functional unit; any lobbying must be initiated at the grassroots level and brought to the attention of Governmental Relations. The University does not advocate for or against legislation unless there is a clear mandate from the campus(es).
- advocacy groups are needed to initiate discussion and lobbying
- typically there are 1500-2000 pieces of legislation; HR tracks any bill that has to do with University HR, but not in a lobbying role; HR does give a 1) positive/in favor, 2) negative/not in favor, or 3) neutral stance; most bills are given neutral position
- The University's non-discrimination policy was raised, and that the UI would not want to see legislation introduced that would run counter to current policy and past practice.

Discussion around SURS and Survivor Benefits [in Traditional Plan] for domestic partners; Pension Protection Act allows for this, but SURS believes it is not covered by that law; SURS considered providing untaxed survivor benefits anyway but decided against it.

Discussion around benefits for children and step-children of domestic partners; no definitive response; children and step-children of opposite sex married couples are covered by insurance, but not the step-children of employees in same-sex couples or the children of their partners; asked about even adopted children of same-sex couples; need to get confirmation about this. Steve Rugg indicated he will follow-up.

Discussion around having a payroll deduction versus writing a check to CMS; Steve Rugg said he will take it on immediately

Question around state residency and tuition from student angle; P. Finnessy will get clarification on exact issue; response- unsure; P. Langley offered the scenario of same-sex faculty or staff living separately in different states (as many heterosexual academics do)

Brief update on web site development; doing clean-up and more inclusive language should be apparent; wanted more understanding of FMLA.

The next meeting will be in Fall 2007.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.