

New Laws Will Affect Employees in 2018: Leave, Equal Pay, Reasonable Accommodations, and More

9 Key Steps For Updating Employee Handbooks to Address New Regulations

NEW PROVIDENCE, NJ (October 13 2017) - One of the most common employee handbook mistakes is not updating it each year, says [Beth P. Zoller](#), XpertHR Legal Editor and author of a new whitepaper on how to update your employee handbook for 2018. This year, lawmakers, particularly those on the state and local level, have been busy enacting laws that directly affect workplace policies and employee handbooks.

Leave Laws

It is important for employee handbook policies to reflect the latest leave laws, especially those on the state and municipal level, such as paid sick leave, safe leave, organ donor leave, or leave to serve in the military or National Guard. Leave law policies are important because they provide employees with knowledge about specifics such as what types of leave they may be entitled to, the reasons for taking leave, the eligibility requirements, the documentation required as well as accrual and how time may be used.

Equal Pay and Wage Discrimination

Employers should take note that over the past year, a number of states and cities have significantly expanded equal pay provisions and enacted legislation promoting wage transparency in order to close the wage gap. Some of these laws expand equal pay protections beyond gender to race and ethnicity, while others prohibit employers from banning discussions regarding salaries and wages by and among employees. Additionally, a new area of focus is laws that prohibit employers from seeking information regarding salary history.

Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations continue to be at the forefront on the federal, state and local levels. States have enacted or expanded reasonable accommodations for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding as well as expanded required accommodations for individuals who identify as transgender. Based on these developments, an employer should make sure to update its handbook to include policies on reasonable accommodations in the workplace and show compliance with these laws.

Addressing Violence and Weapons in the Workplace

Workplace violence can take many forms, including physical violence, harassment, intimidation and disruption of the workplace. It can affect co-workers, customers and visitors. Under the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, an employer is obligated provide a safe working environment, including an environment safe from harm, and minimize the risk of workplace violence. Additionally, many states have workplace safety and violence laws in place. Therefore, it is important for an employer to have policies to prevent workplace violence, ban weapons from the workplace and ensure all employees' safety.

For example, a workplace weapons policy aims to potentially avoid major acts of violence from occurring by prohibiting weapons in the workplace or on the employer's premises. Such a policy

also offers guidance, defines prohibited behavior and outlines reporting criteria and responsibilities under a workplace violence prevention program.

“An employee handbook is crucial in communicating the company’s standard policies and practices,” explains Zoller. “The handbook can be an invaluable organizational tool or an employment lawsuit waiting to happen.”

New federal, state and local laws passed in 2017 will impact employers, their workplace policies and ultimately their employee handbooks in 2018. If an employer does not update their employee handbook to reflect the new regulations, they could be subject to lawsuits by employees who say they were not aware of company policies.

To update an employee handbook for 2018, XpertHR recommends that an employer should take the following steps:

1. Update Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Policies
2. Review Reasonable Accommodation Policies
3. Comply with New and Updated Leave Laws
4. Incorporate Laws Regarding Military Leave and Other Protections
5. Amend Equal Pay and Wage Discrimination Policies
6. Ensure Safe Driving Policies
7. Amend Smoke-Free Workplace Policies
8. Address Violence and Weapons in the Workplace
9. Add Predictable Scheduling Policies

For a free copy of “9 Crucial Steps for Updating Your Handbook for 2018”, [visit XpertHR](#).

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