

The New Jersey Security and Financial Empowerment Act (“NJ SAFE Act”), P.L. 2013, c.82, provides that certain employees are eligible to receive an unpaid leave of absence, for a period not to exceed 20 days in a 12-month period, to address circumstances resulting from domestic violence or a sexually violent offense. To be eligible, the employee must have worked at least 1,000 hours during the immediately preceding 12-month period. Further, the employee must have worked for an employer in the State that employs 25 or more employees for each working day during each of 20 or more calendar workweeks in the then-current or immediately preceding calendar year.

Leave under the NJ SAFE Act may be taken by an employee who is a victim of domestic violence, as that term is defined in N.J.S.A. 2C:25-19, or a victim of a sexually violent offense, as that term is defined in N.J.S.A. 30:4-27.6. Leave may also be taken by an employee whose child, parent, spouse, domestic partner, or civil union partner is a victim of domestic violence or a sexually violent offense.

Leave under the NJ SAFE Act may be taken for the purpose of engaging in any of the following activities as they relate to an incident of domestic violence or a sexually violent offense:

- (1) Seeking medical attention for, or recovering from, physical or psychological injuries caused by domestic or sexual violence to the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner or civil union partner
- (2) Obtaining services from a victim services organization for the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner, or civil union partner
- (3) Obtaining psychological or other counseling for the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner or civil union partner
- (4) Participating in safety planning, temporarily or permanently relocating, or taking other actions to increase the safety from future domestic violence or sexual violence or to ensure the economic security of the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner or civil union partner
- (5) Seeking legal assistance or remedies to ensure the health and safety of the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner, or civil union partner, including preparing for or participating in any civil or criminal legal proceeding related to or derived from domestic violence or sexual violence; or
- (6) Attending, participating in or preparing for a criminal or civil court proceeding relating to an incident of domestic or sexual violence of which the employee or the employee’s child, parent, spouse, domestic partner, or civil union partner, was a victim.

Leave under the NJ SAFE Act must be used in the 12-month period immediately following an instance of domestic violence or a sexually violent offense. The unpaid leave may be taken intermittently in intervals of no less than one day. The unpaid leave shall run concurrently with any paid vacation leave, personal leave, or medical or sick leave that the employee elects to use or which the employer requires the employee to use during any part of the 20-day period of unpaid leave. If the employee requests leave for a reason covered by both the NJ SAFE Act and the Family Leave Act, N.J.S.A. 34:11B-1 et seq., or the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, 20 U.S.C. 2601 et seq., the leave shall count simultaneously against the employee’s entitlement under each respective law.

Employees eligible to take leave under the NJ SAFE Act must, if the necessity for the leave is foreseeable, provide the employer with written notice of the need for the leave. The employee must provide the employer with written notice as far in advance as reasonable and practicable under the circumstances. The employer has the right to require the employee to provide the employer with documentation of the domestic violence or sexually violent offense that is the basis for the leave. The employer must retain any documentation provided to it in this manner in the strictest confidentiality, unless the disclosure is voluntarily authorized in writing by the employee or is authorized by a federal or State law, rule or regulation.

The NJ SAFE Act also prohibits an employer from discharging, harassing or otherwise discriminating or retaliating or threatening to discharge, harass or otherwise discriminate against an employee with respect to the compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment on the basis that the employee took or requested any leave that the employee was entitled to under the NJ SAFE Act, or on the basis that the employee refused to authorize the release of information deemed confidential under the NJ SAFE Act.

To obtain relief for a violation of the NJ SAFE Act, an aggrieved person must file a \_\_\_\_\_ a