



Administrative Policy  
**ABSENCE**

AP No.	AP 3-11
Effective Date:	Upon Approval

**1. POLICY STATEMENT**

The City of Houston (City) is committed to a people-first workplace that supports employee well-being and encourages open communication. The City also recognizes that absences may occur due to a variety of circumstances. This policy is designed to provide clear and consistent guidance regarding attendance and time management, and promote a thoughtful, supportive approach to addressing attendance concerns while balancing the needs of employees and City operations.

**2. POLICY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the appropriate use and management of absences.

**3. SCOPE**

All City employees.

**4. DEFINITIONS**

Absence: Time away from work during an employee’s scheduled work hours.

City Business: Time during an employee’s scheduled work hours in which the employee is engaged in activities that are authorized, directed, or approved by their department director or designee, and are performed in the furtherance of official City operations, programs, meetings or other work-related functions.

Verification: A statement from a licensed health care provider that serves as verification that an employee’s absence was medically necessary for the employee or their family member for date(s) of the absence. The statement does not need to include a diagnosis or medical details.

**5. POLICY DETAILS**

**General**

- 5.1 Employees are expected to work a full workday.
- 5.2 Absences may be paid or unpaid and shall be designated as excused or unexcused in accordance with applicable City policies and procedures. Excused absences, whether paid or unpaid are subject to appropriate approval, include but is not limited to: vacation, City holidays, floating holiday, court-related absences, funeral leave, military leave, personal leave, leave of absence, sick leave, Family and Medical Leave (FML), City business, voting leave, approved union business leave, furlough, inclement weather leave, and prenatal, parental, and infant wellness leave.
- 5.3 Department Director may establish additional attendance and absence-related policies or rules, including but not limited to procedures for reporting absences and reasonable verification requirements for the use of sick leave when such measures support the effective operation of the department. Any department-specific policy or rule adopted under this subsection shall be reviewed and approved by the Human Resources (HR) Director, or designee, and the City Attorney, or designee prior to implementation.

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Date Approved:

3/24/2026

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- 5.4 Employees are expected to report for work as scheduled and shall communicate promptly if they anticipate being late or unable to report for duty. When a delay or absence occurs, employees should notify their supervisor as soon as reasonably possible by direct telephone call unless an alternative method of communication has been expressly approved in writing by management or established by department policy.
  - 5.4.1 The employee shall personally notify their supervisor of any anticipated lateness to report for duty and/or absence. In emergency situations, notification may be provided by another individual on the employee's behalf.
  - 5.4.2 Supervisors shall identify an alternate supervisor or point of contact to ensure employees have clear guidance on whom to notify when the primary supervisor is unavailable.
- 5.5 Employees are encouraged to notify their supervisor as far in advance as possible whenever they are unable to report to work for any reason. When the immediate supervisor is unavailable, the employee should contact the alternate supervisor or the point of contact and make reasonable efforts to follow up with their supervisor as soon as practicable.
- 5.6 Failure to notify a supervisor of an anticipated absence or a delay in reporting for work may result in loss of compensation for the period of absence and may lead to corrective action up to and including indefinite suspension or termination.
- 5.7 Supervisors are encouraged to monitor unscheduled changes in attendance patterns and to engage in timely, supportive conversation with the employee to understand underlying concerns and provide assistance where appropriate.
  - 5.7.1 The supervisor is responsible for documenting attendance-related issues and efforts to support the employee.
- 5.8 Employees may receive compensation during authorized absences in accordance with applicable leave policies. Absences that exceed an employee's available accrued leave balance are generally unpaid; however, such absences do not automatically jeopardize the employee's employment status and will be reviewed based on the circumstances and applicable policies.
- 5.9 Employees are not expected or permitted to work beyond their normal scheduled start or end times to make up lost time due to the absence, or adjust their work schedule, unless such work is expressly authorized by the Department Director or designee, or otherwise provided under department-specific policy.
- 5.10 Unexcused and/or unpaid absences include, but are not limited to: tardiness, absence due to illness that are patterned, excessive, and/or unsupported by documentation from a license health care provider when such documentation is required, and/or absences without proper notification in accordance with departmental procedures, absence resulting from incarceration.
  - 5.10.1 Absence as a result of incarceration shall be an unpaid absence.
- 5.11 For inclement weather-related absences, refer to see Administrative Procedure 2-3, Severe Weather and other Emergency Conditions.
- 5.12 Absences related to Family Medical Leave shall comply with Administrative Procedure 3-2, Family Medical Leave.

**City Business**

- 5.13 City Business does not include personal activities, voluntary external engagements not requested by the City, or time away from work that is unrelated to official job duties.

5.14 In the event an employee is required and authorized to perform City Business on a regularly scheduled day off within the workweek, the employee's work schedule shall be adjusted, when operationally feasible, to provide an alternate day off within the same workweek. If a schedule adjustment is not feasible, the time worked shall be compensated in accordance with applicable City policy through overtime pay or compensatory time, as appropriate.

### **Meal and Break Times**

5.15 Each full-time employee shall be allowed a meal break from thirty (30) to sixty (60) minutes near the middle of the workday. Each part-time employee shall be allowed a meal break of the same duration before five (5) consecutive hours are worked. Exceptions to address matters of public safety and health are subject to approval by the department director.

5.15.1 Meal breaks are generally unpaid. Employees shall comply with the sign-out and sign-in procedures in effect within their department. The timing and duration of meal breaks shall be determined by the supervisor, with appropriate regard for the workload and operational needs. Departments authorized to compensate employees for meal breaks may do so in accordance with their department-specific policy or practice.

5.16 Each employee shall be allowed a rest break of fifteen (15) minutes, generally scheduled near the middle of each four (4) consecutive hours of work that are not interrupted by a meal break as permitted by operational needs. Time spent on rest breaks is compensable; however, employees shall comply with applicable departmental sign-out and sign-in procedures where such policy is in effect. The timing and availability of rest breaks shall be determined by the supervisor with appropriate regard for work requirements.

5.16.1 Employees who choose or are required to remain at their workstation during a rest break are not entitled to leave before the end of their scheduled shift.

5.16.2 A supervisor may require an employee to remain within the immediate work area during a rest break based on operational needs.

5.16.3 Rest breaks shall not be combined with a meal break, nor should they be used to shorten the workday or to extend the start or end of a scheduled shift.

5.16.4 A supervisor may modify or adjust meal or rest break schedules as necessary to ensure the effective operational functioning of the department or any division or work area.

### **Professional Development**

5.17 Professional development seminars or training related to the employee's job duties and responsibilities, as approved by the employee's supervisor, should be considered an excused paid absence.

### **Absences of Three (3) or More Days**

5.18 An employee who is absent from work for three (3) consecutive workdays without providing proper notice to their immediate supervisor and without good cause shall be considered to have voluntarily resigned from City employment, consistent with applicable City policies and procedures. Prior to making such a determination, reasonable efforts shall be made to contact the employee.

5.18.1 The determination of whether good cause exists shall consider the circumstances surrounding the absence, including documented attempts by the department to contact the employee.

5.19 When an employee has been absent for three (3) or more consecutive workdays due to their own illness and the employee is requesting to use their available accrued leave, regardless of whether accrued

leave (including sick leave) is used to cover their absence in part or in whole, a supervisor may request a return work statement from a licensed healthcare provider to ensure the employee is ready to resume work.

5.19.1 Employees who do not have accrued leave to cover their absence shall have their time reflected as unpaid.

5.20 Employees who are absent for three (3) or more consecutive workdays due to their own serious health condition or that of a family member, regardless of whether accrued leave (including sick leave) is used to cover the absence, shall be considered to have provided notice under AP 3-2, Family and Medical Leave. The supervisor shall promptly refer the employee's name and relevant absence information to the department's FMLA Coordinator for a determination of Family and Medical Leave eligibility and appropriate designation, in accordance with applicable City policy and federal law.

### **Holiday Pay**

5.21 If an employee's regularly scheduled day off occurs on a holiday and the employee does not work, the employee is paid at 1.0 times his/her regular rate of pay for his/her scheduled hours.

5.21.1 If an employee's regularly scheduled day off occurs on a holiday and the employee is not called into work, the employee may be given, at the department director's discretion, another day off in lieu of the holiday or can be paid at straight time for the number of hours normally worked. If given another day off in lieu of the holiday, the holiday must be used within 180 days, or the day will be paid out.

5.21.2 If an employee works on a holiday, the employee shall be (1) paid at 1.0 times his/her regular rate of pay for hours worked plus be given an alternate paid day off to be used within 180 days (or the day will be paid out) or (2) the employee shall be paid at 2.0 times his/her regular rate of pay for hours worked. If the employee is scheduled to work on short notice (less than 24 hours), the employee will be paid/accrue an additional .5 times for hours worked on the holiday. The method used shall be at the discretion of the department director.

5.21.3 Specific days of observation may vary from year to year and are not official until so declared by motion of the City Council. The following holidays are typically observed by the City each calendar year: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Spring Holiday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving Day, Day After Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

### **Floating Holiday**

5.22 The city may grant employees one floating holiday each calendar year as declared by motion of the City Council.

5.22.1 The floating holiday shall be taken on a date mutually acceptable to the employee and management in accordance with the department-specific notice requirements, if any, for time off.

5.22.2 A floating holiday that is not taken within the calendar year does not accrue. If the floating holiday is not used for reasons within the employee's control, it is forfeited, and no compensatory time or pay in lieu of a holiday shall be granted.

5.22.3 If an employee is required to work or is called in to work on a day that was previously scheduled and approved as a floating holiday, the employee shall be permitted to reschedule the floating holiday.

5.22.4 Employees hired on or after July 1 of a calendar year are not eligible to take a floating holiday

during that calendar year.

- 5.22.5 Rehired employees shall be treated as new employees for the purpose of determining floating holiday eligibility, regardless of any prior service or adjusted service date.

**Court Related Appearances**

5.23 Employees shall be paid for court-related absences when the court appearance is in response to a jury duty summons or is otherwise conducted in connection with City business.

- 5.23.1 Employees summoned for jury duty shall be required to provide proof of summons and shall be paid for time spent in court, including up to sixty (60) minutes travel time following the release from court, provided such time is validated by an official court document, such as a court attendance slip signed by an officer of the court.

- 5.23.2 Court-ordered or administrative procedure appearances, such as subpoenas or summons, shall be treated and compensated in the same manner as jury duty only when the appearance is directly or indirectly related to City business or to the employee's role as a City employee. Court appearances not so related shall be treated as personal matters, and the employee shall be held accountable for any resulting absence.

- 5.23.3 When a court appearance that would normally qualify as a compensated absence occurs outside an employee's scheduled shift, the supervisor may approve a temporary schedule change to coincide with the absence. Supervisors shall make reasonable efforts to avoid the creation of overtime obligations.

**Death in Family (Bereavement)**

5.24 In the case of the death of an employee's immediate family member as defined in section 5.21.2, the employees may be granted up to three (3) paid workdays of excused absence, with the approval of the department director or designee. This shall be considered as bereavement leave.

- 5.24.1 The department director or designee may approve additional time due to extenuating circumstances or extreme travel distances, if requested. Additional time granted shall be documented as a separate other form of excused absence and not as funeral leave.

- 5.24.2 Immediate Family – Includes the employee's father, mother, sister, brother, spouse, child, grandparent and grandchild, as well as corresponding in-law relationships limited to father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law, and the spouse's grandparent or grandchild.

- 5.24.3 Other relatives by blood or marriage may be considered immediate family if, in the discretion of the department director, the employee's presence is appropriate based on the nature of the relationship.

**Civic Duty Activities**

5.25 The City encourages employees to participate in the electoral process by exercising their right to vote in all municipal, county, state, and federal elections for which they are eligible. Employees are also encouraged to utilize early voting periods during such elections.

- 5.25.1 If an employee's work schedule does not allow sufficient time to vote, the employee may request up to two (2) hours of time off to vote. Such time off may be granted by the employee's supervisor when requested in advance.

5.26 Employees may attend a precinct convention of a political party with which the employee is affiliated or

is eligible to affiliate, or a county, district, or state convention for which the employee is a duly selected delegate. The employee shall provide documentation verifying delegate status or other appropriate evidence of eligibility to attend.

- 5.26.1 If attendance at a qualifying political convention conflict with an employee's work hours and requires time away from work, the supervisor shall, upon reasonable advance notice, make reasonable accommodations to allow the employee to attend. Such time off shall be unpaid and treated as an excused leave of absence without pay unless the employee elects to use accrued leave such as vacation, a floating holiday, compensatory time, etc. Sick leave may not be used for this purpose.

**Community and Professional Organization Affiliations**

5.27 The City encourages employees to take an active interest in community activities of charitable, religious, fraternal, or civic natures and to seek membership in service, trade, and professional organizations that support their personal and professional development.

- 5.27.1 Time spent in community, charitable, religious, fraternal, civic, service, trade or professional activities should ordinarily occur outside the employee's work hours and should not be considered hours worked for compensation purposes. However, time spent performing charitable, public, or similar activities at the request of the City or under City's direction or control, shall be considered hours worked for pay purposes. Voluntary participation in community activities that require an extended absence from work shall be subject to the approval and handled at the discretion of the department director.

- 5.27.2 With prior written approval from the department director, employees may accept invitations to speak before civic or professional organizations, and/or contribute articles to trade or professional publications. Time spent on such activities is not considered City business, and the employee shall use their own accrued leave for any time away from work. However, if the presentation or publication could reasonably be construed as representing the employee's official position of the City or the City's official position, prior written approval from the department director is required and if approved, the activity may be considered City business, as appropriate.

- 5.27.3 Employees who engage in political activity shall do so solely in their individual capacity and not as a representative of the City. Campaigning, fundraising, or engaging in other partisan political activities shall occur on the employees' own time and without the use of City resources.

**Military Absences**

5.28 An employee on active military duty may be authorized to use up to eighty (80) hours of accrued leave per pay period.

- 5.28.1 Accrued hours include, but are not limited to, floating holiday, deferred holiday, personal leave, compensatory time, vacation leave, or Paid Time Off (PTO) under the Houston Police Department Paid Time Off Program.
- 5.28.2 Sick Leave Hours and no-value PTO or no-value vacation hours may not be used for this purpose.
- 5.28.3 The value of leave used shall be calculated based on the employee's biweekly base plus applicable longevity pay.
- 5.28.4 After the initial fifteen (15) workdays of paid military leave per federal fiscal year (October 1 – September 30), an employee who is granted military leave pursuant to Chapter 14, Article IV,

of the Civil Service Code, and whose military compensation is less than the employee's City compensation shall be entitled to receive the difference in pay (military differential pay).

5.28.5 The period of military differential pay shall not exceed ninety (90) days per qualifying event, inclusive of the fifteen (15) workdays of paid military leave, unless an extension is approved by City Council.

5.28.5.1 Military differential pay shall not apply to any period prior to the reporting date for military activation or after the employee's release from active duty.

5.28.6 Total compensation by the City, including differential pay and the use of accrued leave, shall not exceed one hundred percent (100%) of the employee's biweekly regular pay, which includes base pay and longevity pay. Certification pay, if applicable, shall be granted in compensatory time.

## 6. COMPLIANCE

6.1 Unauthorized absence or tardiness are considered violations of attendance expectations and may result in corrective action, up to and including indefinite suspension or termination, depending on the frequency, severity, and circumstances of the violation, and in accordance with applicable City and/or department policies.

## 7. CONFLICT AND REPEAL

7.1 Administrative Procedure 3-11: Absence dated approved November 2, 2020, which shall be of no further force or effect.

7.2 In the event the terms of any labor agreements conflict with any section herein, the terms of those agreements in direct conflict shall control.

## 8. POLICY SPONSOR

**Department:** Human Resources Department