

Shared Leave Program Works For Washington

Local News

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LACEY, Wash. - It is Washington State employees' take on "neighbor helping neighbor." The Shared Leave system allows state workers to donate their hours of unused vacation or sick leave to coworkers who need it, due to illness, surgery, domestic violence or the need to care for a loved one.

Andy McMillan, an environmental planner for the Washington Department of Ecology for more than 20 years and a member of *WFSE Local 443*, says Shared Leave saved him his job. After he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma six years ago, the program allowed him to work part-time, using shared leave to make up the difference.

"It has been a real blessing for me to be able to work as I'm able. I've used Shared Leave to supplement those hours so I can maintain a 60-percent time, which not only is a reasonable paycheck but also maintains my health care benefits, which are absolutely essential.

Shared leave can also be donated for state workers in the military, who take leave without pay when they are deployed.

In most cases, workers who need Shared Leave request it, and coworkers can respond with their donations for specific individuals.

Recently, the State Legislature raised the limit of Shared Leave hours a person can receive and made allowances for extraordinary cases - legislation McMillan helped create.

"As long as I can, I'm gonna work. I need the income and the health care benefits, and it's also really helpful to me psychologically to be able to contribute and maintain some of the professional work that I've done my entire life."

The program operates at virtually no cost to the state, he adds, and is a way for coworkers to help each others' families stay afloat when life takes a challenging turn.