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Robins Kaplan Will Offer 10 Weeks Paid Parental Leave

By **Melissa Daniels**

Law360, Los Angeles (June 21, 2016, 8:41 PM ET) -- Robins Kaplan LLP is the latest BigLaw firm to expand its benefit policies for new parents, announcing Tuesday that it will offer 10 weeks of paid parental leave on top of applicable medical leave benefits.

The new policy, effective immediately, applies to all regular employees and will allow birth mothers to have a total of at least 16 weeks of paid leave. It will also allow attorneys who are transitioning back to work after taking parental leave to have a ramp-up period for up to three months as they return to work at their own pace.

Robins Kaplan will also create a parental leave mentoring program run by the firm's Diversity and Inclusion Department and develop alternative work arrangements policy for increased flexibility, according to a news release.

"We recognize the need for competitive benefits that will allow our firm members to continue to excel in both work and life," said Steve Schumeister, managing partner and member of the executive board at Robins Kaplan in a news release. "The firm has always upheld a strong commitment to women and diversity, and we believe this enhancement will further enable all working parents to advance their careers as well as their families."

Firms have been ramping up parental leave policies **in recent years**, with Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP setting the high watermark for leave policies in May 2015 when it announced it would offer **22 weeks** of paid family leave with an option for nine months of protected absence, as well as transitional support services.

More recently, Winston & Strawn LLP announced this past May it would begin a policy offering up to **20 weeks** of paid leave to new parents during a child's first year.

Robins Kaplan, Orrick and Winston & Strawn all instituted gender-neutral policies, meaning mothers and fathers are entitled to take the paid leave benefits.

A 2015 **Best Law Firms For Women** survey from Working Mother Media and Flex-Time Lawyers LLC found that the number of weeks offered for paid maternity, paternity and adoption leave held steady over 2014. But many lawyers weren't taking full advantage of the policies, the survey showed, with an average of 15 weeks offered for maternity leave but an average of 14 weeks taken.

New fathers were taking an average of three weeks paid paternity leave out of an average of six weeks offered, and new adoptive parents were taking an average of seven weeks paid leave out of 12 weeks offered, the survey found.

That survey also ranked the 50 best law firms for female lawyers, all of which offered paid paternity and adoption leave.

Robyn Forman Pollack, a Philadelphia attorney who is the founder and principal of Trellis Consulting where she advises firms on gender inclusion, told Law360 that parental leave policies help normalize the idea of new parents taking time away from work to be with their families.

Male attorneys typically haven't taken more than a few weeks off from work after becoming a new father, she said, but encouraging all new parents to take paid leave shows that parental leave isn't just "a mommy issue" and helps equalize the firm, she said.

"Firms are trying to alleviate some of the stigma associated with taking paternity leave," she said. "It normalizes between the genders and that naturally helps women because it becomes a parental issue, not a woman's issue."

She also praised firms that include a ramping-up period, as it can be difficult for employees who've been out of the office to rack up the same amount of billable hours they once did right away.

Though law firms have been behind the times in paid leave policies, they're becoming more common, Forman Pollack said, as offering paid leave policies can help attract and retain new employees.

Robins Kaplan develop its new paid leave policy out of its Leaders Engaged in the Advancement of Diversity program, which aims to recruit more women, minorities and LGBT individuals.

Increasing support for working parents was one of eight tactics the initiative identified, along with expanding programs to increase diversity among entry-level attorneys, implementing rules to ensure diverse candidates are considered for associate positions, and conduct firm-wide training on unconscious bias.

"The LEAD initiative was established to ensure that we are able to attract and retain the most talented people, and promote their success at the firm for the long-term," Schumeister said in the news release. "Coupled with the increase in paid parental leave, we believe we have an environment that will continue to serve and benefit our firm members and provide exceptional service and value to our clients."

--Editing by Patricia K. Cole.

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