



2025 California Employment Law Updates: 10 New Laws Impacting Businesses This Year



California companies should update their business policies and practices for 2025 to reflect multiple new employment laws that took effect on Jan. 1. The new regulations span critical areas such as workplace safety, paid leave rights and antidiscrimination measures, so now's the time to ensure compliance and avoid potential penalties.

Here are 10 new California employment laws that in-house counsel should know about, along with practical guidance on adjustments to make and implications to consider.

1 Ensure time-off policies protect crime victims and their families

One of the most substantial changes comes through expanded protections for victims of violence and abuse. Building upon existing laws that allow time off for employees affected by crime, [AB 2499 extends protections](#) beyond direct victims and expands the circumstances under which employees can use vacation, personal leave, or paid sick leave.



The key changes include:

- Employers can't discriminate, retaliate, or terminate employees for:
 - Serving on a jury or complying with a subpoena or court order
 - Seeking relief or assistance for themselves or a family member related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or other qualifying acts of violence
- Qualifying acts of violence now include domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or patterns of conduct that include:
 - causing bodily injury or death
 - exhibiting, drawing, brandishing or using a firearm or other dangerous weapon
 - physically harming or threatening to harm someone
- The alleged perpetrator does not need to be arrested, charged, or convicted for the acts to qualify as violence.
- Employers with 25 or more employees must allow victims (or employees with family members who are victims) to take leave for:
 - Obtaining restraining orders or other legal relief
 - Seeking medical attention or mental health services
 - Accessing support services like shelters or victim advocacy organizations
 - Safety planning or relocating due to violence
 - Attending or preparing for legal proceedings
- Total leave is capped at 12 weeks for employees, while certain leave types for family members (such as relocating or attending services) may be limited to five to 10 days.
- When feasible, employees must provide reasonable advance notice. Otherwise, employees must provide certification upon the employer's request. Acceptable forms include police reports, court orders, and documentation from medical professionals or counselors.
- Employers must maintain the confidentiality of any information regarding an employee or their family member's victim status. Disclosure is only allowed when required by law or necessary to ensure workplace safety, and employees must be notified beforehand.
- Employers must provide reasonable accommodations for employees who are victims or have family members who are victims. These accommodations might include modified schedules, work relocations, or other safety measures, and they should be determined through a timely, good faith and interactive process that doesn't impose undue hardship on the employer.
- Leave taken under this law runs concurrently with the California Family Rights Act and the Family Medical Leave Act – and doesn't exceed what's provided under those laws.

Make attendance voluntary for certain meetings

California employers can no longer require employees to attend meetings where they discuss religious, political, or labor union topics and the employer's stance on these issues.

The California Worker Freedom from Employer Intimidation Act says that:

- Employers can still hold these meetings, but attendance must be completely voluntary, and they cannot retaliate against employees who opt out.
- Employees who are working during the meeting and choose not to attend must still be paid.
- Penalties include a \$500 fine per employee per violation. The Labor Commissioner has enforcement authority, and employees can also file civil lawsuits for damages and injunctive relief.
- The law doesn't apply to certain organizations, including religious institutions, political organizations, and educational institutions, when political or religious discussions are part of coursework or training. Employers can still communicate legally required information and job-related instructions.



3 Update policies and procedures to cover intersectional discrimination

Discrimination involving the combination of two or more protected characteristics is now explicitly prohibited under SB 1137, which clarifies that the [Unruh Civil Rights Act](#), the [Education Code](#) and the [California Fair Employment and Housing Act](#) (FEHA) include protection against intersectional discrimination. Employers should update their antidiscrimination policies, training programs, and compliance procedures to reflect this and ensure managers understand the concept of intersectionality and how it can impact discrimination and harassment claims.

4 Remove driver's license requirements from job ads

Updates to California's [FEHA](#) have made it illegal for employers to require a driver's license via job ads, postings, applications, or other hiring materials — unless certain conditions are met. SB 1100 aims to prevent discrimination against prospective employees who don't have a driver's license.

Employers can now only require a driver's license if:

- Driving is a necessary part of the job, and
- The employer reasonably believes that alternative transportation (such as ride-sharing, taxis, biking or walking) would not be a practical substitute in terms of time or cost



5 Clarify employee protections against workplace harassment

In addition to requesting temporary restraining orders (TROs) to protect employees from violence or credible threats of violence at work, California employers can now file a TRO for workplace harassment as well.

Under SB 428, harassment means a: “knowing and willful course of conduct directed at a specific person that seriously alarms, annoys or harasses the person, and that serves no legitimate purpose.” The alleged conduct must be serious enough to have caused substantial emotional distress, and the law does not cover constitutionally protected actions, including those protected by the National Labor Relations Act.

6 Add attorney consultation rights to workers' compensation notices

In workers' compensation notices, employers must now include language that says injured employees have the [right to seek advice from an attorney under AB 1870](#). The new law also requires the notice to explain that attorney fees may be paid from the employee's reward.

7 Display employee whistleblower rights

Employee rights and responsibilities under state whistleblower laws [must now be prominently displayed](#) in the workplace and online. The lettering should be at least 14-point type and include the California State Attorney General's whistleblower hotline: 1-800-952-5225. For an example of what this notice should look like, the California Labor Commissioner's website has a [model notice](#).

8 End vacation time requirements for Paid Family Leave

California's Paid Family Leave (PFL) program gives employees financial support when they step away to look after a seriously ill loved one, bond with a new child, or assist family members in the military. This benefit used to be accessible only after employees had used up their accrued vacation days, [but AB 2123 has changed that](#). Employees can no longer be forced to use their vacation time before accessing PFL benefits.

9 Protect outdoor workers from hazards with paid sick leave

Agricultural employees can now use sick leave for additional reasons, as SB 1105 has built upon the [Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Families Act](#) of 2014. The new law requires employers to provide paid sick leave to outdoor workers to avoid hazards by a local or state emergency, such as smoke, heat, or flooding. It also covers sick days for preventive care connected to those workplace conditions or emergencies.

SB 1105 applies to employees in:

- Occupations defined as agricultural under Wage Order No. 14 of the Industrial Welfare Commission
- Industries that prepare agricultural products for market on farms, as defined in Wage Order No. 13
- Industries that handle products post-harvest, as defined in Wage Order No. 8

10 Prepare for new disclosure duties for social compliance audits

Employers that voluntarily conduct social compliance audits to check for child labor in their operations [must publish the audit findings](#) on the company website.

AB 3234 does not require all employers to conduct audits – only those that choose to conduct a social compliance audit. The law describes these audits as a “voluntary, nongovernmental inspection, or assessment of an employer's operations or practices to evaluate whether the operations or practices are in compliance with state and federal labor laws.” This includes but is not limited to, wage-and-hour and health and safety regulations, including those regarding child labor. Child labor refers to any work by a child that violates state or federal law.



On the horizon: Add Narcan to workplace first aid kits

A new California law requires the Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board (Cal/OSHA) to develop rules mandating opioid overdose reversal medication such as Narcan in workplace first aid kits.

Under AB 1976, Cal/OSHA must propose these regulations by Dec. 1, 2027, and the OSHA board will decide whether to adopt them by Dec. 1, 2028.



On the horizon: Ensure healthcare facilities strengthen their safety measures

Cal/OSHA is also required to amend its workplace violence prevention healthcare standards by Mar. 1, 2027.

AB 2975 will mandate automatic weapons screening devices at designated entrances in hospitals. These devices shouldn't be handheld metal detector wands, and hospitals must also establish related policies, staffing, and signage.

Action items for in-house attorneys

As these new California employment laws take effect, in-house counsel plays a crucial role in ensuring successful adaptation.

Prioritize the following to facilitate compliance:

Conduct policy audits

- Review all client handbooks and policies against the new legislation, paying particular attention to leave policies covering crime victim protections and PFL.
- Ensure antidiscrimination policies specifically address intersectional discrimination.
- Verify compliance with new posting requirements for whistleblower rights.

Develop implementation strategies

- Draft communication plans for announcing changes to employees.
- Prepare training materials for HR staff and managers.
- Design compliance checklists for different-sized organizations.

Update legal documentation

- Revise employment agreements to reflect the new requirements.
- Update workplace notices and postings.
- Modify job application materials regarding driver's license requirements.
- Create new templates for reasonable accommodation requests.

Establish compliance protocols

- Develop procedures for handling social compliance audit disclosures, if applicable.
- Create guidelines for voluntary meeting attendance.
- Design protocols for maintaining victim confidentiality.
- Establish processes for reasonable accommodation discussions.

Plan client education

- Schedule briefing sessions with key stakeholders.
- Prepare FAQs addressing common compliance questions.
- Create guidance documents for HR professionals.
- Develop manager training programs on new requirements.

As California employment law evolves, businesses have a golden opportunity to not only comply but also to foster more inclusive, safe, and supportive workplaces. Embracing these changes isn't just about adhering to regulations — it's about building a thriving environment where employees feel valued and protected. **Regular monitoring** and **updates** will also be crucial as interpretive guidance becomes available through administrative agencies and **court decisions**.

For more insights into California employment law and other legislative updates, get in touch to schedule a free demo.



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