

LEGAL AND PRIVACY

Esté Lauder faces discrimination suit over parental leave

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Esté Lauder Companies is facing a suit over its parental leave. Image credit: Esté Lauder Companies

By STAFF REPORTS

Federal regulators are suing beauty conglomerate Esté Lauder Companies, claiming the organization's parental leave policy is discriminatory towards men.

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Esté Lauder's employees who are new mothers are entitled to six weeks of paid time off, whereas their male colleagues that have newborns are allowed only two weeks of paid leave. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission has brought a suit against Esté Lauder, saying the employer is violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963.

Leave lawsuit

According to the suit, Esté Lauder launched a new parental leave policy in 2013 that was designed to give new parents time to bond with their child. In addition to taking aim at the difference in paid time off, the suit also claims that fathers are not given the same flexibility as new mothers when they return to work.

The EEOC is bringing its suit following the complaint of one male employee in a Maryland store. The stock room worker applied for six weeks of paternity leave after the birth of his son and was denied.

This civil action suit is seeking damages for this employee and other male employees affected by the policy. The majority of Esté Lauder's workforce is female, with women representing 84 percent of its employees worldwide.

Esté Lauder is not alone in offering disparate maternity and paternity leave. The U.S. is one of only three nations that does not federally require paid time off for new parents, but some companies decide to offer the benefit to their employees.



Paid parental leave is still uncommon in the U.S. Image credit: Kering

On average, women receive 41 days of paid time off for maternity leave, while men receive only 22, per data from the Society for Human Resource Management. The organization has also found that despite high-profile companies offering greater benefits, the average amount of paid parental leave has not changed since 2012.

"It is wonderful when employers provide paid parental leave and flexible work arrangements, but federal law requires equal pay, including benefits, for equal work, and that applies to men as well as women," said Mindy Weinstein, EEOC Washington field office acting director, in a statement about the case.

Late last year, French luxury conglomerate Kering Group furthered its advocacy for women's rights with the introduction of a parental leave policy for all employees globally.

The length of maternity leave, and whether the period away from work is paid, fully or at a lower salary, has become a passionate issue for many women and their partners. With no true workplace standard and a lack of government mandates in many countries, companies with policies that support employees' desires to have children will be better received than those who do not implement leave programs ([see story](#)).

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