

THE STATE BUDGET AND YOUR OFFER OF BENEFITS

How The State Budget Could Affect Your Offer Of Employee Benefits

One of the toughest jobs of any employer is attracting and retaining talented staff. That job can be especially difficult in the public sector where budgets are tight, services are in high demand, and complying with state and federal laws are essential.

This environment often calls for those with benefit design responsibilities to be creative. You want to be able to design a benefit package which not only meets the needs of your staff, but also reflects the sentiment of your community.

Recently the State of Wisconsin enacted Act 59, the two-year budget, into law. The budget included a much wanted increase in per pupil funding for school districts. The text of the budget bill also included the elimination of the language which allows local government units to offer domestic partner benefits. ([More info](#) on that change.)

Moving Forward

For some school districts, this will directly affect the eligibility for your benefit plans. As an employer, you should review your offer of benefits and your employee population to understand if this change will directly impact any of your staff.

If this change does alter your offer of benefits, you may have concerns about how your staff may react to the change. This is a time when fundamentals such as communication and creativity are reminders to your staff that your district wants to retain their services.

- **Communication:** When working through any type of change, communication to your stakeholders is vital. In this case, transparent communication to staff explaining the change in the law will help them understand the reason for the change. This not only includes the specific change, but the logistics of when they should expect changes.
- **Creativity:** Your benefit program should already demonstrate your philosophy towards attracting and retaining talented staff. With the loss of the domestic partnership option, have you explored all of your options, such as health savings accounts, or low/no cost supplemental benefits?

Leverage Your Experts

During a change like this, you want to leverage your experts. Each district will have different levels of expertise, ranging from staff-lead insurance committees, to a board tasked with plan design, to your insurance expert. Be sure to partner with those experts to ensure that you ultimately meet your goal of attracting and retaining the talent your district needs to be successful.

Jeff Ireland is an M3 Senior Account Executive serving Wisconsin's public sector clients.

FREEDOM TO MOVE FORWARD