

WeirFoulds Employment Law Hot Takes: Branching Out and Pawing Forward – What Trees and Sick Pets May Signal for Employers

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Employers in Canada are not yet legally required to water the office Ficus or approve bereavement leave for a dead goldfish, but some broader legal trends are worth watching. A town near Montreal has recently recognized trees as living beings with legal rights of their own, including rights to life and regeneration, and Italy recently recognized that a sick pet entitles employees to up to three days of paid leave per year in certain circumstances.

Global Legal Developments Shaping Workplace Expectations

For employers in Canada, while these developments may seem far removed from the current realities of the workplace, they highlight an important and ongoing trend that changes to employment standards, including job protected leaves, can take root quickly. For example, long-term illness leave was recently added to the Ontario *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, to provide employees with up to 27 weeks of job-protected leave in a 52-week period due to a serious medical condition. Leaves and other employment standards will continue to evolve over time as governments respond to changing expectations around health, caregiving, and employee well-being. Although Ontario has not adopted measures comparable to caregiving leave for pets, and environmental rights do not have direct workplace implications, these recent developments are a reminder that the scope of employer obligations can shift quickly, and in ways that were not previously contemplated.

Why Employers Should Regularly Review Workplace Policies

This may be one of those moments when employers should both see the forest and watch the dog. Regular policy reviews will help employers bark up the right tree when new legal obligations sprout. Employers should also be mindful that employee expectations often evolve alongside, or sometimes ahead of, formal legislative change. A policy manual that has been sitting untouched long enough to gather both dust and pet hair may deserve a good grooming or pruning.

Advising employers on evolving workplace obligations, including the ever-changing landscape of statutory leaves, is second nature for the WeirFoulds [Employment & Labour Group](#). Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can assist.

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

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