

## **EMPLOYMENT LAWSCENE ALERT: BIDEN PROPOSED BUDGET HAS LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT SIGNALS**

On March 11, 2024, President Biden released the Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2025. Although this proposed budget is only a proposal and unlikely to pass either the House or the Senate as currently drafted, it does provide insight into the Biden Administration's priorities and contains a number of important labor and employment components.

First, the proposed budget contains a 2.3% increase to the Department of Labor's discretionary budget and a 7% increase to the National Labor Relations Board's budget. These increases are intended to support, among other things, DOL's worker protection agencies, which focus on workers' wages and benefits, child labor, misclassification of workers as independent contractors, and workplace health and safety, and the NLRB's "capacity to enforce workers' rights to organize and collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions."

Additionally, the proposed budget seeks to establish a national comprehensive paid family and medical leave program, administered by the Social Security Administration, that would significantly expand upon the current federal Family Medical Leave Act. The new proposed plan would (1) entitle eligible workers to up to 12 weeks of partially paid leave to bond with a new child; care for a seriously ill loved one; heal from their own serious illness; address circumstances arising from a loved one's military deployment; or find safety from domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking; and (2) entitle workers to three days to grieve the death of a loved one. Furthermore, President Biden called on Congress to require employers to provide seven days of job-protected sick leave each year to all workers and to ensure that employers cannot penalize workers for taking time off to address their health needs, the health needs of family members, or to find safety from domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. The proposed budget also notes the Administration's proposed rule that would extend overtime pay to an estimated additional 3.6 million workers by raising the salary basis from the current level of \$35,568 per year (\$684 per week) to \$55,068 per year (\$1,059 per week). This proposed rule was issued in September 2023 and is expected to be finalized in April 2024. If not challenged, this means that the required increase could go into effect as early as June 2024.

The proposed budget also significantly increases penalties for employers who violate laws overseen by the DOL, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the National Labor Relations Board. This would include penalties for laws related to workplace safety and health, wages and hours, child labor, equal opportunity, and labor organizing. The proposed budget also specifically provides the EEOC with resources to implement and enforce the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act; continue to monitor pay equity through collection and analysis of pay data; and combat discrimination that may arise out of automated employment systems, including AI.

Even if this proposed budget is not enacted as written, it is a strong signal of what the current Administration believes is important and what its agencies will focus on from an enforcement standpoint. As always, O'Neil Cannon is here for you. We encourage you to reach out with any questions, concerns, or legal issues you may have regarding your labor and employment policies and practices.