

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: 11/8/2023

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

Subject: From the Executive Zoo Director requesting authorization to allow Zoo employees free admissions to the Milwaukee County Zoo

File Type: Action Report

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**REQUEST**

The Executive Zoo Director is requesting authorization to allow free Zoo admissions for Milwaukee County Zoo employees.

**POLICY**

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	§9.05(2)(a)
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

**BACKGROUND**

Related File No's:	
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

The Milwaukee County Zoo operates seven days a week and 365 days per year. The Zoo is only closed to the public on three holidays, but most staff are required to work to take care of the animal population and the grounds. The Zoo is also open for public special events, member events, and private rentals during the peak season and into fall and winter, requiring staff to work many weekends and nights to cover operations. Staff are also called in for animal emergencies, life support system maintenance, critical building and grounds repairs and snow removal.

The Zoo provides six free days to the public each year; however, the majority of our staff are not available to attend the Zoo on those days because they are working. Many key staff work all the six free days as these days tend to have larger attendance. To allow Zoo staff free access similar to the public, the Milwaukee County Zoo is requesting annual approval for up to four free admission days to Zoo employees and their family to enjoy the Zoo on their off days.

Zoo management is also requesting the ability to offer all Zoo staff a discount on concessions. Depending on the time of year, staff either have an hour or half-hour lunch and getting in and out of the Zoo does not allow enough time since many staff workspaces require a longer walk to and from the parking lot depending on where their workspace is located in the 197-acre zoo. The Zoo has an agreement with Service Systems Associates (SSA) that provides retail and concessions for the Zoo. SSA has agreed to offer a discount to staff for food items.

The ability for Zoo staff to visit free of charge with their families and receive a discount on concessions was vetted by Corporation Counsel and the Ethics Board. Their opinions are below:

Corporation Counsel - County Board approval of a resolution would be needed for the incentives regardless of whether any benefit is provided by the Zoo or SSA. It was also suggested we request an opinion from the Ethics Board.

Ethics Board - There are possible implications of MCGO §9.05(2)(a); however, that ordinance also provides an exception for benefits approved by the County Board.

We are aware that any employee free ticket is a taxable benefit. The Zoo has developed a tracking method to report free staff tickets to the Comptroller's Office Central Payroll section.

### **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest "upstream" to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

Allowing Zoo employees to visit free of charge on their off days creates a workplace that is inclusive because it allows employees to experience the Zoo as a guest and see the results of their hard work and gives them similar access as the public.

### **FISCAL EFFECT**

This request has no fiscal impact. Free admissions for Zoo staff would not displace revenue generation from other customers as the Zoo can absorb the attendance within its capacity.

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

Amos Morris at [Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:Amos.Morris@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

Vera Westphal at [Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:Vera.Westphal@milwaukeecountywi.gov)

**PREPARED BY:**

Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director

**APPROVED BY:**

Amos Morris, Executive Zoo Director

*Amos O Morris, Jr.*

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Resolution, Fiscal Note

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk  
David Crowley, County Executive  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive  
Margo Franklin, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Scott Manske, Comptroller  
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
Joseph Lamers, Director, Budget and Management  
Michelle Nate, Deputy Comptroller  
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director, Comptroller's Office  
Ciara Miller, Research Analyst, Comptroller's Office  
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager  
Anthony Rux, Budget and Management Analyst  
Justin Rodriguez, Budget and Management Coordinator  
Vera Westphal, Deputy Zoo Director