

2026 Compliance Roundup

Wages, Leave, AI, and What Every Dental Office Manager Needs to Know

CALAOMS Office Manager's Forum • October 7, 2026 • 1:00–2:00 PM PT

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Session Overview

California employment law continues to evolve rapidly, and 2026 brings a significant wave of changes that directly affect dental practice operations. This session walks office managers through the key developments they need to know: updated minimum wage and exempt salary thresholds and how they apply to dental staff; new mandatory notice requirements, including the annual workers' rights notice and emergency contact designation deadlines; the rise of artificial intelligence in employment decisions and California's new regulations addressing AI-driven discrimination risk in hiring, scheduling, and workplace monitoring tools; and a review of ongoing compliance obligations — from workplace violence prevention plans to infection control training — that remain in effect and require continued attention.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the updated 2026 minimum wage and exempt salary thresholds and determine how they apply to dental practice staff classifications.
- Recognize new mandatory notice and disclosure requirements — including the annual workers' rights notice, emergency contact designations, and AI-related employment regulations — and understand practical steps for compliance.
- Review ongoing HR compliance obligations, such as workplace violence prevention plans and infection control training requirements, to ensure continued adherence in 2026.

1. Wages & Hours

State minimum wage: \$16.90/hour (effective Jan 1, 2026)

Minimum exempt salary threshold: \$70,304/year or \$5,858.67/month (2x state minimum wage)

Healthcare worker minimum wage: ~\$18.63–\$24/hour depending on facility type (separate schedule, updates each July 1)

Orange County: no local minimum wage ordinance — the \$16.90 state rate applies in Irvine, Santa Ana, Anaheim, Newport Beach, and all other OC cities

For comparison, cities with their own local rate: San Diego \$17.75/hour, San Jose \$18.45/hour

- Confirm whether healthcare-specific wage rates apply to your practice before assuming the general state minimum applies.
- Audit current salaries against the \$70,304 exempt threshold; staff below this line cannot be classified as exempt.

2. Notices & Leave

SB 294 written notice: due Feb 1, 2026, and annually thereafter; also to every new hire at time of hire

SB 294 emergency contact designation: due Mar 30, 2026, and at time of hire going forward

Notice must cover: workers' comp rights, immigration enforcement rights, right to organize, constitutional rights with law enforcement

Paid sick leave now covers: crime victims, jury duty/subpoena compliance

AB 692 ("Stay-or-Pay" ban): repayment clauses for training/relocation costs are no longer enforceable if an employee leaves early

- Build the Feb 1 and Mar 30 deadlines into a recurring annual compliance calendar.
- Review any offer letters or agreements with training-cost repayment clauses.

3. AI in the Office

Effective date: October 1, 2025 (California Civil Rights Council, FEHA regulations)

Applies to: any employer with 5+ employees

Core rule: AI/automated-decision systems cannot produce discriminatory outcomes based on protected characteristics — intent is not required

Recordkeeping: retain automated-decision data for a minimum of 4 years

"Employer" includes agents/vendors who screen on your behalf — liability can flow back to your practice

Assessments that elicit disability information may be an unlawful medical inquiry, even if unintentional

- Inventory any AI or automated tools touching hiring, scheduling, or employee decisions — including vendor and recruiter tools.
- Ask vendors whether their tools have been tested for disparate impact, and document the answer.

4. Ongoing Reminders

Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (SB 553): in effect since July 1, 2024; requires written plan, incident log, training records, at least annual review

Infection control training: required for unlicensed dental assistants before blood/saliva exposure; approved virtual/asynchronous format not yet available

Equal Pay Act (SB 642): effective Jan 1, 2026 — statute of limitations extended to 3 years; look-back period for relief up to 6 years

- Review your Workplace Violence Prevention Plan annually, even if it hasn't changed.
- Confirm pay-equity documentation is current given the extended look-back period.

Additional Resources

- California Department of Industrial Relations — dir.ca.gov (wage, hour, and workplace safety topics)
- California Civil Rights Department — calcivilrights.ca.gov (FEHA/AI regulations and SB 294 template notice)

Questions After Today?

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This handout summarizes general compliance information current as of October 2026 and is not a substitute for advice from qualified legal counsel.