

I'm contacting you in regard to the proposed changes to Paid Parental Leave. I believe the proposed changes will have long reaching negative effects on women and families.

I live in the Northern Territory and population growth is considered a significant issue I believe these changes will only work to discourage couples from having children. A few reasons these changes will impact the community in the NT include; the median age in the NT is 31, this happens to be the age range of couples starting a family and the cost of living in the NT is very high in comparison to other cities. Therefore although you have a younger population that is likely to want to start a family the financial implications may prevent or delay this.

I'm currently on maternity leave, my daughter is 14 weeks old, I can't imagine having to go back to work in a month, but the reality is that I would have had to without the support of the current PPL provisions. Darwin's high cost of living makes it impossible to live on one average wage. My partner and I both have reasonably well paid jobs that have allowed us to prepare for our first child, this and financial support from my employer and PPL has meant that I am able to take almost 12 months off work. Of course this still requires us to adjust our budget and would not be possible without the money saved previously.

I believe the PPL scheme as it currently stands was set up to support mums and families to allow them time with their new babies without the added pressure of worrying about how you will pay the bills and buy groceries. I believe that this support should be available to all women regardless of their employment. I see employer maternity leave as a separate agenda, my employer provides the leave as a recruitment and retainment strategy, they couldn't care less if I have a child - in fact they would probably prefer that I didn't and continued working, however they recognise the value of good staff and incentives like these are their way of saying we support you because we value your contribution at this organisation and want you to return. The government should support population growth by providing incentives for all women like providing PPL, I feel that only offering PPL to some women and not those with good jobs is sending the wrong message, the government is only willing to support some families to have children.

Some people argue that our tax dollars shouldn't be given to women who already get support from their employer - well in that regard I wonder why I bothered gaining an education, a good job, supporting the economy and paying taxes all my life only to be disadvantaged for it. We spend so much money on far less worthwhile things, we also put so much funding into youth justice in the NT when we know from the multitude of reviews that the issues are cropping up as a result of inadequate family foundations early on. I think this support (PPL) which is by no means generous in comparison to other countries in the western world, is the least the government can do

to allow parents to stay home and raise their children properly at least for the very early stages of life.

I have heard some political commentators referring to PPL as 'middle-class welfare' this makes me so mad, it's not welfare - it should be the norm in a progressive society that values families. Australia isn't even close to providing generous provisions when it comes to having children and now these proposed changes will set us back even further. Not to mention the possible fallout with employer leave provisions - employers may think there isn't much incentive to providing leave if you are only able to access one lot of leave and then where will this leave women.

Maternity leave isn't about the money, if you are a 'double-dipper' chances are you have a job that pays more than minimum wage anyway - there isn't a risk that you aren't going to return to work, government PPL is about providing extra time. The first months of a child's life are extremely important but also very taxing on new parents, you don't need money to survive this, you need time.

In concluding this submission I'd like to express my huge disappointment in our current government for showing such disdain for new mothers in these proposed changes - you're not just alienating a whole generation you aren't investing in the next one.