

Leah Walsh

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary,

I'm a single parent, mother to one small child, and I am a business owner currently employing five staff. All just so happen to be female. **I am writing today to register my concerns about the proposed changes to the Paid Parental Leave Scheme.**

Our current scheme is already a bare bones scheme (compared to other similar nations) which was designed to operate as a public/private partnership, encouraging business to become enthused about their role in ensuring women can both parent effectively and return to the workplace.

Spreading the responsibility between business and Government was a great way of recognising that we all benefit when new Mums can spend the recommended 6 months breastfeeding and bonding with their baby. The health and developmental benefits of breast feeding for 6 months are well documented. From my own experience, the pressures of modern working life and the stresses of the working environment would have been detrimental when breastfeeding – which was thankfully possible, very natural and ultimately rewarding for my child and I. This was my chance to focus on what is best for the generation we are raising and I was grateful for the opportunity and the option to do so. Sleep and my own mental capabilities were not the highest priorities at that time – and yet they are the things we need to rely on when stepping back into the workplace. For some this can be an impossible requirement when the time is not right.

The implications of forcing women back to work before they are ready go well beyond the period of leave; the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children found that women who took between 13 and 26 weeks parental leave were more likely to report that they were suffering from mental distress for up to two years than women who took more than 26 weeks; and the long term benefits to children of breastfeeding exclusively to 6 months are well known: improved brain and cognitive development, measurable impact on school performance and later life, and a decreased risk of obesity have all been clearly identified as benefits of prolonged breastfeeding.

Our country already has a significant gendered wealth gap. Financially disadvantaging women who take time off work to be with their babies will only contribute to that gap. New mums will need to decide to either forego the lost income and attempt to survive without it, or be forced back to work before they're ready, losing valuable bonding time and incurring additional childcare costs.

I'm counting on the Committee and the Senate to stand up for Mums and bubs and help protect our paid parental leave. We fought too hard to get the minimum entitlement - we can't let it go now.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Leah Walsh

PLEASE NOTE: I request my contact details remain private. Thank you.