

The failure to transfer the funds amounted to "an employer improperly appropriating Commonwealth funds", he said.

"The fact that the Respondents have received funds which have been provided to them for the purposes of remitting to an employee to assist through maternity leave and then used those funds for their own purpose must be deplored."



Sarah said she had considered Natalie Kringoudis a friend and mentor. (Supplied)

### **New mother struggled waiting for payments**

When she first started working at the fertility clinic, Sarah said she had felt valued and respected, and considered Ms Kringoudis – a self-proclaimed "fertility expert" – a friend and mentor.

As a migrant with no family in Australia and limited support, her colleagues and Ms Kringoudis became her "family away from home".

And when the payments were first failing to come through, Sarah gave the company the benefit of the doubt.

Sarah said Ms Kringoudis would tell her she was struggling financially, but that didn't match what she saw on her social media.

"She was going overseas on holidays and living her normal lifestyle, while I was struggling to care for a newborn," she said.

"She wasn't hurting for money to do what she wanted to do."

The Pagoda Tree promotes itself as a boutique natural fertility clinic, offering fertility and pregnancy treatments using traditional Chinese medicine.

## Sarah says it was a 'slap in the face' when the fertility clinic she worked at refused to pay parental leave

By [Zalika Rizmal](#)

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Pagoda Tree clinic operator Natalie Kringoudis has been ordered to pay more than \$10,000 in penalties. ([Facebook](#))

A Melbourne fertility clinic operator has been fined almost \$70,000 for withholding thousands of dollars in parental leave entitlements from an employee.

Sarah\* was working as a Chinese medicine practitioner at the Pagoda Tree Clinic in Albert Park, when she took parental leave to have her first child in 2018.

She was owed \$12,948 in government-funded parental leave payments, but was paid less than half of that.

Clinic operator, the Pagoda Tree (Vic) Pty Ltd, and sole-director Natalie Jade Kringoudis, were [taken to court by the Fair Work Ombudsman](#), after complaints to the Department of Human Services.

The Federal Circuit and Family Court found the Pagoda Tree withheld more than \$7,000 in parental leave payments, as well as more than \$10,000 in annual leave entitlements.

Sarah said she was surprised to learn that the payments had been intentionally withheld.

"I never expected anything like this to happen. It was very hard financially, it was very hard emotionally," she said.

### Key points:

- Pagoda Tree Clinic withheld more than \$7000 in parental leave payments
- Sarah worked at the fertility clinic as a Chinese medicine practitioner
- A court found the company received money from the federal government but failed to pass it on