

RE: paid parental leave amendments

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am an academic with research expertise in sustainable employability and healthy ageing. Employment leads to improved health and wellbeing and will reduce the long-term cost of our ever expanding health care needs. We should aim for everyone to be sustainably employable throughout their life course. Paid Parental Leave is an essential element of this.

Therefore, I'm writing to express 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 recognizing 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.

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.

We already have a significant gendered wealth gap in this country. Financially disadvantaging women who take time off work to be with their babies will only contribute to that gap. We now see increasingly that older women have financial issues with meeting their basic needs. 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 you 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. Importantly, the long term benefits of Paid Parental Leave clearly outweigh the short term gains.

Thank you very much

Dr Sabrina Pit

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