

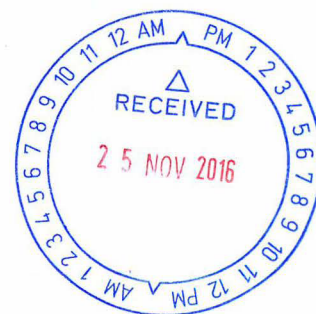


Union of Australian Women

(VICTORIAN SECTION)
NO. A0021219R

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600



23 November 2016

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please find attached the Union of Australian Women's Submission to the Standing Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Sgro
President



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Submission to the Senate Affairs Legislation Committee Proposed Government Changes to Paid Parental Leave

The Union of Australian Women was established in 1950 to campaign for the status and well being of women, peace and social justice.

For many years we campaigned for a universal Paid Parental Leave Scheme that would allow women to recover from childbirth, breastfeed their babies for at least 6 months, and keep in contact with their workplace. We made a submission to that effect to the Productivity Commission in 2008. Australia and the USA, were the only two OECD countries that did not provide such a scheme for working women – a shameful situation for a wealthy country. When, in 2011, a universal scheme was introduced, it was very basic – it is regarded as one of the least generous in the OECD – the third lowest, in fact. The scheme was set up as a public/private partnership aimed at encouraging business to recognize that PPL is of benefit to everyone and to the economy.

The importance of a Paid Parental Leave scheme is well documented:

It improves women's health

It improves babies' health

It develops a workplace culture of promoting PPL as a gender equality measure in workplaces

It keeps women connected to the workforce, a huge benefit to the economy.

Both the World Health Organisation and the Commonwealth Department of Health recommend twenty-six weeks exclusive breastfeeding for the wellbeing of children. Australia's scheme offers only eighteen weeks at the minimum wage, and acts really as a safety net for the majority of women who cannot access employer provided leave. To reduce the existing scheme still further will be detrimental to many women. It is documented that 85% of mothers do not return to work within 18 weeks, and 64% do not return before 26 weeks. Time is needed.

The proposed amendments, outlined in the Fairer Parental Leave Scheme Bill, negate the intended aims of the current PPL. They are not just punitive and mean-spirited, but will be counterproductive. They will reduce women's choices about when to return to work. They will certainly not improve women's participation in the workforce – how can they, by restricting the time available to women workers to bond with their babies? Women's participation is essential to the economy. Children are our future. The current PPL is basic,

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but it is relied on by women workers. We oppose any attempt to restrict its accessibility to women workers. That would not be in the interests of women, children or the economy.

Anne Sgro
President
Union of Australian Women Victoria

23 November 2016