

MEDIA RELEASE

March 11 2010

Leading Australian researchers urge Abbott to pass parental leave legislation

Some of Australia's leading researchers in work, organisational studies and work and family policy have urged Opposition Leader Tony Abbott to put aside political point-scoring and pass the Government's parental leave legislation.

The academics and researchers delivered their appeal in a letter to Mr Abbott today, saying a failure in the passage of the bill would be a "be a policy tragedy for Australian women".

While the signatories acknowledged the Liberal leader's efforts in proposing an alternative scheme offering a 26-week parental leave provision, they said working women, particularly from low socio-economic backgrounds, would be further disadvantaged by delays to the introduction of paid parental leave.

"The details of eligibility, administration and funding that you propose are not yet clear," their letter states.

"We are also concerned that the possible administration of your proposed scheme would lead to further complications which will not benefit women and would impose onerous transaction costs on business, government and potentially women and their families."

They said they believed the 18-week scheme before the Parliament was vital to women working in low paid jobs and the private sector who currently lack access to paid maternity leave.

"We see this scheme as an important first step and believe that it is vital that support for working women and their families is not jeopardised or delayed by party political gamesmanship."

A full copy of the letter to Mr Abbott and a list of signatories follows...

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Institute Building H03
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AUSTRALIA
11 March 2010

The Hon Tony Abbott, MP
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott,

We, the undersigned researchers in work and family policy, urge you to support the introduction of legislation for paid maternity/parental leave this year.

Australia still remains one of only two countries without universal access to paid maternity leave. As you yourself now acknowledge, Australian women and their families are entitled to this benefit.

While the provision of 26 weeks parental leave would be welcome, and is certainly supported by international research, the details of eligibility, administration and funding that you propose are not yet clear. We are also concerned that the possible administration of your proposed scheme would lead to further complications which will not benefit women and would impose onerous transaction costs on business, government and potentially women and their families.

The paid parental leave scheme of 18 weeks at federal minimum wages currently in draft legislation was developed after extensive consultation and costing by the Productivity Commission. Many of the undersigned brought international evidence forward to the Commission in the process of its inquiry, making the point that the benefits of paid parental leave have been publicly discussed for many years in Australia. The case for provision at the earliest moment possible is overwhelming.

The current proposed scheme is due to commence on 1 January 2011. It will particularly benefit the many women in low paid jobs, and in the private sector, who currently lack any access to paid parental leave. We see this scheme as an important first step and believe that it is vital that support for working women and their families is not jeopardised or delayed by party political gamesmanship. That would be a policy tragedy for Australian women.

Based on our own research, we recommend a course of action that starts with the introduction of the federal Government's proposal. Following this, we recommend investigating the feasibility of extending this scheme to six months and increasing the rate of payment to replacement wages.

There remain other important outstanding aspects that also require attention, such as the provision of superannuation contributions for parents while on leave, enforcement of the current right to return to work after a period of leave, and the provision of paid paternity leave.

Two weeks paternity leave was recommended by the Productivity Commission and is the minimum provision that should be available.

We urge you to support the early provision of 18 weeks paid parental leave for all Australian workers as a first step and to resist any temptation to make this important question a political plaything.

Yours sincerely,

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