



Justin Madders MP

Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets
Department for Business and Trade
Old Admiralty Building, Admiralty Place
London
SW1A 2DY

02/05/25

Dear Minister Madders,

Call for a Comprehensive Review of the UK's Parental Leave and Pay Framework

I am writing on behalf of Working Families alongside a group of academics, charities, rights organisations and campaign groups from our Academic Board and Families and Work Group coalition to welcome the Government's promised review into the parental leave system, and to offer our assistance with the process and future policy development.

Working Families is the UK's national charity for working parents and carers. Our mission is to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. In addition to our direct work with employers – including the launch of our Family Friendly Workplaces Certification which you kindly supported in March – we provide guidance and free bespoke legal advice to the UK's 13 million working parents and three million unpaid carers on their rights at work, and advocate to policymakers on their behalf.

Our experience has led us to conclude that the current parental leave system – including maternity, paternity, and Shared Parental Leave – is outdated, complex, and inaccessible to many. The review represents a vital opportunity to reappraise UK's parental leave offer and lay the foundations for phased reforms that better meet the needs and aspirations of families, and brings the UK into line with comparable economies.

To achieve this, it is vital that the review is supported by multiple government departments such as HM Treasury, and includes within its scope:

- Statutory leave entitlements and their design;
- Statutory rates of pay and adequacy;
- Eligibility criteria and access for all types of parents regardless of employment status;
- The capacity of employers and their role in supporting parental leave; and
- Related forms of leave, such as adoption and kinship care leave.

workingfamilies.org.uk

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We also believe that the review will be most successful if underpinned by public consultation, ensuring parents, carers, employers, and those supporting them have a meaningful voice in shaping reform.

Following the review, which we believe will show an urgent need to reform parental leave and pay, we hope the Government will commit to a phased improvement of leave and pay entitlements, designing policy around the following nine principles for new parent leave reform. These have been developed in collaboration with members of the Families and Work Group and are supported by the signatories to this letter.

Principles for New Parent Leave Reform

We believe that children who receive time, care, and attention benefit society as a whole. The UK government should invest in policies that support both parents to care for a new child whilst remaining attached to the labour market, and to balance work with caring for their children on an ongoing basis.

These principles must apply equally to same sex partner parenting relationships, Adoption Leave. Where appropriate, to any new entitlements for kinship carers.

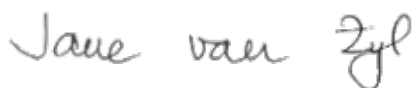
- Each parent should have an individual right to time off and pay, reserved just for them, which has been shown in other countries to reduce gender inequality.
- Maternity leave is important because mothers need to recover from childbirth and establish breastfeeding. Appropriate support for breastfeeding from employers should also be required.
- Leave for fathers or partners to care for their infant is important to lay the ground for fathers' role in caring for children, and should be incentivised.
- The system must be simple and easy to understand for both parents and employers while enabling flexibility for parents, including some time off together if that's what they want.
- Time off and pay should be available to all parents (including those classified as 'workers' and 'self-employed') as an individual right from day one.
- Statutory pay levels should be substantially increased and kept in line with the cost of living, to ensure that taking leave is genuinely affordable for all families.
- The system should ensure that parents have the right to return to the same job after taking leave, and are protected by law from losing their job during leave or upon return due to discrimination.
- Future reform should not come at the expense of existing parental rights and entitlements.
- Parental leave and pay policies should work alongside a part-time and flexible by default UK labour market; a more affordable, available childcare system that ensures work pays from the day parents return to work; and a health system that recognises both parents' unique roles and impacts.

This is a crucial opportunity to modernise the UK's parental leave system and deliver real benefits to children, families, employers and the wider economy.

We very much look forward to supporting you with the review and would be more than happy to be of assistance in sharing evidence, providing case studies from parents or best practice examples from our employer members, who are already demonstrating how family-friendly policies can drive positive outcomes for businesses and families alike.

For further information, please contact Simon Kelleher, Head of Policy and Influencing, at simon.kelleher@workingfamilies.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Jane van Zyl

Chief Executive
Working Families

CC: The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Note: A copy of this letter will be made available publicly as a press release on our, and supporting organisations', websites and social media channels following its submission.

The asks in this letter and the principles are supported by the following organisations and individuals.

Signatory Organisations





Academics signatories

Prof Emma Banister, Work and Equalities Institute, University of Manchester

Dr Joanna Clifton-Sprigg, University of Bath | GW4 Maternity Leave Network Lead

Prof Heejung Chung, Professor of Work and Employment | Director of the King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership

Dr Sarah Forbes, University of York.

Dr Mark Gatto, Assistant Professor in Critical Organisation Studies, Northumbria University

Dr Ernestine Gheyoh Ndzi, York Business School

Dr Jasmine Kelland, Associate Professor in HRM, University of Plymouth

Prof Susan Milner, Associate Professor, University of Bath

Dr Helen Norman, Associate Professor, University of Leeds

Raj Patel MBE, University of Essex

Dr Ian Roper, University of Essex

Dr Bianca Stumbitz, Transition to Parenthood in UK SMEs (Principal Investigator), Middlesex University

Prof Tracey Warren, Nottingham University Business School

Dr Krystal Wilkinson, Associate Professor of Human Resource Management, Manchester Metropolitan University

Dr Afshin Zilanawala, Associate Professor of Demography, University of Southampton.