

## **To Whom It May Concern:**

I am a 37 year old Australian female, currently living and working in Saudi Arabia where I have resided for the past four years. Whilst living here I have met people from many different cultures including my husband who is from Sweden. We have recently made the decision to move to Australia – there are many good reasons for us to make this move, however one big concern for us has been the lack of financial support for parental leave in Australia compared to most other Western countries.

In today's society, women have usually been financially independent for quite some time before meeting their partners and making the decision to have children. It is therefore a huge concern to suddenly lose a full time income and to be expected to be totally dependent on your partner. This is also difficult for my husband to imagine, being that women are so well supported in Sweden. With the increasing living costs in Australia, especially for housing, living comfortably on a single income is becoming almost impossible to consider.

I would hope that Australia will catch up this issue on which they seem to be lagging so far behind. I am listing below some of the benefits the Swedish women and their partners receive which allow them to feel comfortable taking the significant step of becoming parents. Not only do they receive financial support but they are also able to share this leave as they see fit between both partners. The idea behind this is that there is equality between partners, neither one is dependent on the other and both parents also have the opportunity to take an active part in the child's upbringing.

Below is some information about Swedish parental leave;

### ***Parental benefit***

*If you have children, you are also entitled to parental benefit if you give up gainful employment in order to look after them. Parental benefit is payable for 480 days for children born in 2002 or later and for 450 days for children born before 2002. The days of parental benefit are always shared equally between both parents. One parent may give up the right to parental benefit to the other parent, apart from 30 days for children born before 2002 and 60 days for children born in 2002 or later. If you are a lone parent, you are entitled to all these days yourself. If you are the mother, you can start drawing parental benefit 60 days before you are expected to give birth. Both parents can draw parental benefit in connection with parental training. Parental benefit may be drawn until the child reaches the age of eight or when the child comes to the end of his or her first year at school. You can choose to draw full, three-quarters, half, one quarter or one-eighth parental benefit.*

### ***Allowances at parental leave***

*The parental allowance compensates parts of your income reduction when you are home with your children. It is taxed as regular income and is base for your pension. During 390 of the 480 days the amount is 80% of the "Sickness Benefit Base part of the income" (SGI), which is calculated based on your total annual income. Maximum SGI is 310 000 SEK. The following 90 days are compensated with 180 SEK per day.*

### ***Temporary parental benefit***

*If you have to stay at home from work in order to look after a sick child under the age of twelve, you may be entitled to temporary parental benefit. This also applies if the person who normally looks after the child falls ill. Parents together are eligible for temporary parental benefit for sixty days per child and year. After these sixty days have been used up, a further sixty days can be taken out. It should be noted, however, that these extra days cannot be taken out in the event of illness or infection of the normal carer. You can also draw temporary parental benefit for visits to a doctor or child healthcare centre.*

### ***Paternity leave***

*If you have recently become a father, you are entitled to ten days' leave on temporary parental benefit in connection with the birth of the child. You may take these days within sixty days of when the child comes home from the hospital. If you are adoptive parents, you are eligible for five days each, unless you have agreed to divide the days up otherwise. You can take these days within sixty days after the child has entered your care.*

More information is available on the following link:

<http://www.forsakringskassan.se/sprak/eng/foralder/>

I understand that this issue needs to be considered carefully but it seems that Australians have been discussing this for a long time now. At some point we need to take a step in the right direction to encourage couples in today's society to be able to comfortably embrace the idea of having a family.