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To Commissioners: Robert Fitzgerald and Angela MacRae

I would like to submit this letter for consideration of the Productivity Commission in its consideration of maternity and paternity leave options for new parents. I actually think that this discussion needs to focus not on if we should have such a scheme but what this scheme should look like. It seems to me that the evidence demonstrates the benefits to the child's future health and development in relation to emotional, social and mental capacities, the mothers physical and emotional health and the overall happiness and reduced stress of the whole family if paid parental leave is available. It would seem from research available that the benefits are really obvious if maternal leave is available for a minimum of 4 months, with a decreasing mortality rate, an increase in breastfeeding with the resultant benefits of this and other tangible benefits for the whole family.

I must admit to being shocked by the recent knowledge that the Commonwealth Government made 12 weeks of paid maternity leave available to its employees in the early 1970's. It seems terrible that we have not seen any changes to this or it being picked up by other government and non-government agencies since this time. It actually astounds me that we should have let this issue lie so quietly for such a long time. This is evidence of a strong need for action around children's and women's health and for this to be a priority for our Governments and communities.

I have worked in the not-for-profit sector for a very long time now and I am 33 years old. I am in a long-term stable relationship in which we would like to have children. My salary is quite low due to the industry that I work in – despite having senior roles in the organisations I work. This makes it very difficult to be able to save enough money in order to be able to take time off for having a child. The baby bonus would be useful in contributing to the purchases required for a new child to be welcomed into the home-but it does not mean that the rent, bills and food can be covered whilst I take time off after giving birth.

Access to paid maternity (or paternity leave) is not common in the not-for-profit sector. In my last position I had access to 2 weeks paid maternity leave and there was no provision for male staff to take any paid paternity leave. This is common and recently a friend had a child who worked for one of Australia's largest not-for-profit Christian organisations and was not paid any maternity leave at all. This is common and means that a lot of women either have to return to work very quickly from giving birth or they leave the sector altogether in search of better entitlements around parental leave.

A paid parental leave scheme that is funded partly by government, business and the individual would help alleviate this issue. It is hard when you rely solely on government funding to provide adequately for your staff without impacting on the delivery of services to the client group. If Government formally recognised paid parental leave then this would ensure that funding included this. This is particularly important in the not-for-profit sector in which women are the main employees. This is particularly so in the youth sector which also has a large percentage of women between 25 and 40 years of age. As a result of this it is difficult to keep skilled, qualified staff in the industry. This includes myself – I have left as I am keen to start a family but could not see financially how I could take time off if only had access to 2

weeks paid maternity leave and my partner has no access to any paid paternity leave (despite working for a successful IT company). I have left to work for a University that offers a minimum of 12 weeks paid maternity leave. This was the primary reason for me changing roles and leaving the not-for-profit sector.

Not only for me personally but for our communities I see the value of paid parental leave. It would mean for many people that they could take longer periods of time off to care for their child and themselves and also for women it means that they do not end up always being the working underclass who has to continue working well past normal retirement age due to the time that they have spent out of full time employment. This is particularly a female issue and I would like to see shared paid parental leave so that the decision to stay at home isn't forced upon the mother but can be shared between both partners.

The impacts of not having paid parental leave means for me and my partner that:

- Would need to go back to work after at least 2 months due to financial issues
- Detrimental to me to be out of paid workforce for my economic future, especially as it relates to superannuation
- That the outcomes for my child's development would not be what they could be. I would actually be harming my own child by returning to work quickly.
- I would have limited ability to breastfeed due to having to return to work
- I would have increased guilt and stress due to leaving my child early
- Increased stress levels for the family as time and money become more of an issue
- No paid paternity leave means that my partner would only have time off if he used annual leave- which would mean no holiday in the near future and also little time for him to bond with our child
- Little time available for developing breastfeeding, sleeping and other routines, reduced health for me, no time to adjust to being a parent and
- Little time for the family to bond

These are major issues and ones that a lot of people are faced with in our communities. I would like to emphasise that women are often the most negatively impacted by taking time out of the paid workforce for periods of time to raise children and as a result they end up not accruing entitlements during this period which leaves them financially at a great disadvantage to their male counterparts. Women are still earning substantially less than males and this adds to this problem. As a lot of relationships fail and women become single again this impacts heavily on their financial future. Thus the importance placed on this inquiry being able to ensure that shared parental leave is available to all Australians is vital. I am not an economist however that nearly all OECD countries can find an equitable way of funding such a scheme and that most are now increasing the amount of paid leave available means that Australia is in a good position to be able to offer a similar scheme.

I would like to highlight what would be important to any scheme that was introduced:

- That the period of time that is paid should be flexible in its delivery. For instance if it is 6 months paid leave this should be able to be shared between the parents as well as being flexible enough that the money could be paid at differing rates like at 50% to allow for 12 months of paid leave. Parents should also be able to access this paid leave as they would like between pre and post natal.
- That since other countries offering guaranteed paid maternity or parental leave are increasing the amount of time that it paid over that Australia should start with a minimum of at least 4 months.

- That what is offered nationally be the minimum that is offered and government should encourage employers to offer over and above the scheme as an incentive to attract staff to their organisation. We should as a society value family and family friendly work environments.

Thank you for your time in considering the above. If you would like further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards

Leanne Nicholson.