

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I would like present a written submission to support my verbal submission to the Inquiry into Paid Maternity Leave in Hobart in April 2008.

My main reason for presenting to the panel is that adoptive parents are generally entitled to a lesser level of entitlements than pregnant women under Paid Maternity / Parental Leave provisions.

My argument is:

Adoptive parents should be entitled to exactly the same paid leave entitlements as pregnant parents and this entitlement needs to be enshrined in legislation to stop the inequity that occurs in numerous workplaces.

The task of individually changing all workplace Awards in Australia is an impossible task due to the numerous awards that Australians work under.

The best example to illustrate my point is my ongoing submissions to the University of Tasmania where the equal opportunities panel has decided that pregnant women have 26 weeks of paid leave and yet adoptive parents leave is dependant upon the age of the child allocated to the family. For most adoptive parents, the entitlement will be only 6 weeks paid leave, 20 weeks less than that of a pregnant woman. To me, this is discriminatory and unfair.

In Australia, most children are adopted from overseas and are over the age of 1 year when the parents bring them home. My employer, against the advice of the Senate Inquiry into Adoption which fully supported equal paid leave entitlements for adoptive parents, has ruled that after 26 weeks of age there is a diminishing sliding scale of entitlements so that the 26 weeks leave diminishes week for week with the age of the child and when the child is 46 weeks of age, the parents of adopted children qualify for only 6 weeks paid leave. The reason given to support this is that extended maternity leave is given to attract pregnant women back to the workforce.

Legislation exists to ensure that adoptive parents take 52 weeks of leave on adoption of their child, this is for bonding and attachment reasons. Adoptive parents face numerous rules and regulations based on the current theories of adoption at the time. We could surely add another piece of legislation that gives us the same entitlements for paid leave as pregnant parents.

For comment on other areas that my verbal submission touched upon, I strongly support NO age restrictions for this legislation as adoptive children arrive at any age and age restrictions will always mean someone misses out on an entitlement. This can be seen with the "baby bonus" scheme which used to stop when adoptive children were 26 weeks of age, excluding almost all adoptive children. The immunisation allowance was also age-linked, again excluding almost all adoptive children.

On bonding and attachment theories and breast feeding, adoptive parents have to find other ways of bonding with their child, it can be very challenging however the adoptive services in Australia seem to educate prospective parents well, and attending an adoption gathering shows numerous well adjusted and content children. Adoptive parents strive very hard to ensure their children's well being, many commit to cultural trips to the child's homeland, to the search for birthparents, and to continued education about adoption and educating ourselves about the adoptees view point throughout our life.

Adoption is a life long commitment and it would be wonderful if the government supported us by legislating to give us the same entitlements as pregnant parents. The fact that I am still writing to politicians and making submissions to inquiries shows that the adoption community is a group that has little political persuasion as I have been arguing for these rights since 2000! I wish the government would follow the advice of the Senate Inquiry into Adoption and act upon the recommendations to remove the numerous inequities that exist when it comes to adoption. Jon Stanhope's government is to be applauded for it's quick response when the issue was raised with them in 2002.

Many thanks for allowing my submission to be heard and lets hope that we can see some changes effected soon!

Kind regards,

Ceri Flowers