

17th October, 2008

Dear Inquiry Team,

Recently I was part of a team of people from Unions NSW who visited Parliament House to discuss Paid Maternity Leave with parliamentarians. It was very successful with most Senators and Ministers showing great support for our model.

After reading the Draft Productivity Commission Report I was disappointed that the full 26 weeks had been altered to recommend 18 weeks. Whilst this is an improvement on current conditions for families in Australia, it falls short of what I believe would be a more fair length of time, 26 weeks.

I have four children, Sebastian aged 16, Jesse aged 14, Grace and Tully (twins) both aged 6. When each of the boys were born there was no Paid Maternity Leave at all available but I really wanted to have a full year off work with each of them to give them the best start in life. Seb is now doing his Trial HSC and going well and Jesse dyes his hair black, plays guitar and bass and excels in school. They are both calm, inquisitive, kind young men and we believe part of this is from a strong presence of both parents when they were little. Despite the time taken on Maternity Leave it was a real struggle without my income in our family.

Grace and Tully were born after the option of 9 weeks' Maternity Leave was added to our USU Local Government Award. (I was on the original Women's Committee that lobbied for this Leave). The extra money made our lives so much easier to afford a budget that provided enough for our family! Twins use a LOT of nappies (\$30 for 70 nappies) and the extra money helped. I took 18 weeks Paid Maternity Leave (at half-pay) and was fortunate to have Long Service Leave so took all I could (also at half-pay). This took us through most of the year with money to help though used all my LSL. It would have been so much better to have a good length of Paid Maternity Leave instead.

In Canberra I raised the point that many more Australians are going to be having twins in the future as many couples are leaving pregnancy until after age 35 years. Most people don't realise that after age 35 a woman often releases 2 eggs each month as the body makes a last effort to reproduce. Angelina Jolie, Julia Roberts and others (not so famous!) are living proof of this. Australia needs a National Paid Maternity Leave Policy to cope with this future "boom" as twins are born smaller and require longer periods of nurturing and breastfeeding to catch up to single babies. I fed mine for 19 months and both are now in Kindergarten and thriving.

I hope you will consider this fact when discussing the Final Productivity Report. A full six months would be the ideal length of time to allow for the health of the mother, the health of the baby and to raise the return-to-work rate of mothers who would not feel "torn" from their little ones. It would be wonderful to see Australia join the Scandinavian countries in providing a truly world-class Paid Maternity Leave system that our future Australian parents and children deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Somerville