

Comment on Draft Recommendation 4

I am male.

Late in 1996 I became the sole parent and carer of my 28 day old daughter. She was simply handed to me and has not seen her birth mother since. I had to wean her immediately and take over her care. So, in effect, I became her 'mother' and I have remained so. It has been my pleasure. She is now 12 years old.

At the time, I was working full-time as the Overseas Students Advisor at an Australian University and had worked at that University for 18 years.

I immediately resigned from my job, took the little accumulated leave pay that I could, and set out to care for my baby alone. I had no relatives or other people to assist in this process. I was very, very alone.

I resigned from my job because as a man I was not entitled to "maternity leave". Some at work suggested that I make a stand and demand that my union (Federated Clerks Union) press for it. At the time I did feel discriminated against because of my gender. However, I was too engrossed and involved in the care of my new baby. I did not want any other stresses on my life. I put my child's welfare first over and above political agitation. And, as it happened, there were many times in the next few months while alone with my baby I became quite depressed. Yes, males can have post-natal depression!

Financially, it was very difficult. I had to rely on Parenting Payment for income and had to continue with mortgage payments. I did not want to be kicked out of my house by the bank and end up in the street with a tiny baby.

Nevertheless, we survived.

Therefore, I would like to see "Maternity Leave" made available to single male parents as well. Male sole parents of new babies should not be relegated to just "Paternity Leave", which I see as something very different.

Male "Maternity Leave" should be available not only where the birth mother has died. My daughter's birth mother is, I think, still alive. We've not seen or heard from her since late 1996. **"Maternity Leave" should be available to all primary carers of new babies regardless of the primary carer's gender.**

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