

UPDATE ON PAID PARENTAL LEAVE CAMPAIGN

Unions NSW Women's Committee, 22nd September 2008

Canberra Lobbying Trip

On 25-26th August, 20 rank and file union activists along with a number of union leaders travelled by bus down to Canberra to meet with some of the key MPs and Ministers about this important issue.

Over one and a half days, we met with 30 MPs in an extremely tight schedule. The women and men who told their stories to our parliamentary representatives showed tremendous courage and fantastic solidarity – as well as an uncanny ability to navigate their way around the halls of Parliament House!

As a result a number of new MPs from around Australia are keen to support our proposal. (See below for further reports on actions by MPs). We've also received very positive feedback from many individual MPs on our meetings, and how much they enjoyed meeting union and rights@work activists.



Many thanks to all the union members (many of them new activists) and officials who so willingly gave up their time to make our lobbying efforts such a success.

MP speaks in support of 6 months paid maternity leave in Parliament

One of the most positive results of our lobbying efforts came on Tuesday 16th September, when Julia Irwin, Labor member for the federal seat of Fowler (in southwest Sydney), gave a speech in parliament in support of Unions NSW model for 6 months paid maternity leave at full wage replacement. You can read Ms. Irwin's speech as recorded in Hansard at <http://www.aph.gov.au/Hansard/reps/dailys/dr160908.pdf>. A copy is also attached to this bulletin.

6-12 Months Coalition launched

Unions NSW and the Commissioner for Children and Young People recently facilitated the launch of a 6-12 Months Coalition comprising of academics, medical, family, social services and advocacy groups, all calling for the length of paid parental leave to be between 6-12 months.

We had a number of parents and bubs join us on the day. The media was keen to tell the stories of both parents and partner organisations. John Robertson, the Secretary of Unions NSW, did a live cross to the newsroom of a commercial TV station, and the story appeared in several papers and online. You can find a copy of the Joint Statement issued by the 6-12 months Coalition in this bulletin, as well as a copy of a story published in the Sydney Morning Herald.

The 6-12 Months Coalition is meeting again on 22nd September to discuss ways to coordinate responses to the Productivity Commission (PC) Draft Report which will be released in the last week of September.

MP Launches continue

Julia Irwin also held a launch at Bonnyrigg Childcare centre, in her electorate of Fowler, on 12 September. Eleven launches have now been held, with Ms. Julie Owens, the federal member for Parramatta, joining members of the Parramatta Rights@Work group for a launch on 22nd August. Jennie George MP, Federal member for Throsby, will hold a launch on 29th September.



6-12 months Paid Parental Leave Coalition Joint Statement

Because Australian babies deserve the best possible start in life

The Federal Government must invest in the future health and well being of Australian babies and their families by creating a paid parental leave scheme that is bold and world class.

A paid parental leave scheme of at least six months, ideally 12 months, can provide babies with the best possible start in life.

Science provides compelling evidence that a sustained period of leave benefits both babies and mothers.

Babies need plenty of time with their mums and dads so they can get to know one another. The continuous one to one interactions between parents and their babies are crucial for healthy brain development.

Mothers need time away from work to recover from birth and establish breastfeeding. Breastfeeding where possible helps to reduce early childhood illness and has many long term health benefits.

But the reality for too many parents is they simply cannot afford the time away from

work. This is why we need a system that supports Australian parents in their role as carers as well as their role as workers.

Paid parental leave means parents can stay at home with their babies with the assurance of an income and a job to return to.

Paid parental leave means babies can have the ongoing interactions with their parents they need for the development of healthy minds.

We will work together so that Australia catches up with world leaders like Sweden, the United Kingdom and Canada when it comes to paid parental leave. For our babies' well-being and Australia's future we cannot afford to remain behind.

[Australian Breastfeeding Association](#)

[Dr Marian Baird](#)

www.careermums.com.au

[Families Australia](#)

[National Association of Community Based Children's Services \(NACBCS\)](#)

[National Investment for the Early Years](#)

[The National Foundation For Australian Women](#)

[The National Pay Equity Coalition](#)

[The NSW Commission for Children and Young People](#)

[The NSW Midwives Association](#)

[Young Women's Christian Association](#)

[NSW Nurses Association](#)

[Unions NSW](#)

Groups join hands on maternity leave

<http://news.smh.com.au/national/groups-join-hands-on-maternity-leave-20080819-3y25.html>
August 19, 2008 - 4:02PM

More than a dozen prominent Australian organisations will sign a joint statement advocating six to 12 months paid maternity leave, after an analysis showed Australia lagging behind the UK, China and New Zealand on the issue.

In the Unions NSW ranking of paid maternity leave provisions, Australia failed to make it into the top 20 countries.

Unions NSW secretary John Robertson said a diverse group of organisations and individuals, including the Australian Breastfeeding Association, National Investment for the Early Years, Families Australia, CareerMums and the NSW Midwives Association, had joined together to lobby for change.

While some business groups oppose the ambitious maternity leave proposal, implementing 14 weeks maternity leave would still leave the country "behind the international standard", Mr Robertson said.

The Unions NSW analysis shows Australia falls behind Iran, Tanzania, China, New Zealand and the United Kingdom for paid maternity leave.

"If maternity leave were an Olympic event, not only would we miss out on reaching the medals podium - we would never have qualified to compete in the first place," Mr Robertson said in a statement.

"A six to 12-month paid maternity leave scheme is not a radical proposition when you consider Sweden, the UK, Denmark and Canada are already at this level or above, and we believe this should be the starting point for discussion."

He said health professionals, early childhood development experts, women's groups, unions and the Independent Commission for Children and Young People agreed that mothers and babies needed at least six months together.

NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People Gillian Calvert said too many Australian parents felt financially pressured to return to work early despite research showing the importance of interaction between parents and their baby in the first 12 months of life.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Votes and Proceedings – Hansard - TUESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2008

Paid Maternity Leave Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.45 pm)—I speak tonight on the very important issue of paid maternity leave. It is an issue which has been spoken about, debated, deferred and put into the too hard basket by all sides of politics in Australia over the years, yet if we look around the world there are many countries that have successfully implemented paid maternity leave. Sweden, as an example, has an astonishing 16 months of paid maternity leave. Both Denmark and Canada have 12 months of paid maternity leave, and the United Kingdom has 10 months. Ireland, Italy and France, all European Union members, have six months, five months and four months of paid maternity leave respectively. Vietnam, Cuba, China and South Africa have paid maternity leave. The Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Iran all have three months of paid maternity leave. There are more countries that can be named. Regrettably, Australia languishes behind the rest of the world. If a comparison with the countries just named is made, one cannot draw the conclusion that paid maternity leave is beyond our abilities, is not affordable or is unworkable here in Australia.

Last Friday it was my privilege to launch in my electorate of Fowler a local paid maternity leave campaign in conjunction with Unions NSW. The successful launch at a local childcare centre in Bonnyrigg allowed me to talk to a number of young mothers and only confirmed to me the absolute need for paid maternity leave to be in place sooner rather than later. Unions NSW have suggested a model for paid maternity leave in a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into paid maternity, paternity and parental leave. Their submission calls for a reasonable minimum of six months of paid leave and two weeks of prenatal leave, a total of 28 weeks. The system proposed by Unions NSW is of two parts. Firstly, a base payment should be paid to all mothers or primary carers irrespective of their previous employment status. Secondly, there should be a full wage replacement. While the precise modelling for this is still being worked out, it is essentially a pool of contributions by employers paying a levy into a central fund to be distributed as needed, not unlike superannuation.

The Unions NSW submission envisages that costs can be met through a combination of government funding— between \$1.4 billion and \$3.4 billion—and a payroll equivalent levy on business of between 0.9 per cent and 1.4 per cent. The advantages of a collective levy are that pressure is taken off small business and it allows for a predictable cost, unlike paying paid maternity leave enterprise by enterprise. It shares the costs across all businesses and across the life cycle of employment, it levels the playing field between big and small businesses for attracting and retaining women and it removes any incentive to discriminate against women. Additional government savings will come from taxation of the benefit and amalgamating family tax benefits.

The Unions NSW submission provides full costings. Unions NSW acknowledges that the argument of government needing not to intervene in providing for paid maternity leave and wage replacement if the market is already moving in that direction will certainly be made. However, the submission firmly argues

that the market will never see it to be in the short-term interest to provide for certain categories of workers, particularly casuals and low-paid workers. A secondary result of the market forces argument may be that wages fall in industries where paid maternity leave offered institutionalising further the disadvantage of workers in female dominated sectors.

Government intervention is absolutely crucial to a successful outcome. We must all recognise the significant impact that childbirth has on the financial cycle of a woman's life and her career and the additional financial burden that is placed on families. A fair and equitable system of paid maternity leave will leave mothers, and indeed all primary carers, in a better financial position, better equipped to handle the changes that occur to responsibilities, career and future unforeseen circumstances. I hope that the Rudd Labor government embraces the concept of paid maternity leave and I look forward to the day when I as a woman can see it successfully implemented.

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