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## Parents and carers should have the right to request family friendly work, says ACTU

Employees must be given a genuine right to ask for family-friendly work arrangements, including going part-time, to balance work and caring responsibilities, the ACTU said today.

ACTU president Ged Kearney said that the lack of a right to family friendly work arrangements was forcing women out of the workforce or into insecure jobs.

"We cannot afford to lose talented workers because we can't come up with a way that lets them balance work and family responsibilities," Ms Kearney said. "We also know that this is one of the main reasons that women are over represented in insecure work."

"The ability to manage work and family responsibilities must become part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace."

The ACTU's National Executive will today debate a resolution calling on the Federal Government to amend the Fair Work Act to guarantee carers a real right to request part-time work.

The Fair Work Act's current right for employees to request family friendly working arrangements is limited to employees who care for children under school age (or a child with a disability under 18 years of age).

"We want this right extended to all workers with caring responsibilities, including school aged children, adults with a disability and frail and elderly dependents," Ms Kearney said.

"The current right is not enforceable because employers can simply refuse on 'reasonable business grounds', with no right of appeal."

"This means employers can simply say they do not offer part-time work without seriously considering the request or negotiating with their employee."

"An avenue of appeal must be added to the legislation to ensure it actually delivers for workers who need it."

"While the right to request part-time work would apply to all workers, it would mainly be used by women, particularly those returning from maternity leave."

The majority of OECD countries have a right to request part-time work.

"Like paid parental leave, Australia is well behind the rest of the developed world in this area," Ms Kearney said.

"And as happened with paid parental leave, the sky will not fall in if the right to request carer friendly working arrangements is granted."

"To increase Australia's productivity we need to harness the talents of all workers, and we cannot ignore the needs of working parents and other carers."

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