

Thursday, 6 February 2020

ACTU welcomes greater access to parental leave but more to be done

The peak body for working people in Australia, the ACTU, has today welcomed the announcement by Industrial Relations Minister, Christian Porter, that families coping with still births, infant deaths and premature births will be able to access an entitlement of up to 12 months of unpaid leave.

The ACTU has called for appropriate monitoring and safe guards for the additional announcement that parents will be able to stop and restart parental leave if an infant requires hospitalisation. The ACTU has stressed that employers should not put undue pressure on parents to stop their leave, and be away from their child, if they wish to be with them during a hospitalisation.

The call by The Australian Labor Party to additionally equalise the payment for parents who experience a stillbirth with other bereavement payments was also supported by the ACTU

The announcement has led to the ACTU renewing its call for the establishment of a right to 26 weeks paid parental leave in the national employment standards as a shareable family entitlement.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus

“Supporting families dealing with the tragedy of losing an infant or coping with the complications of a still or premature birth is something that should be part of our workplace relations system. Ensuring that families are not subject to undue pressure from their employer to return to work while their child is in hospital or financial stress must be part of how we support working families.

“The arbitrary nature of denying bereavement payments to the families of stillborn children has already been highlighted by the senate stillbirth inquiry and the Morrison government should fix this glaring inequity.

“While the Minister has taken a step in the right direction with the announcement of access to unpaid leave the reality of people needing to pay the bills will lead to a lower take up of this entitlement.

“The Morrison government talks about these changes as a move towards flexibility and choice but without wages to pay the bills many working people’s choices don’t include taking unpaid time off work.

“The ACTU supports families having access to 26 paid parental leave as a basic right under the national employment standards and making access to that paid leave flexible across the family so that people have the choice about who can take on caring responsibilities.

“Real access to paid parental leave, by the family member who needs it, is how we can ensure support, flexibility and choice when people are most in need.

ENDS