

Media Release

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Time for paid maternity leave for all women

Unions Tasmania will today present a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into paid maternity leave.

Unions Tasmania supports the ACTU position of a minimum fourteen weeks paid maternity leave at the minimum wage.

Australia lags well behind the world in terms of paid maternity leave being one of only two countries in the OECD which do not have a paid maternity leave scheme for women in the private sector. Countries like the United Kingdom and New Zealand have had effective schemes for years.

Currently only one in three Tasmanian working women have access to paid maternity leave and they are mostly women on higher pay in large companies or the public service.

Alarming only 8 per cent of women in retail and hospitality receive some form of paid maternity leave – more than nine in ten women in these industries are currently missing out.

Examples of paid maternity leave internationally:

- Bulgaria: 2 years paid leave
- Sweden: 64 weeks paid leave
- Germany: 64 weeks paid leave
- Norway: 54 weeks paid leave
- Canada: 50 weeks paid leave
- UK: 39 weeks paid leave
- New Zealand: 14 weeks paid leave

Unions Tasmania Secretary Simon Cocker said:

"Australian families deserve a minimum fourteen weeks paid maternity leave. It's affordable and there are plenty of examples now of schemes that are working well across the world.

"Universal paid maternity leave will have across the board benefits not just for individual families but for the wellbeing of whole communities.

"Paid maternity leave is important to allow for the health of the mother and child in those vital first months. Families need to be able to bond with a new child, address any health issues and recover from childbirth without significant financial pressures.

"There is a massive gap between the haves and have-nots in this area with so few (8%) women in retail and hospitality getting paid maternity leave, while most (56%) women in professional occupations getting some form of paid maternity leave.

"One of the key things Tasmania needs to do to increase productivity is to improve the number of women participating in the workforce.

"Studies show the longer women remain out of the workforce after having a baby without any financial support or link to their workplace, the more likely they are to simply drop out of work altogether.

"For the Tasmanian economy, this means a significant loss of productivity, knowledge and skills. For women personally, this means a loss of career and income.

"International studies show that women with access to at least 14 weeks paid maternity leave are more likely to return to work in the same job.

"Recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show women make up two thirds of Australians who are not working but want to work. Most are mothers.

"Dads and partners need it too. Paid maternity leave would mean they do not become the sole breadwinner at exactly the same time they face the challenges and stress of new parenthood.

"The most vulnerable women are working for low wages in retail and hospitality. Under the model we are suggesting the cost to their employer would be nil or negligible because these women are earning little more than minimum wage anyway." said Mr Cocker.

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