



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Kelly Tolhurst MP

Department for Business, Energy &
Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

T +44 (0) 20 7215 5000
E enquiries@beis.gov.uk
W www.gov.uk

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email dated 29 January, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, , regarding parental leave and pay for parents of babies in neonatal care. I am responding as family related leave and pay falls within my Ministerial portfolio.

I am very sympathetic to the experiences of parents of premature, sick and multiple babies, and recently met with The Smallest Things (a charity for parents of premature babies) and Bliss (a charity for premature and sick babies) to discuss the issues that parents whose children spend extended periods in neonatal care face. This Government is committed to supporting working parents, including parents who find themselves in such a distressing and traumatic position.

My Department is conducting a short, focussed internal review of the provisions for parents of premature babies and sick babies and those that experience multiple births. The purpose of this work is to obtain a high-level understanding of the barriers to participating in the labour market that these parents can face. It would not be appropriate to announce future policy without first establishing an appropriate evidence base.

As part of the review, my officials are working with The Smallest Things, Bliss, and TAMBA (the charity for parents of twins and multiple births) to better understand the issues that parents can face and have also held focus groups with a small number of parents themselves. This will inform our policy consideration.

The UK's system of Maternity Leave is one of the most generous in the world. Pregnant women and new mothers are entitled to take 52 weeks of leave as a 'day one' right and 39 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay, if they are eligible for pay. This is nearly 3 times the EU minimum requirement and the current arrangements for pregnant women and new mothers are intended to cater for a wide variety of circumstances – including cases where the mother or child are ill (or the child is premature).

In the case of premature births, eligible fathers and partners have the flexibility to take up to two weeks of Paternity Leave and Pay within 8 weeks of the expected date of birth, rather than within 8 weeks of the actual date of birth, if they wish.

Employed parents also enjoy other employment rights which enable them to take time off work following the birth of their child or agree a working pattern with their employer which gives them the flexibility to combine work with caring for their child. This includes time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependant, unpaid parental leave and up to 5.6 weeks' paid holiday per year.

Subject to meeting eligibility requirements, employed parents now have the Right to Request Flexible Working and the right to take Shared Parental Leave and Pay. Shared Parental Leave and Pay enables eligible couples to share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay and can be particularly useful for fathers who wish to take more time off work to help care for their child. They can use the scheme to take up to 6 months off work together or, alternatively, to stagger their leave and pay so that one of them is always with their new-born child. They can also intersperse periods of leave with periods of work if they wish. Parents can use this flexibility to take time off work according to their baby's needs, for example, fathers and partners may wish to take time off work when their baby is born and later in the first year.

I hope that I have reassured you that the Government is committed to supporting all working parents and our undertaking of the review of provisions for parents of premature, sick and multiple babies, reassures your constituent that we are far from complacent and are already taking steps to better understand the needs of parents and employers in this situation.

Yours sincerely



KELLY TOLHURST MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility