



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 4887 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk
Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

Paul Scully MP
Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets

3 August 2020

Dear Minister,

The Committee is obviously disappointed that the Government has not responded to its report on the impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave before the summer recess.

I urge the Government to recognise the urgency of this issue and respond to the report as soon as possible, rather than in the 60 days the Government is normally expected to respond to Committee reports. I'm sure you will agree after reading the report that these parents need clarity and support now.

While some of the Committee's recommendations require political agreement and understandably necessitate cross-departmental work, other recommendations—such as on the guidance available for employers and employees regarding new and expecting parents—can be acted on immediately without a need for policy to be changed. I am therefore writing to highlight these recommendations and request that these be acted on immediately.

Guidance for those returning from leave

In your initial response to the petition the Government highlighted the furlough scheme as an option for returning parents to extend their leave, but responses to our surveys suggested that this was not being offered to most parents. Our report recommended:

The Government should publish clear new guidance for employees and employers, including dedicated pages on GOV.UK on supporting employees returning from parental leave that explains clearly their options and responsibilities.

Guidance relating to pregnant women

Our report highlighted that some pregnant women are wrongly being sent home on unpaid leave or statutory sick pay as a result of Covid-19, and some are missing out on their entitlements to Statutory Maternity Pay and, in some cases, even Maternity Allowance. Our report recommended that:

The Government publish clear guidance for employers on their obligations in respect of pregnant women who cannot safely socially distance at work, including making clear that pregnant women have a right to be suspended on full pay if they cannot work safely.

Statutory Maternity Pay calculations

In addition to our recommendations about updating guidance, we also recommended amending the way Statutory Maternity Pay is calculated to disregard periods of unpaid leave or SSP where pregnant women were put on these incorrectly. Changing the guidance as recommended above should prevent this from happening to more pregnant women, but those who have already been affected need urgent help. We are therefore also asking that the Government gives this recommendation immediate attention:

The Government was able to amend the Statutory Maternity Pay calculations to disregard the lower income of periods on furlough. We recommend the Government should also do so for women whose incomes have fallen through no fault of their own because their employers have failed to follow the Government's guidance on how pregnant women should be treated.

We urge you to consider immediate action on the above recommendations, and once again ask that the Government responds to our report as soon as possible.

The issues we raised are having a profound impact on parents now, and many simply cannot wait until the autumn.

Best wishes,



Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee