

Written evidence from the Working Families (PCW0068)

Thank you for your invitation to give evidence to the Work & Pensions Committee's inquiry into the DWP's preparations for changes in the world of work on 25 November. I said that I would provide the Committee with more information about father's involvement in childcare during the the COVID-19 lockdown, and about our proposal for paternity and adoption allowance.

Analysis by the Fatherhood Institute of data gathered by the Office for National Statistics shows that the COVID-19 lockdown has led to a 58 per cent increase in unpaid childcare undertaken by men.¹ The case for better leave entitlements for fathers has never been stronger.

Given that job insecurity and unemployment is rising due to COVID-19 we wrote to the Secretary of State for Work & Pensions (with the Fatherhood Institute, Parental Pay Equality, the University & College Union, Bliss, the Fawcett Society, the UK Women's Budget Group and Maternity Action) calling for the urgent introduction of a day one right to paternity leave and paternity and adoption allowance equivalent of Maternity Allowance.²

For birth mothers, maternity leave is effectively a day one right – open to all from the start of their employment. Birth mothers that are not eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) – because they are self-employed or their earnings are too low, for example – can claim MA if they meet the qualifying conditions. There is no MA equivalent for fathers and partners for birth and adoption that do not qualify for paternity leave and pay, more of whom are likely to need it because:

- They have just started a new job and have not worked for their employer for long enough to qualify for statutory paternity pay – birth or adoption (26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby due date, effectively 41 weeks)
- They have been dismissed before the qualifying week for paternity pay
- They have taken on low paid, insecure work whereby they do not qualify for paternity leave and pay, because of the intense competition for vacancies
- The state of the labour market post-COVID-19 means they have decided to become self-employed.

¹ <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2020/mens-childcare-up-58-during-lockdown-makes-case-for-father-friendly-jobs/>

² Maternity Allowance is currently administered by the DWP.

A day one right to paternity leave and a paternity allowance equivalent of MA would support fathers and partners for birth and adoption that:

- Are an employee or a worker earning over £120 per week and have not been with their employer for 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the baby's due date
- Are an employee or worker earning less than £120 per week but more than £30 per week
- Are self-employed
- Have been dismissed before the qualifying week for Statutory Paternity Pay.

Similarly, primary adopters not entitled to Statutory Adoption Leave and Pay (and for whom an equivalent of MA does not exist), should qualify for an adoption allowance equivalent of MA.

The 2019 Conservative Party manifesto pledged to "make it easier for fathers to take paternity leave". I would be very grateful if the Committee could also raise this issue with the Secretary of State for Work & Pensions.

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