



We are a coalition of women's and charitable organisations working to improve women's representation and participation in every level of decision-making. We are calling on parliament to send a powerful message that parental leave is a right that all workers should enjoy, and to ensure participation in politics and public life is open to all.

Today, the Government will pass The Ministerial and Other Maternity Allowances Bill, which gives the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition the power to provide six months maternity leave on full pay to government ministers and some of the shadow cabinet. It is right that no minister should be forced out of their post due to pregnancy, so this bill is long overdue and to be welcomed. Yet, if this legislation passes without any further reforms, it will set a precedent of a two-tier system of maternity and paternity rights.

There has never been a more important time to speak out on these issues. The TUC found that during the pandemic one in four pregnant women and new mothers have reported experiencing unfair treatment or discrimination at work, including being singled out for redundancy or furlough. In May 2020, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that mothers are one and a half times more likely than fathers to have either lost their job or quit since the lockdown began, and 23% more likely than fathers to have lost their jobs either temporarily or permanently during the pandemic.

This legislation must not be seen in a vacuum but instead as the opportunity for a national call to action to protect parents in the workplace during these difficult times. While it is welcome that government ministers will be given 6-months maternity leave on full pay, as in line with the civil service, Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance is just £151.20 per week, equivalent to about half of the national minimum wage.

There is still no formal provision for MPs to take maternity or paternity leave, with MPs who have tried to get maternity cover let down. Given the UK's poor record on provision of parental leave and the underrepresentation of women in politics, it is vital that parliament does not send the message that maternity leave is equivalent to a bonus like a company car, given only to those at the top.

We are calling on Ministers to make a clear commitment to bringing in further legislation to create proper legal rights to parental and adoption leave for all MPs. Further, we support the amendment to the existing legislation tabled by a cross party group of over 30 MPs which would require the Government to produce an equalities impact assessment of the proposals, to assess any potential discriminatory impact of lack of parental leave policy for all MPs and properly consider why these rights matter.

Covid-19 has highlighted how essential it is that women are included in decision-making, and we know that Parliament is better for having parents and carers in it. By taking these steps, the House of Commons can take a small but symbolic step in demonstrating that it is forward-looking, inclusive, and family-friendly.

Signed:

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