



## **Government commitment to extend maternity and adoption pay**

This briefing calls for the Government to honour its commitment to extend maternity and adoption pay from 39 weeks to 52 weeks.

Currently, Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay and Maternity Allowance are paid for 39 weeks of the 52 weeks of Statutory Maternity Leave and Statutory Adoption Leave. This leaves 13 weeks of leave unpaid. Statutory Maternity Pay is paid at 90% of earnings for the first six weeks and up to £123.06 for the remaining 33 weeks. Statutory Adoption Pay and Maternity Allowance are paid at up to £123.06 for 39 weeks.

In 2005, the Government gave a commitment to extend maternity pay to 52 weeks by 2010. The Labour Party Manifesto states:

Parents consistently say their top priority is more choice on whether to stay at home with their baby in the first year of its life. We will therefore increase paid maternity leave to nine months from 2007 – worth an extra £1 400 – *with the goal of achieving a year's paid leave by the end of the Parliament* while simplifying the system for employers.

Informal feedback is that the Government is not intending to honour this commitment on the grounds of inconvenience to business during the recession. Government is required to consult before extending the period of maternity and adoption pay and no consultation has been announced. Swift action is required to resolve this issue before the general election.

The additional 13 weeks of paid leave is worth up to £1599.78 for each eligible family. This is a substantial contribution to household income at a time when family finances are stretched. It is particularly important during the recession when family members in work are facing reduced income and job insecurity.

Paid maternity and adoption leave gives families real choices about how much leave they will take and when they will return to work. Research has found that the single most important factor explaining the duration of maternity leave is the duration of paid leave. Paid leave supports women to maintain employment during pregnancy and parenthood. This reduces the gender pay gap and reduces child poverty.

There is general agreement that the current system of maternity and paternity leave is not consistent with gender equity principles and a new system should be adopted which gives families greater choice about which parent takes leave. The Government had proposed a system of transferable maternity leave which was due to be in place by April 2010. The Equality and Human

Rights Commission has proposed an alternative model. There is no general consensus on this issue and further debate is required. Extending paid maternity and adoption leave will provide families with additional income and real choice about duration of maternity and adoption leave while the future design of leave and pay arrangements are considered.

The cost of extending maternity and adoption leave to 52 weeks is estimated at £195 million.

For further information, contact Rosalind Bragg on  
[rosbragg@maternityaction.org.uk](mailto:rosbragg@maternityaction.org.uk)

Company reg. no. 6478568 Charity no. 1128776