

Submission to the Government Administration Committee on the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill, 5 October 2012: by Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley, and the Wellington Community Justice Project

I INTRODUCTION

1. This submission is by Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley in collaboration with the Wellington Community Justice Project. In preparation for this submission, we have consulted with the Post and Ante-Natal Distress Support Group in Porirua and the Inner City Mental Health Liaison Group which is a network of community organisations in the mental health field that meets monthly to discuss issues concerning mental health service users.
2. Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley was established in 1981 to meet the unmet legal needs of individuals and community groups through the provision of legal advice, legal assistance and representation, legal information and education along with law reform in certain key areas of the law. One of our service delivery priorities includes the areas of mental health and employment law. A significant portion of our clients is women and families on a low income.
3. The Wellington Community Justice Project (CJP) aims to improve access to legal services in the wider community. It does so by working with various organisations, which share similar goals, including Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley. In addition, the CJP acts to ensure that segments of society, which may be overlooked by the current system, are addressed by exploring new avenues of community work. When law reform is initiated, the CJP aims to reach out to groups in the community believed to be affected and to ensure their views are adequately considered.

II SUBMISSIONS

4. We strongly support the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill ("the Bill") on the extension of paid parental leave from the current entitlement of 14 weeks to 26 weeks. We have found that the key reason that many women return to work sooner than desired after the birth of their newborn is due to the need to maintain family income. The extension of paid parental leave enables families, particularly women on lower incomes and who are dependent on the current 14 weeks paid parental leave to be able to take more time off with baby. In the long term, this translates to social and economic benefits for all levels of society - families, communities, employers and the government .

5. The current entitlement of 14 weeks of paid parental leave covers the period immediately prior and after the baby's birth; up to 6 weeks can be taken before the baby's expected due date ("EDD"). Taking into account that most pregnant women are not able to continue working right up until their EDD and that some babies are born post-EDD, women who cannot afford to take time off without the financial assistance that paid parental leave provides are currently forced by their circumstances to return to work when their babies are still newborn, and may even be as young as 8 weeks old.

6. The submission will focus on the following key benefits of extending the current paid parental leave entitlement to 26 weeks:
 - A Positive effects on the child,
 - B Positive effects on families,
 - C Long term economic benefits, and
 - D Benefits to employers.

A Positive effects on the child

1 The benefits of breast-feeding for newborn babies

7. The World Health Organisation ("WHO") recommends mothers maintain exclusive breast-feeding for at least the first six months of a child's life as breast milk is the best

food for babies and it passes on the mother's anti-bodies to the child. There is extensive research literature, which demonstrates the benefits of breast-feeding for the overall health and well being of the child. A mother's milk meets the full nutritional requirements for infants for up to the first six months of life, supplying nutrients in a hygienic, cost-effective, balanced and easily absorbed way.¹ There is strong evidence that breastfeeding reduces the incidence and/or severity of infectious diseases amongst babies. A recent review conducted by the American Academy of Paediatrics found that other specific benefits to babies included improved cognitive development and visual acuity, reduced risk of types 1 and 2 diabetes, reduced childhood obesity and coeliac disease, reduced mortality during the first year of life and long-term benefits for cardiovascular health.²

8. Extended paid parental leave would mean that more mothers would be able to afford staying home for longer periods of time, enabling mothers to establish and maintain exclusive breast-feeding. 14 weeks is a short period of paid parental leave but with an extended period of entitlement to 26 weeks, mothers are more likely to continue breast-feeding their babies. Cooklin et.al found that "it is very difficult for women to breastfeed and be employed, [which is] attributable to insufficient provision of lactation breaks, a lack of privacy for the expression of breast milk, and insufficient employer support."³

2 The significance of the first 6 months to child development and health

9. The first six months of a baby's life are critical developmental stages. By extending the paid parental leave to 26 weeks, all mothers would be incentivised to take more time off to be with their babies for the first 6 months. A number of studies in the United States have found that there are adverse effects on cognitive development or behavioral problems for children whose mothers work long hours in the first year of the

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics "Breastfeeding and the use of Human Milk" (2005) 115 Pediatrics 496 at 506.

² Ibid.

³ Amanda R Cooklin, Heather J Rowe and Jane R W Fisher "Paid parental leave supports breastfeeding and mother-infant relationship: a prospective investigation of maternal postpartum employment" (2012) 36(3) Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 249 at 254.

child's life.⁶ There is less incentive on women to have to work such long hours when extended paid parental leave exists. In the case of sick children, studies found that the presence of a parent lessens the severity of symptoms and speeds recovery.⁷

10. In Christopher Ruhm's study in health economics, he examined the health of children across 16 countries and measured this against paid parental leave entitlements. In all areas of health care, children in countries where their parents had longer paid parental leave entitlements were healthier than their counterparts with less paid parental leave.⁸ Studies have also found that children from lower income families are more susceptible to being unwell and evidence show that longer paid parental leave reduces the number of infectious diseases in children.⁹ Christopher Ruhm's econometric estimates also suggest that significant parental leave entitlements substantially reduce mortality during early childhood. This study found that entitlements to a longer period of paid leave i.e. one year of job-protected paid leave has been associated with roughly a 20 per cent decline in post-neonatal deaths and a 15 per cent decrease in fatalities occurring between a child's first and fifth birthdays.¹⁰

3 Increased child-parent attachment and bond

11. Children are less likely to suffer abuse or neglect due to mothers suffering from mental health related issues, like post-natal depression, if the parents and particularly the mother have bonded with their child after the birth. Failure to bond with a child is one of the risk factors for post-natal depression. The longer parents are able to stay at home with their child, the stronger and better formed the parental bond. Sir Peter Gluckman, the Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister, states: "The early years of life have a unique and formative impact on child health, development and relationships throughout life. Secure mother-infant attachment is an important predictor of resilience in later life including high self-esteem, reduced anxiety and reduced

⁶ Jane Waldfogel "International policies towards parental leave and child care" (2001) 11 *The Future of Children* 98 at 101.

⁷ Gillian Lester "A defence of paid parental leave" (2005) 28 *Harvard Law Journal and Gender* 1 at 19.

⁸ Christopher J Ruhm "Paid parental leave and child health" (2000) 19 *Journal of Health Economics* 931 at 955.

⁹ JP Collet, T Ducruet, D Floret, J Cogan-Collet, D Honnegar and JP Boissel "Daycare Attendance and Risk of First Infectious Disease" (1991) 150 *European Journal of Pediatrics* 214 at 216.

¹⁰ At 952.

hormonal responses to stress”.¹¹ Therefore, supporting mothers to stay home for longer with their newborn babies promotes better developmental outcomes throughout their children’s lives. With the extension of paid parental leave to 26 weeks, staying at home can be an affordable reality, particularly for mothers on a low income.

12. A sustained period of parental care for a newborn infant gives working parents an opportunity to care for and bond with infant children. This bonding between parent and child would have distinctive benefits for both, a sense of personal achievement and intimacy on the part of the parent, and improved health on the part of the infant. Studies show that there is likely to be a significant improvement in a mother's feelings of personal achievement and intimacy with her baby if she is able to remain home with her baby for at least the first few months of her baby’s life. In addition, parents who are able to minimise financial strain while caring for infants are less stressed and better able to create a safe, well-functioning household.¹²

13. Attachment theorists have also found that staying at home for as long as possible in the earliest stages of a child's life is beneficial. They say the bond that forms between a child and its primary caregiver in the initial months gives the child the security and confidence to explore the child’s world.¹³ Attachment gives rise to positive feelings of love and security. Studies have found that children who are unable to develop a strong attachment bond with their parent in the first few months of their lives are more likely to engage in anti-social and dysfunctional behaviours and have developmental delays.¹⁴

4 Equality for all children

14. Ulker and Guven found that “mothers who have higher wealth levels... controlling for other factors, seem to be able to ‘afford’ to stay on maternity leave longer and to

¹¹ Peter Gluckman (2011) *Improving the Transition, Reducing Social and Psychological morbidity during adolescence* A Report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor, Wellington, May 2011.

¹² Lester, above n 4, at 19.

¹³ John Bowlby *A secure base: parent child attachment and healthy human development* (Routledge, London, 2005) at 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

nourish and look after their children better”.¹⁵ New Zealand being a developed, OECD nation that prides itself on being egalitarian should ensure equality for all children - children should not be denied the best start in life because their parents are unable to afford to be on unpaid parental leave and must return to work earlier than desired to make ends meet. Providing all parents the entitlement to 6 months of paid parental leave allows all parents, not just the wealthier ones more time to nurture and bond with their babies.

15. In findings by the Australian Government Productivity Commission, children in low income families were generally placed into child care that was of a lower quality for extensive amounts of time as this was all their parents could afford, and because they were working long hours. The Productivity Commission stated that 6 months of exclusive parental leave translated to significant developmental benefits for children particularly when the alternative was low quality childcare.¹⁶ Parents will be able to provide these benefits for their children if they can afford to stay at home, giving children a healthier start in life.

B Positive effects on families

1 Increased maternal health and well-being

16. An extension of paid parental leave to 26 weeks will provide lower income families with a sustain source of income to allow for more time to bond with baby. Cooklin et al found that “the development of a woman’s emotional attachment to her infant is closely linked to psychological adjustment, and maternal mental health”.¹⁷
17. There is compelling evidence of child and maternal health and welfare benefits from a period of absence from work for the primary caregiver of around 6 months, according to the *Paid Parental Leave report produced by the Australian Government Productivity*

¹⁵ Aydogan Ulker and Cahit Guven “Determinants of Maternity leave duration in Australia: Evidence from the HILDA survey” (2011) 87 Economic Record 339 at 409.

¹⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission *Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children* (No 47, 2009) at 4.1.

¹⁷ Cooklin et al, above n 24, at 250.

Commission¹⁹ The Productivity Commission examined the length of time it took for mothers to “physically and mentally recover” from childbirth, and to restore functionality.²⁰ It was noted, “international and Australian evidence suggests that full recovery from pregnancy and childbirth can be prolonged with a range of studies suggesting a period of 6 months or longer.”²¹ An Australian study found that it was common for mothers to suffer from tiredness and backache and that 94 per cent of mothers experienced at least one health problem “in the first six months after childbirth”.²² Similarly, a study from the United States found that many women were not completely able to resume their normal activities “until at least 6 months after delivery”, and even after 6 months some had not regained full functionality.²³

18. Providing for an extension of paid parental leave will incentivise mothers to breast-feed for longer, which has shown to also benefit mothers. The Productivity Commission noted that breastfeeding facilitates women’s recovery from childbirth.²⁴ Similarly, the New Zealand Families Commission found that breastfeeding results in “decreased postpartum bleeding and more rapid uterine involution”.²⁵ Both the Productivity and Families Commissions have also identified lower risks of breast and ovarian cancer as a result of breastfeeding, as well as an “earlier return to pre-pregnancy body weight” and reduced risk of both post-menopausal hip fractures and osteoporosis.^{26,27}

In a study by Baker & Milligan, it was found that “the need to return to work is the leading reason to stop breastfeeding at longer durations.”²⁸ For families on a low income, having to return to work earlier due to financial constraints could lead to women discontinuing breastfeeding prematurely and consequently missing out on these benefits which contribute to maternal well-being.

¹⁹ Australian Government Productivity Commission, above n 12.

²⁰ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.11.

²¹ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.11.

²² Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.12.

²³ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.13.

²⁴ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.21.

²⁵ Families Commission *it’s about time: Towards a parental leave policy that gives New Zealand families a real choice* (Research Report No 3/07, August 2007) at 30.

²⁶ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.21.

²⁷ Families Commission, above n 20, at 30.

²⁸ Michael Baker and Kevin Milligan “Maternal employment, breastfeeding, and health: Evidence from maternity leave mandates” (2008) 27 *Journal of Health Economics* 871 at 872.

2 Reducing the stress of rationing and managing paid parental leave

19. While women value the availability of paid parental leave, our current relatively short paid parental leave entitlement of 14 weeks is a real concern for many who find it stressful having to manage how best to optimise its use. Through our consultations with community groups, we found that women do give serious thought to when they should begin their parental leave. The adverse effects of insufficient paid parental leave has meant that those who cannot afford unpaid leave will plan to commence their leave as close as possible to their expected due date to maximise time with their newborn baby. The realities of financial pressures have meant that women on low incomes have a higher tendency to resist taking leave earlier even when recommended by health professionals. Further, current legislation³⁶ does not provide additional paid parental leave in situations where women are directed to be off work earlier for medical reasons. In such situations, women are left with a reduced amount of paid leave and less time to bond with their newborn babies.³⁷
20. Research has shown that for women, being able to take more time off work immediately before the birth of their babies is beneficial for families. According to the WHO guidelines, families are less likely to have a premature or low weight babies. The complications associated with pre-mature births are both costly for families and the government. Premature babies can have developmental delays and difficulties. Mothers-to-be are more likely to make use of their parental leave immediately prior to the birth if they have a longer amount of time in total leave, an option which would be made affordable by extending the current paid parental leave entitlement to 26 weeks. Otherwise, pregnant women will be reticent to take any time off work to rest prior to the birth, as they want to be able to use all 14 weeks of paid leave once the baby is born.
21. A longer period of paid parental leave will allow more flexibility to accommodate cases where a child is born with a disability or serious illness, or where the mother is seriously ill following the birth.³⁸ Such situations are in addition to instances where the baby is

³⁶Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987, s9(2)

³⁷Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987, s9(2)

³⁸Sue Kell Associates

born prematurely or otherwise requires neonatal care, potentially delaying the baby's return to the family home for possibly some weeks. With a longer paid parental leave entitlement of 26 weeks, families in these situations will benefit from being able to afford more time to bond with their babies, once discharged from the hospital environment.

C Long-term economic benefits

1 Retention of women in employment

22. The Productivity Commission also reported on the significance of stimulating women's labour force participation and that "paid parental leave is an in-work benefit, acting like a de facto wage increase for employees, and yet, given it is predominant tax funding, does not increase the costs of hiring parents much for employers." Consequently, formerly unemployed women have incentives to be in employment and for those who are employed, to remain in the workforce. Paid parental leave would be one of the few areas of government social expenditure that actually encourages women to work."⁴⁴ An extension of paid parental leave entitlements to 26 weeks would incentivise the retention of skills and human capital that women amass. Further, higher levels of women participation in the workforce would generate more income tax; increasing government revenue as a whole.⁴⁵

23. It has been found that 77 per cent of employers strongly agreed that paid parental leave allows for better retention of women staff,⁴⁶ which in turn reduces employee turnover and absenteeism.⁴⁷ Increased paid parental leave would mean that women employees are more likely to be loyal, resulting in a higher rate of return to the work force.⁴⁸ Further, satisfied employees also feel healthy and safe, and this produces a more

⁴⁴ Productivity Commission, above n 12, at XXIII.

⁴⁵ Sheila B Kamerman, *Encyclopaedia for Early Childhood Development, "Maternity, Paternity, and Parental Leave Policies: The Potential Impacts on Children and Their Families"* (2005).

⁴⁶ Above n 13.

⁴⁷ EEO Trust 2008; Department of Labour (DOL), 2008 *Work-Life Balance and Flexibility in New Zealand: A snapshot of Employee and Employer Attitudes and Experiences in 2008*, available at <www.dol.govt.nz/worklife>, at 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, at 3.

satisfactory work performance and increases productivity (efficient wage theory).⁴⁹ Additionally, longer paid parental leave would extend the productivity pay-off from training new staff.⁵⁰ It may also mean that some mothers will take paid parental leave instead of leaving the job altogether.

24. Ulker & Guven also found that providing mothers with adequate paid parental leave following childbirth encourages a quicker return to paid employment due to a stronger attachment to the workforce.⁵¹ A United Kingdom study found that women returning to work after a shorter period of paid parental leave of 18 weeks after childbirth (when paid leave in the United Kingdom ended) “felt more distracted and less productive than mothers returning to work after a longer period”.⁵² Hyde et al reported that “short leave can be conceptualised as a risk factor that, when combined with other risk factors such as marital concerns, is related to elevated levels of depression for mothers of newborn.”⁵³
25. Paid parental leave increases work place attachment, loyalty and worker retention.⁵⁴ Employers are thus able to retain institutional knowledge, with employees experiencing higher work place morale and productivity. Van Doorne-Huiskes, Den Dulk, and Schippers note that “in countries with a more extensive government policy regarding work-family arrangements, women have higher labor participation rates and the gender gap in wages is smaller.”⁵⁵ Research has identified a “family gap”, whereby a “wage penalty” of between 10 and 15 per cent is inflicted upon women who have children.⁵⁶ Research also found that there “is no similar penalty for men.”⁵⁷ While part of this wage gap can be explained on the basis of reduced productivity and availability for work after having children, it is at least partially attributable to the time taken off from work.

⁴⁹ Above n 12.

⁵⁰ 26forbabies, above n 31.

⁵¹ Aydogan Ulker and Cahit Guven, above n 11, at 409.

⁵² Productivity Commission, above n 12, at 4.13.

⁵³ JS Hyde, MH Klein, MJ Essex and R Clark “Maternity leave and women’s mental health” (1995) 19 *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 257.

⁵⁴ Lester, above n 4, at 21.

⁵⁵ Linda Haas “Parental Leave and Gender Equality” (revised paper presented to the National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, 2000) at 90.

⁵⁶ Gillian Lester, above n 4, at 22.

⁵⁷ Gillian Lester, above n 4, at 22.

Creating stronger attachment to the work force through extended paid parental leave results in women being more likely to return to positions held prior to childbirth.

26. Further studies regarding women's participation in labour markets show that New Zealand and the United Kingdom are comparable because of similar employment environments. New Zealand's labour market participation rate is slightly higher for women of all ages except for those aged 25 to 34, which are the main childbearing years for women. In the OECD, participation rates for women of this age are broadly similar. However, as Katherine Forbes explains:

“ ... New Zealand's employment rate for mothers of children aged under 2 years is below the OECD average, alongside quite dissimilar countries such as Germany and Japan, while the UK's is above average, and in 2005 even above Finland which is known for its family-friendly policies. Although labour participation and employment rates are influenced by many different factors, the availability of paid maternity leave is perhaps one reason why these figures are higher in the UK than in New Zealand.”⁵⁸

2 The creation of more jobs in areas of economy where women work

27. With regard to the suggested concern of finding and training temporary replacement staff, it can be argued that the current economic climate with high unemployment rates will ease employers' search for temporary replacements.⁵⁹ Longer periods of paid parental leave will also create a flow of jobs. While these jobs may be temporary, it will lead to more women contributing to the economy through training, experience and skills gained which can be used as building blocks to remain productive in the workforce, on a permanent basis.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Katherine Forbes “Paid Parental Leave Under (New) Labour” (2009) 34 Social Policy Journal of New Zealand.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

3 Cost-savings in the long term

28. The early months of an infant's life are crucial.⁶¹ There is a positive correlation between increased mental, emotional and physical abilities of an infant who is breastfed for longer. As the Labour party advocated in the House, the extension of paid parental leave would support exclusive breast-feeding, which is recommended up to 6 months of age. Research shows that in the long term, bonds that are formed in the earlier stages translate to children having fewer behavioral issues and better cognitive abilities and parents become more attached and act less negligently.⁶² Arguably, savings can be made on current spending to address social and child developmental issues and conduct disorders in children through the re-allocation of government spending to longer paid parental leave entitlements, which is an early intervention.⁶³ An extended entitlement to 26 weeks of paid parental leave is an investment with long-term gains.
29. Strengthened family bonds through extended paid parental leave will also lead to a better environment at home, which contribute to mental and emotional stability and an increase in productivity. It is important to note the demographics of New Zealand – with the third-highest rate of children living in single-parent homes.⁶⁴ People in one-parent families reported twice as likely to not have enough money to meet everyday needs compared with two-parent families.⁶⁵ Most of these will be women. This needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about the economic stability of families and social effect on children, which ultimately flows into future economic sectors and government spending on future social problems.
30. In an American based research, it was also found that “the costs of parental leave in relation to population and GPD are modest, even in countries with generous leave policies.”⁶⁶ In the European Union countries and the OECD, public expenditure on

⁶¹ (25 July 2012) 682 NZPD 3923.

⁶² (25 July 2012) 682 NZPD 3923.

⁶³ (25 July 2012) 682 NZPD 3923; Productivity Commission, above n 12, at B.3.

⁶⁴ Bronwyn Torrie “One child in four in single-parent home” *Stuff* (New Zealand, 30 April 2011).

⁶⁵ *New Zealand General Social Survey: 2008* (Statistics New Zealand, 29 October 2009) at 12.

⁶⁶ Janet Walsh *Failing its families: Lack of Paid Leave and Work-Family Supports in the US* (Human Rights Watch February 2011).

maternity leave is estimated to amount to a modest average of only 0.3 per cent of GDP for parental leave payments.⁶⁷

31. While it has been argued that increasing paid parental leave runs counter to the cutback of welfare in other policy areas, there are studies that show that paid parental leave is more compatible with the labour-market activation policies (such as workfare and welfare-to-work) that have grown in popularity in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand.⁶⁸ The basis of such policies is the belief that "the wage is the best form of welfare and employment as a means of social inclusion, and a flexible labour market are the best means of promoting economic growth and increasing employment."⁶⁹

D Benefits for employers

32. Paid parental leave is beneficial for employers. Employed mothers on longer paid parental leave are able to breastfeed their infants for longer, resulting in healthier children which benefits employers as there is less of a need for employed mothers to take time off work to care for a sick child.⁷¹
33. Conversely, shorter paid parental leave entitlements is a cost for employers as women invariably take more time off at their employer's expense through the utilisation of other forms of leave, most commonly unpaid and sick leave in order to prolong time at home with their child. This has the adverse effect of disrupting work-flows as such leave is unpredictable. By having longer paid parental leave, parents are less likely to feel the need to resort to such mechanisms, which decreases productivity.

⁶⁷ Henning Lohmann and others "Towards a Framework for assessing family policies in the EU Final Report" (Research Report April 2009) at 58.

⁶⁸ O Avdeyeva "In support of mothers' employment: Limits to policy convergence in the EU?" (2006) 15(1) *International Journal of Social Welfare* 37; A Skevik "Women's citizenship in the time of activation: The case of lone mothers in "needs-based" welfare states" (2005) 12(1) *Social Politics* 42; PM Evans "Comparative perspectives on changes to Canada's paid parental leave: Implications for class and gender" (2007) 16(2) *International Journal of Social Welfare* 119.

⁶⁹ Lewis and Campbell "A decade of change in gender politics and policy? The Blair and Howard years" (2007) 14(1) *Social Politics* 4.

⁷¹ Thomas M Ball and David M Bennett "The Economic Impact of Breastfeeding" (2001) 48(1) *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 253.

34. A longer paid parental leave entitlement would also allow for greater certainty for employers. Two-thirds of employers agree that it would allow them to plan and manage workloads with greater confidence.⁷² 51 per cent agreed that it is difficult to manage instances where employees return to work from parental leave earlier or later than planned.⁷³ This is more likely to occur where shorter paid parental leave entitlements are in place. It has been found that 15 per cent of paid parental leave-takers return to work earlier or later than planned due to the limited availability of paid leave. For those on lower incomes, their financial circumstances meant that they had to return to work earlier than desired.⁷⁴ An extension of paid parental leave would hence increase income-stability for families over a period of time and this would incentivise more employees to return to the workforce as originally intended, allowing for employers to plan ahead with more certainty. This includes being better able to predict and provide for temporary 'maternity cover' staff.

E Other considerations

1 Whangai arrangements

35. In considering our submissions, we also ask that the select committee consider whangai arrangements. Section 8 of the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 allows women who have met the work requirements to take paid parental leave on assuming the care of a child under five years old "with a view to adoption". The extended 26 weeks of paid parental leave entitlement should also be extended to women who assume the care of a child under five pursuant to a whangai arrangement. There is little practical difference between adopted and whangai children in terms of their needs. Consequently it is unjustifiable to deny caregivers of children under a whangai arrangement the entitlement accorded to caregivers of children who have been, or will be, formally adopted. Similarly, eligibility for extended leave under section 24 of the Act should be extended to include caregivers of children under whangai arrangements.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, at 52.

⁷⁴ Ibid, at 42.

2 Miscarriage

36. Under section 71L of the Act, parental leave payments currently continue for a total of 14 weeks in cases of miscarriage. We recommend that this remain unchanged. While women in such situations would need time to recover from the miscarriage, we submit that this will be more appropriately funded by welfare payments such as the sickness benefit.

III CONCLUSION

37. We support the extension of paid parental leave from the current entitlement of 14 weeks to 26 weeks, as this would ease the financial pressure, particularly for low-income families. Financial unaffordability has been cited as the most significant factor for parents returning to work earlier than desired. Research has shown that there is a positive correlation between longer periods of parental leave and the health and well being of newborn babies, their mothers and families. We have also found that longer periods of paid parental leave would translate to long-term benefits for the economy and employers. We believe that the financial implications and concerns raised of extending paid parental leave from the current entitlement of 14 weeks to 26 weeks has been recognised in the Bill itself by the proposal that these changes be implemented in stages, over the course of 3 years.
38. We would welcome the opportunity to speak to our submission.

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