

Epolitix article – MP urges support for adoptive parents- Valerie Vaz MP.

Adoption (Leave, Pay and Allowances Arrangements) Bill

I am bringing in a Bill to equalise the statutory entitlements for adoptive parents with those available to parents whose children are born to them.

Firstly, pregnant women are entitled to 52 weeks' maternity leave irrespective of their length of service with their employer. Adoptive parents must have 26 weeks of continuous service before they are eligible for adoption leave. The first provision would equalise this.

Second, the first six weeks of statutory adoption pay are paid at a lower rate than the first six weeks of statutory maternity leave. Adopters should be paid at the same rate. Third, there is no equivalent of maternity allowance – available to self-employed mothers – for self-employed adopters. They should be entitled to Maternity allowance.

Some employers have their own contractual policies which make the entitlements more equal; however in many cases maternity packages are enhanced while adoption packages are not.

I have heard from people who have spent incredible amounts of time, energy and emotion into the adoption process, only to feel they are being treated as second-class parents when they discover they are not entitled to equal leave, pay and allowances. Organisations including USDAW and Adoption UK have been campaigning hard on this issue and in my view it is time for the Government to listen.

The Government should send a clear message that they value what adopters do to help children to find a new home. Adoption agencies expect parents to take time off work for up to a year in order to bond with their new child. Those who adopt should be able to do this and not be financially penalised.

I am pleased that the Government already has a Ministerial Advisory Group under the aegis of the Minister for Children and Families to look at how adoption can be encouraged and supported. I hope they will consider the provisions of my Bill, which have been overlooked in the past.

Changing the law would be simple, and costs would be minimal and far outweighed by future social and financial benefits. Encouraging people to adopt children into a stable environment is likely to have far-reaching positive impacts for society. It costs over £37,000 to keep a child in care for a year: encouraging adopters by treating them fairly would enable more children to leave local authority care.

More importantly, equalising these entitlements is likely to improve the quality and success of adoptions. This is an emotive issue and I hope the Bill will encourage debate about how we can more effectively acknowledge and support the valuable contribution that adopters make, including those who look after some of the most vulnerable children in our society.

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