



Committee Secretariat
Government Administration Select Committee
FREEPOST Parliament
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

October 2015

Submission

Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill

- 1.1** This submission is being made by Family First NZ, a charitable organisation that researches and advocates on family issues in the public domain.
- 1.2** **Family First SUPPORTS the intent of this Bill**
- 1.3** Families are being penalised for having children. We believe that successive governments have undervalued mothers – and parenting in general.
- 1.4** The political and policy focus has been on the needs of the economy, rather than on the welfare of children and the vital role of parents. In reality, this policy would represent about 0.2% of the total government spending, yet research shows that the role of mothers and the early bonding between mums and babies is vital for healthy child development.
- 1.5** Ironically, the spending on early childhood education has almost tripled in the past ten years – yet there was no suggestion of a veto by the government then.
- 1.6** According to OECD Statistics compiled by Parliamentary Library, the current paid parental leave of 16 weeks (increased from 14 weeks on 1 April 2015) puts New Zealand in 29th place, equal with Spain and Turkey, out of the world's 34 developed countries in Organisation for

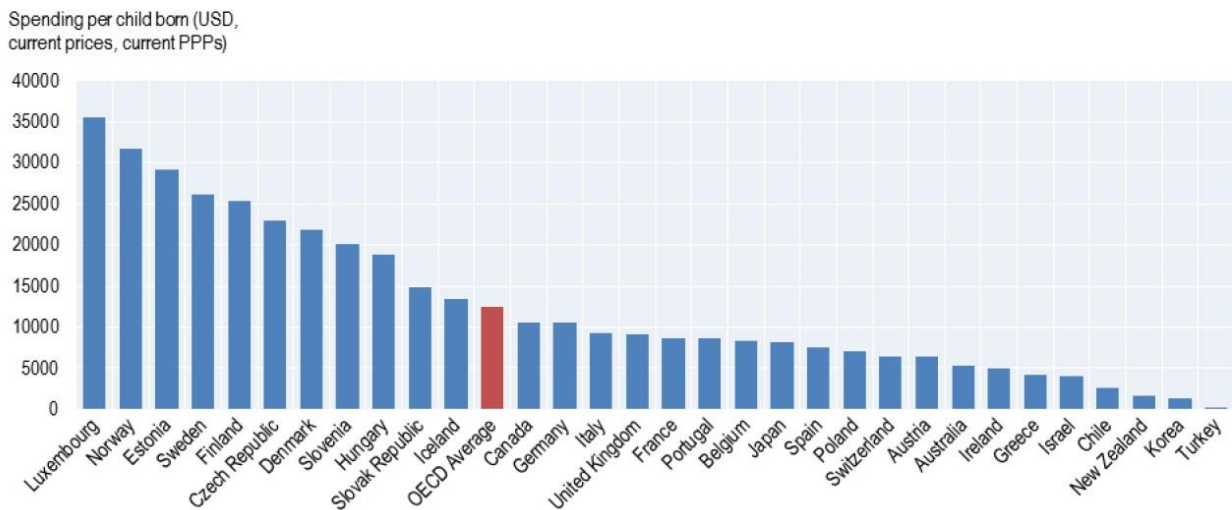
Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) rankings. The only developed countries lagging behind it are Switzerland and Mexico with 14 and 12 weeks respectively and the United States, which doesn't offer any paid parental leave. From April 1 next year, it will increase by another two weeks, putting New Zealand on par with Australian parents. We will then rank 26th equal on the OECD rankings.ⁱ

1.7 OECD COUNTRIES PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

- 1 - Slovak Republic - 164 weeks
- 2 - Poland - 130 weeks
- 3 - Czech Republic - 112 weeks
- 4 - Hungary - 110 weeks
- 5 - Russia (Currently non-OECD member) - 88 weeks
- 6 - Estonia - 82 weeks
- 7 - Austria - 68 weeks
- 8 - Korea - 65 weeks
- 9 - Sweden - 60 weeks
- 10= Germany and Japan - 58 weeks
- 29= New Zealand, Spain and Turkey - 16 weeks
- 30 - Switzerland - 14 weeks
- 31 - Mexico - 12 weeks
- 32 - United States – 0ⁱⁱ

Chart PF1.6.D. **Public expenditure on maternity and parental leaves, 2011**

Public expenditure on maternity and parental leaves per child born, at current prices and current PPPs, in US dollars



1.8

Sources: [OECD Social Expenditure Database](#); [OECD Health Statistics](#)

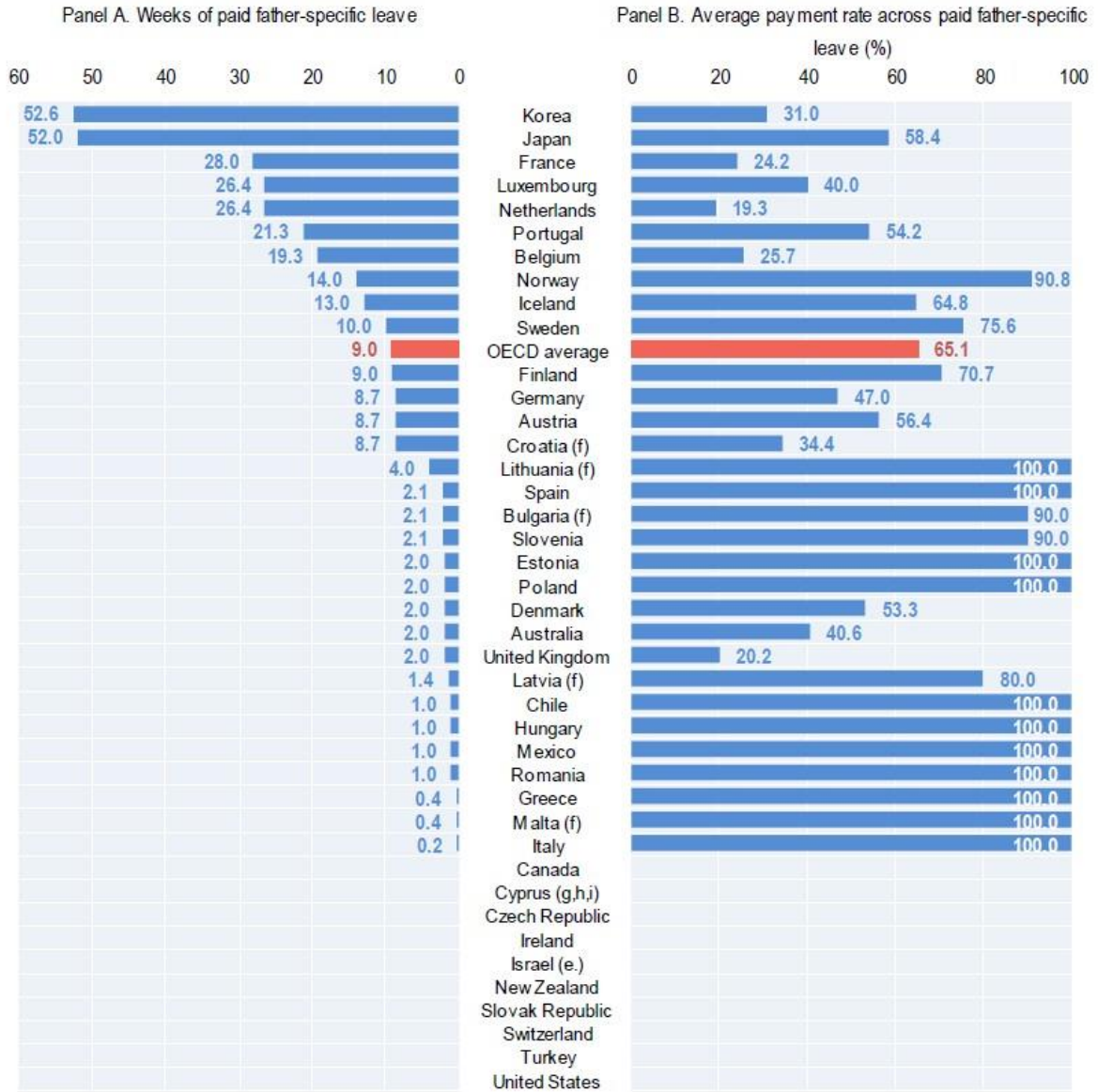
- 1.9 In 2009, the Families Commission called for an extension of paid parental leave to at least 13 months.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 1.10 A Department of Labour (2007) evaluation of paid parent leave showed that only ¼ of mothers thought the paid parental leave was long enough, and up to 75% said ideally they would take a year off. Yet the average time at which mothers return to work is when their baby is six months old. Only 14 weeks of that is paid. 'Financial pressure' was cited as a key reason for returning to work earlier than desired.^{iv}
- 1.11 It is significant that the Ministry of Health recommends at least six months exclusive breastfeeding.^v It is also noted that a key objective of the *Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987* is improved health outcomes for both mother and child with a mother being able to recover from childbirth, bond with a new baby, and return to work without negative consequences to her health and that of her child.
- 1.12 Two separate studies from the University of California, Berkeley, add weight to the push for extended paid maternity leave. The first study, which appears in the *Women's Health Issues* journal in 2009, found women who took at least a month off work before the birth were four times less likely to have a caesarean delivery because they were less tired and anxious. They were also more likely to carry to term, especially for women who had stressful jobs. "What we're trying to say here is that taking maternity leave may make good health sense, as well as good economic sense," said Sylvia Guendelman, professor of maternal and child health at the university's school of public health.^{vi}
- 1.13 The second study, which appears in *Pediatrics* journal, found women who took less than six weeks' maternity leave were four times less likely to successfully breastfeed beyond 30 days. Of the 770 full-time working mothers who participated, 82 per cent were breastfeeding within a month of their baby's birth. Of those, 65 per cent were still breastfeeding 4½ months later. These women had taken an average of 10.3 weeks' maternity leave.
- 1.14 Research by the Ministry of Social Development found that 1/3rd of all working couples were unhappy they both have to work. And only 43% of kiwi mums with children under 3 are in some form of paid work.
- 1.15 The role of parents during the crucial early years of a child should be acknowledged. Families should not be pressured to return to work simply because of financial concerns, and **the Parental Leave scheme and other family tax breaks such as Income Splitting^{vii} and the removal of marriage penalty taxes^{viii} should support and strengthen families with young children.**

- 1.16** NZ's Brainwave Trust fronted by Judy Bailey and which was formed as a response to new scientific evidence on the impact that experiences in the first 3 years have on the brain development of a child, says on its website, *"The early attachment between parents and their baby creates a foundation for that child's future relationships with others. Smiling, singing, touching and cuddling as part of attuned, responsive care is necessary to develop this part of the brain. Close, loving physical touch is crucially important. These things allow the child to develop the brain connections needed to feel empathy and care for others – an important prerequisite for healthy functioning as an adult."*^x
- 1.17** The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Sir Peter Gluckman, says: *"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 hormonal responses to stress... Social investment in New Zealand should take more account of the growing evidence that prevention and intervention strategies applied early in life are more effective in altering outcomes and reap more economic returns over the life course than do ... strategies applied later. This will require long-term commitment to appropriate policies and programmes."*^x
- 1.18** Some would argue that this Bill demonstrates growing recognition of the value of women in the workplace by employers. We would argue that this Bill demonstrates growing recognition of the value of *parents* in the home by children.
- 1.19** The National Government have previously argued that they have increased the paid parental leave payments, have improved Working for Families, better health-care for families, record rates of immunisation, and investment in childcare. But the issue is not about services or even just financial reward. This is about enabling parents to be able to afford extended **time** with very young children and babies in the early formative years.
- 1.20** We note that the Labour government in 2007 ignored a report from the Families Commission that recommended that paid parental leave provisions be increased to 13 months by 2015, including a month for fathers.
- 1.21** We agree with the Families Commission who, again in 2009, called for paid parental leave for fathers. In a Supporting Kiwi Dads survey, almost half of fathers said they were unable to take paternity leave when their children were born.^{xi}

ADDITIONAL CLAUSE – PARENTAL LEAVE FOR FATHERS

1.22 We would call for the Bill to allow two weeks - rising to four weeks - paid parental leave for fathers.

Chart PF2.1.C. Paid leave reserved for fathers, 2014
Duration of paid father-specific leave^a, and the average payment rate^b across paid father-specific leave for an individual on national average earnings



1.23

1.24 According to the latest OECD report, **on average, OECD countries offer nine weeks of paid father-specific leave.** Nine OECD countries provide no paid father-specific leave at all, and ten offer two weeks or less. However, at the other end of the scale, nine countries reserve three

months or more of paid leave for fathers, with the father-specific entitlements in the two East Asian OECD countries – Japan and Korea – lasting as long as twelve months. Father-specific leaves are often well paid when short, although payment rates tend to fall once entitlements last longer than one month or so.^{xii} (see graph 1.26)

- 1.25** In Australia, *Dad and Partner Pay* is up to 2 weeks of government funded pay based on the rate of the national minimum wage when you are on unpaid leave from work or are not working. Dad and Partner Pay is currently \$657 per week before tax. This is the hourly rate of the national minimum wage x 7.6 hours in a standard working day, x 5 days in a standard working week.^{xiii}
- 1.26** The period immediately following the birth of a child is demanding and difficult for mums – especially with sleep deprivation, recovering from childbirth, and coping with the existing demands of siblings. It is completely appropriately, and in fact desirable, that the father is involved in this crucial period of adjustment and to support the mother. This will promote hands-on parenting by fathers, which is a good thing.
- 1.27** According to the website www.zerotothree.org - *"If fathers have the capacity to nurture their children competently but differently from mothers, does this matter to the children? Apparently so, according to two decades of research. Eight-week-old infants can discriminate between their fathers and their mothers, and respond in a differential way to their approach. Yogman (1981)"*
- 1.28** *"Research has found that subtle face-to-face differences in play, modulation, verbal and physical contact are mutually appreciated by the child, the father, and the mother. They justify the father's feeling that his relationship with his baby is irreplaceably special. A 17 year-old brand-new father was "blown-away" when his baby opened her eyes wide in response to his reaching down to pick her up. He asked his daughter, "I'm not your mother - and you still want me?" This tiny bit of encouragement from his baby touched him and kept him coming back for more."*
- 1.29** *"Male involvement, supported by responses from babies and women, has measurable, positive effects on the development of children. Studying the effects of fathers' participation in the daily care and physical maintenance of infants, Pedersen and his colleagues found that the more actively involved a 6-month-old baby had been with his or her father, the higher that baby scored on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Pedersen, et al, 1980)."*
- 1.30** *"Examining 2-month-old infants from middle income, two-parent families, Parke and Sawin (1975) found that the more fathers participated in bathing, feeding, diapering, and other*

routines of physical care, the more socially responsive the babies were. Furthermore, a year later these babies seemed more resilient in the face of stressful situations."

- 1.31** *"Male involvement has positive effects on the development of vulnerable, as well as typical, infants and young children. In their studies of preterm infants, Gaiter (1984) and Yogman (1987) found that early paternal involvement had a significant mitigating effect on the long-term vulnerability of these at-risk infants. Both researchers found that fathers who visited their babies in the hospital frequently, touched them, and talked with the nurses about them, were significantly more involved with their infants up to a year after discharge from the hospital."*^{xiv}
- 1.32** Fathers are often seen as solely being the provider for the family and having only a minimal role to play in the child's development. Research is now showing us that it is important that fathers be actively involved with their children. It shows us that fathers are not an optional extra. In fact fathers are fundamental to children's healthy development as their involvement can improve the health, emotional well-being and educational achievement of their children.
- 1.33** Noted sociologist, Dr. David Popenoe, is one of the pioneers of the relatively young field of research into fathers and fatherhood. *"Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home,"* he says. *"Involved fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring."* Fathers have a direct impact on the well-being of their children.^{xv}
- 1.34** Even from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings, and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children also are less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the neighborhood. Infants who receive high levels of affection from their fathers (e.g., babies whose fathers respond quickly to their cries and who play together) are more securely attached; that is, they can explore their environment comfortably when a parent is nearby and can readily accept comfort from their parent after a brief separation.^{xvi}
- 1.35** The cost of this policy – based on 57,000 births in 2014^{xvii} and the average weekly income from wages and salaries^{xviii} of \$991 means that the cost of the policy would be approximately \$50 million dollars. The entitlement could be set at a maximum – similar to Australia.^{xix} A lesser entitlement (as per other OECD countries) means that this total cost would be even less – but a worthy investment in young families, and the role of fathers.
- 1.36** We wish to appear before the Select Committee.



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ⁱ http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

ⁱⁱ OECD Statistics compiled by Parliamentary Library, March 30, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.superu.govt.nz/sites/default/files/parental-leave-summary-report.pdf>

^{iv} Department of Labour (2007) Parental Leave in New Zealand: 2005/2006 Evaluation, Department of Labour, Wellington.

^v <http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/pregnancy-and-kids/first-year/helpful-advice-during-first-year/breastfeeding-perfect-you-and-your-baby>

^{vi} <http://www.theage.com.au/national/study-shows-benefits-of-early-maternity-leave-20090108-7cwc.html>

^{vii} <https://www.familyfirst.org.nz/issues/income-splitting/>

^{viii} <https://www.familyfirst.org.nz/2008/10/penalty-tax-for-being-married-as-high-as-15000/>

^{ix} <http://www.brainwave.org.nz/>

^x <http://www.pmcsa.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Improving-the-Transition-report.pdf>

^{xi} <http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/3116563/Dads-need-paid-parental-leave>

^{xii} http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

^{xiii} <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/dad-and-partner-pay>

^{xiv} <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-development/how-men-and-children-affect.html>

^{xv} Popenoe, D. (1996). Life without father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society (p. 163). New York, NY: The Free Press; Stanton, G. T. (2003). How fathers, as male parents, matter for healthy child development [On-line].

^{xvi} Yeung, W. J., Duncan, G. J., & Hill, M. S. (2000). Putting fathers back in the picture: Parental activities and children's adult outcomes. In H. E. Peters, G. W. Peterson, S. K. Steinmetz, & R. D. Day (Eds.), *Fatherhood: Research, interventions and policies* (pp. 97-113). New York, NY: Hayworth Press; Harris, K. M., & Marmer, J. K. (1996). Poverty, paternal involvement, and adolescent well-being. *Journal of Family Issues*, 17(5), 614-640; Pleck, J. H. (1997). Paternal involvement: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of fathers in child development* (3rd ed., pp. 66-103). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

^{xvii} http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/births/BirthsAndDeaths_HOTPYeDec14.aspx

^{xviii} http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/income-and-work/Income/NZIncomeSurvey_HOTPJun14qtr.aspx

^{xix} <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/dad-and-partner-pay>