



**Early Childhood Australia**

A voice for young children

**OUR  
VISION:  
EVERY  
YOUNG  
CHILD IS  
THRIVING  
AND  
LEARNING**

## Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

**Early Childhood Australia**

**January, 2017**

### **About us:**

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is the national peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood sector. ECA advocates for quality in education and care as well as social justice and equity for children from birth to eight years. We have a federated structure with branches in each state and territory. In 2013, ECA celebrated 75 years of continuous service to the Australian community.

Find out more at: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

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Early Childhood Australia (ECA) thanks the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for the opportunity to provide input in relation to the Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016. ECA recognises that the development of close bonds between parents and child in the time following birth is particularly critical. Paid parental leave (PPL) facilitates the opportunity to embed early attachment as well as breastfeeding. The World Health Organisation supports implementation of policy settings:

enacting 6 months' mandatory paid maternity leave, as well as policies that encourage women to breastfeed in the workplace and in public.<sup>1</sup>

Currently Australia has one of the weakest PPL systems among developed nations.<sup>2</sup> The existing scheme was a valuable step forward, but needs to be extended. We also believe that the PPL scheme must compliment a strong investment in non-parental care givers and early childhood education beyond the PPL period.

It is important that PPL provisions are sufficient to act as an incentive for people to access the leave, rather than return to work immediately after taking on new parenting responsibilities. One of the problems with the current system is that, because of the limited time and pay available, many new parents will use all available forms of leave—including annual leave and long service leave — to extend their time at home before returning to work. This is well intentioned but can leave them exhausted prior to the commencement of leave and/or for up to a year after returning to work because they have no leave available for normal breaks. The first year back to work after having a child can be a challenging time already; it is made more difficult if the person returning to work has no leave entitlement or prospect of a break.

Amendments, such as those in this Bill, that reduce either the value or duration of leave available will make parents more likely to exhaust all leave options, and more likely to return to work sooner than is best for their infant, the parent, or the workplace.

ECA notes that the final evaluation report on the PPL scheme indicated that the evidence “strongly suggests that the introduction of PPL provides mothers with the capacity to continue breastfeeding for longer, probably primarily because of its effect in delaying their return to work”.<sup>3</sup>

Based on these considerations, ECA supports measures to extend the duration and coverage of the existing scheme. We believe this will provide children with the best opportunities in life, both through experiencing the care of their parents in infancy, and through ensuring their parents have enhanced economic opportunities in the workforce through their working lives.

The changes in the Bill do the opposite, reducing the availability of PPL for some parents, and not extending it for any. It does nothing to encourage employers to increase their parental leave offerings. Accordingly, the bill should be opposed.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, *Global Nutrition Targets 2025 Breastfeeding Policy Brief*, p.2.

[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/149022/1/WHO\\_NMH\\_NHD\\_14.7\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/149022/1/WHO_NMH_NHD_14.7_eng.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>2</sup> OECD Family database, PF2.1: Key characteristics of parental leave systems, p.4.

[https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2\\_1\\_Parental\\_leave\\_systems.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Social Science Research, PPL Evaluation: Final Report, November 2014, p.60.

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03\\_2015/finalphase4\\_report\\_6\\_march\\_2015\\_0.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/03_2015/finalphase4_report_6_march_2015_0.pdf)