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Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Department of the Senate
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Submission – Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016

The South Australian Premier's Council for Women (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee (the Committee) inquiry regarding the Fairer Paid Parental Leave Bill 2016 (the Bill).

The Council is a high-level independent advisory body. We advise the Premier of South Australia and the Minister for the Status of Women on issues relating to women to facilitate a whole of government approach to meeting the needs of women in South Australia. The views expressed in this submission are those of the Council and do not represent those of the South Australian Government.

There are entrenched and persistent gender differences and related inequalities that influence women's access to and experience of paid employment. The Council believes changes to social and industrial policies, such as the Paid Parental Leave scheme (PPL scheme), that allow working parents, especially women, to balance work and life commitments are critical for creating a fair and equitable society. There is strong evidence that policies and provisions that allow working parents, especially women, to better balance their family with their employment responsibilities enable workers to fulfil more satisfactorily their workplace roles which also delivers benefits to their employers.

For many women their position in the labour market is reliant on their ability to find employment that provides them with the flexibility they need to fulfil their other commitments. This work is often in marginalised and casualised sectors of the workforce where rights and entitlements are sacrificed for flexibility. It also has serious implications on the number of women in senior and leadership positions.

The Council does not support any amendments to the PPL scheme which will reduce the total leave available to women under the current PPL scheme. Such a reduction would affect a woman's choice about when to return to work and can have a significant impact on a child's development and the mother's wellbeing.

Australia already sits well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 52 weeks for government provided paid parental leave. The changes proposed in the Bill essentially limits the number of weeks Australian parents can

access leave to 18 weeks unless an employer offers more than 18 weeks paid parental leave. Very few Australian employers offer more than 18 weeks.

Reduction in the amount of paid parental leave available to women is likely to lead to a decrease in women's already low workplace retention rates, leaving families at risk of underemployment and poverty as well as causing significant financial and emotional stress to families.

The Council does not support any retrospectivity of application caused by the enactment of the Bill. The proposed changes to take affect across the board from 1 January 2017 creates a situation where women who are currently pregnant and have negotiated contracts with their employers based on relying on access to the Commonwealth Government PPL scheme will be negatively affected by the changes. These women may not be able to access the leave they have planned for and may already be bound by an enterprise agreement or a negotiated contract with their employer. These women must not be subjected to a period of no income because of changes in legislation that they could not foresee. The Bill should be amended to ensure no Australian woman is unfairly disadvantaged by the 1 January 2017 enactment of the changes proposed in the Bill.

The Council supports the changes in the Bill that will allow for a longer break between workdays when accessing the PPL scheme and the extension in the time allowed for an application to the PPL scheme.

The Council supports the submissions provided to the Committee by the Equal Rights Alliance, the National Working Women's Centres, and Australian Women Lawyers Ltd.

The Council looks forward with interest to seeing the outcomes of this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Ms Miriam Silva

Chair

Premier's Council for Women

On behalf of all members of the Premier's Council for Women:

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