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CALL FOR PAID MATERNITY LEAVE FOR ALL WORKING MOTHERS

The AEU believes that paid maternity leave should be available to all working women and calls on the Federal government to start supporting working mothers.

Both UNICEF and the WHO recommend a minimum period of 16 weeks of paid maternity leave as a result of the growing evidence of the significant health benefits for babies and mothers of exclusive breastfeeding for a minimum four month period. The World Health Assembly has recently recommended 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding.

Children are our most valued asset. Society benefits from children. The primary focus for education is on the development and growth of our young people. It is important that they are nurtured through their schooling and in their home environments. Society needs to ensure that parents can provide care and support. Paid maternity leave is one practical way that the Federal Government can support the rearing of its children.

Currently whether or not one receives paid maternity leave is entirely dependent on factors such as size of the workplace, employer attitudes or whether it is private or public sector employer. Paid maternity leave should be a right which is shared universally. It is extremely unjust that women who work in the majority of Australian workplaces do not have access to paid maternity leave.

Paid maternity leave recognises that women experience the demands of pregnancy, birth and breast feeding. Their biological demands require absence from the workforce. The health issues associated with childbirth are unique to women. Therefore women must have a minimum period of paid leave that:

- Allows them to recover physically, psychologically and emotionally from pregnancy and childbirth.
- Promotes the establishment of a healthy feeding regime and care arrangements for babies and
- Gives women (and where applicable their partners) the opportunity to make considered choices about their work and family balance.

Paid maternity leave should also be introduced to help to redress the disadvantage women experience in the workforce. The disadvantages that women bear in remuneration, appointment and promotion and superannuation are directly related to their responsibilities in child bearing and as primary care givers.

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