

New parents hope proposed B.C. parental leave rules hold up ^[1]

Leave will be extended to 18 months if legislation goes through, matching option offered by federal government

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EXCERPTS

New legislation introduced Monday by the B.C. Minister of Labour aims to make it easier for parents to take extended parental leave of 18 months, but some parents worry the measures won't go far enough to alleviate their child care woes.

On Monday, Minister Harry Bains proposed changes to the Employment Standards Act which included increasing the length of time before an expected due date when a pregnant woman can begin her leave — from 11 weeks to 13 weeks — and upping the total parental leave allowance to 18 months.

He also proposed extended compassionate care leave, leave in the event of a child death, and leave in the event of a child who is lost due to a crime.

The changes, if approved, would mean B.C. employers must grant the extended amount of time to new parents as unpaid leave. That's consistent with the federal government decision to begin offering new parents the option of obtaining the same amount of money through employment insurance for 18 months instead of 12, which began Dec. 3.

"We believe families deserve to take time to care for a new child or support an ailing relative ... without having to worry about their job security," Bains said Tuesday.

Some Vancouver parents worry the proposed change is too little, too late for them.

Brooke Roach's baby, Louie, was due to be born Dec. 1, 2017, but he arrived more than a month early and had to stay in the hospital until Dec. 3.

Roach and her husband, Barrett, knew they wanted to opt for extended parental leave as soon as the federal government announced it. As it turned out, they had to apply for special permission since Louie was born before the new federal rules kicked in.

The couple was told they were approved for extended care, only to be told that was not the case about two months later. Roach has reapplied for the extended parental leave, and is waiting to hear back so she can confirm her return to work. In the meantime, they're scrambling to get on daycare wait-lists, just in case.

Roach hopes the new B.C. legislation will help parents in the future. She also believes the system should not be too rigid on parents like her.

"It's been an upsetting experience," trying to make the extended leave work for her to spend more time with her family. "The time means more than the money."

"Everybody's case is different. Why does it matter that my baby was born Oct. 28 rather than Dec. 3?" she said.

The proposed change is welcomed by child care advocates in B.C., who see both supportive leave and affordable daycare options as necessary aspects of a child care system.

"Extending parental leave is what was recommended by our \$10 a day child care campaign," Sharon Gregson, provincial spokesperson for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C., said.

But, she added, "It's not helpful for families when it's still the same amount of dollars federally that's spread over a longer period of time."

Bains called the employment insurance money offered by the federal government for parental leave a "jurisdictional issue."

"They should be looking at EI to make sure it reflects the times and living expenses we have today, especially in the lower mainland," he said.

Investments in child care were promised by Premier John Horgan's government in the February throne speech. "Now that the commitment is there we have to make sure that the implementation follows through," Gregson said.

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