

Kings County guarantees parental leaves for councillors ^[1]

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Author: CBC News

Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Jul 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

A Kings County, N.S., councillor says she hopes a new policy aimed at making the municipality a family-friendly workplace will bring flexibility and stability to new parents on council.

The Municipality of the County of Kings passed its parental accommodations for elected officials policy on July 3.

The policy allows elected members to go on leave not only for pregnancy, birth and adoption, but also for pregnancy loss, if that loss occurs after the 19th week of pregnancy. Councillors can choose how involved they are with municipal business during leave, including whether to attend meetings, answer calls and emails or meet with residents.

The policy also allows councillors to bring their infants to meetings.

Deputy Mayor Emily Lutz has attended meetings with her three-month-old daughter, Azie.

"As Azie's so small, it's hard to find child care, and obviously we're breastfeeding. We can't be separated for that long, so I'm now able to bring Azie to council chambers with me and she sits with me here in my chair and I care for her while I also debate and participate in the meeting."

Provincial legislation

Last fall, Lutz and her fellow councillor, Megan Hodges, lobbied for changes to the Municipal Government Act that would guarantee parental leave for councillors. Previously, councillors had to ask council for permission to go on leave. The provincial bill was passed earlier this year.

But the municipality's policy goes even further, Lutz said, granting the leave for pregnancy loss and committing the municipality to being a family-friendly workplace.

Lutz said she hopes the changes will encourage other young people to run for municipal office.

"It certainly eliminated a lot of the uncertainty that a person might consider before deciding to run," she said.

"As a young person, it's sort of a time of your life where things are in flux, you're having a new baby, and so in any workplace you're not sure maybe what your future might be, but especially as an elected official, where things are so up in the air."

Babies at the table

Lutz said it can be challenging at times when Azie is crying during meetings, but overall, the reaction has been positive.

"We've had many people just saying it's sort of time for a change, it's time that we have legislation like this in order to make the council table more inclusive, to ensure people at all different stages of life can be involved in government."

Lutz said she hopes other municipalities will follow suit with their own policies.

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