

HRMAJ supports implementation of a national paternity leave policy ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Human Resource Management Association of Jamaica (HRMAJ) has welcomed the recent announcement by Gender Minister Olivia 'Babsy' Grange that consultation with stakeholders in relation to the development and implementation of a National Paternity Leave Policy (NPL) for Jamaica will be conducted over the next few months.

President of HRMAJ, Karl Williams, said the association is in full support of a Paternity Leave Policy, as he believes that fathers should be as integral as mothers in the early stages of child-rearing, as well as be a part of all the other important processes following childbirth, which is experienced by mothers who currently enjoy maternity leave.

"The introduction of an NPL policy would constitute a significant advancement in gender equality, which would benefit both parents and child since it would allow for bonding with the newborn and increase the probability of the father's sustained support/influence in the child's development", Williams said.

Currently, the Maternity Leave Act (1979) provides a mother with a minimum of eight weeks paid maternity leave, subject to her satisfying the eligibility criteria.

Williams pointed to the evolution of the movement of the traditional roles of males as breadwinners and females as caregivers, positing that an NPL policy would be an appropriate response to the workforce dynamics in which an increasing number of women within the childbearing age group are employed at various levels in organizations.

"Having a National Paternity Leave Policy would be an important provision to encourage fathers to share childcare responsibilities. This policy would, therefore, be a positive step in the right direction, not only from a national perspective but also in support of building-up family structures", Williams added.

Based on longitudinal research/ studies (JA Kids Study, UWI, 2011) on child development in Jamaica the benefits of an NPL policy implementation will outweigh the cost. Firms investing in this benefit will reap dividends in terms of improved branding, employee productivity and employee engagement and retention.

A recent survey administered by HRMAJ captured feedback from Jamaican adult males (18 yrs. and older) on whether Jamaica needs a National Paternity Leave Policy. Ninety-eight per cent of the 176 respondents indicated that Jamaica should have a National Paternity Leave Policy.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) study (2014) -Maternity and Paternity - Laws and Practice across the World reported that of a total of 169 countries for which information was available, 66 had implemented inclusive parental leave policies.

HRMAJ noted that a cost/benefit analysis would be required to determine the possible effects/impact of a NPL policy on employers, employees and other key stakeholders, adding that stakeholder consultations will be critical in the development of the policy as it relates to work culture and the transformation of social norms and attitudes towards the desired goals and outcomes.

Williams noted that HRMAJ stands ready to continue supporting the development and implementation of this policy, which is vital for nation building.

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