



**Submission of the PSA Women's
Network Committee on the Holidays
(Bereavement Leave for Miscarriage)
Amendment Bill No 2.**



Submission of the PSA Women's Network Committee to the Education and Workforce Select Committee on the Holidays (Bereavement Leave for Miscarriage) Amendment Bill No.2

14 February 2020

Who we are and why we are submitting

The Women's Network Committee of the Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) wish to make a submission on the above Bill. We would also like to appear before the select committee.

The Public Service Association is New Zealand's largest union, with over 76,000 members, 72% of whom are female. The PSA Women's Network has over 5,000 members. It aims to promote the interests of women within the PSA, facilitate the sharing of information and experiences and encouraging and supporting women's participation in PSA representative structures at all levels.

The Public Service Association also has a long and proud history of upholding women's rights and working to better the working terms and conditions of its members, including provisions made for bereavement and other forms of leave. The PSA Women's Network Committee therefore believes we are well placed to comment on this Bill in relation to women workers in the Public Service and their families.

The PSA is affiliated to the Council of Trade Unions and we endorse their submission.

Our submission

Currently the documentary *Helen Kelly - Together* is being shown in cinemas across the country. In it, Helen says:

"I just want people to be kind. It would make a hell of a difference".

This legislation is about being kind. It recognises the grief experienced by parents on losing a child as a bereavement and entitles people to time to grieve. Kind employers already do this as a matter of course. But some do not. They need guidance on what to do, as illustrated in the personal statements below.

PSA Women's Network members were asked for their comments. The following statements speak to why this legislation is necessary:

Personal Statements

“As someone who suffered a late miscarriage whilst in employment, I totally support the Bill in regard to bereavement leave for a miscarriage.

There is not much worse than losing a much wanted and even at early stages much-loved new member of the family. In my case I found out around 19 weeks that the baby had died in utero, so I was hospitalised to induce the arrival of the baby.

It took 3 very gruelling days for the baby to actually arrive, by which time I was both physically and emotionally shattered, and the first phone call I had on my return home was from my supervisor, asking when I was going to be back at work.

While this was partly driven by insensitivity to the death of an unborn child, it was also largely not helped by there being no guidelines as to what is acceptable in a situation like this. There was definitely enough going on to not need to have had that conversation and it is one that will stick with me forever.

The ability to take the time for bereavement leave would make such a huge difference to the parents involved and make resourcing a workplace so much easier if there were guidelines to work with.”

PSA Women’s Network member A, February 2020.

“I support the Bereavement Leave for Miscarriage Bill, especially from a personal perspective.

My partner and I sadly had two miscarriages. Our darling babies would have been in their teens now. We were excited with our first pregnancy and only told a handful of people of the beautiful news. This would have been the first grandchild on my partner’s family and third on my side.

Then we had a miscarriage. We could have never dreamed that our first pregnancy would not come to full fruition. I often imagine how life would have been if they had survived. The reality is, that they didn’t. If Bereavement leave was available at that time, it would have assisted myself, my partner & our families to properly grieve for the tremendous loss. It would have helped bridge the loss with returning to ‘normal’ life again.

However, life is never quite normal again. I was quite numb with the first miscarriage. I really did not know how to react. I took a few days off on sick leave to rest. My manager knew and was very ‘supportive’ but we were busy at work and of course, I had to return to work to join the team. That was the priority. A miscarriage was not viewed as a loss like a living person who lived a life however long and has now passed away.

My partner and I took a philosophical approach to it all and decided our first pregnancy was not meant to be and to try again. It is much easier to talk about it now, but at the time it was not quite viewed as a true loss by all but it was a loss for myself & my partner.

We tried again and successfully were pregnant a second time. This time we decided to not make it public for fear that there would be a re-occurrence of what happened previously.

And then it happened again. I didn't take sick leave, just took annual leave and went out of town to re-group my emotions and to mourn another loss. I was getting used to it.

Miscarriage is not really talked about so openly. I liken it to an incomplete job or project. Family and friends would say "Oh, just try again you will have no problem" or "sorry to hear that, don't worry it will happen". As it would eventuate, much easier said than done.

It is almost as if couples, especially the women, are silently viewed as a failure ~ unable to successfully hold/carry a pregnancy to full term, when you come from big families where everyone is having babies with no issues. And then time passes and their youngsters become parents themselves. It is a bittersweet joy because my children could have been here also and then in time having their own children.

I support this bill because it is an acknowledgement of our women who unfortunately suffer miscarriages largely in silence, in private, and almost as if it never happened."

PSA Women's Network member B, February 2020.

"I suffered two miscarriages in 2019. Both were early, but both pregnancies were very wanted. While I am in the fortunate category of workers with an employer who would have been supportive of my circumstances had I disclosed them, I still struggled with knowing how to handle the situation from a workplace perspective. I needed time off, both to deal with the physical impact and the emotional impact and I didn't know how to categorise my loss in terms of a leave process. Technically it didn't qualify for bereavement leave, though it categorically was a bereavement and it seemed strange to take it as sick leave (though ultimately that was what I did). I didn't want to discuss the details with my managers, because I was struggling to emotionally process my experiences and I'm a private person by nature. Though I have no doubt they would have been supportive, it was a hard time and having to consider how I would deal with an appropriate leave application was the last thing I needed to worry about.

Apart from the workplace considerations, the fact that we do not accept miscarriage as a common place example of a bereavement, means people like me, who have suffered them, feel almost odd comparing them to the bereavement of another type of close family member (which are recognised in employment law). Expanding the categorisation of a bereavement to include miscarriage would go a long way towards acknowledging this type and experience of grief. To those of us who have experienced it, we know it is all too real and as such should be acknowledged in a very real way".

PSA Women's Network member C, February 2020.

The PSA Women's Network fully support the Bill with the minor adjustments proposed by the Council of Trade Unions in their submission.

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