



**Police Federation  
of Australia**

The National Voice of Policing

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Fairer Paid Parental Leave Amendment Bill 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Fairer Paid Parental Leave Amendment Bill 2015. The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) is the national body representing the professional and industrial interests of Australia's 60,000 police officers, of which approximately one third are women, across all jurisdictions and has almost 99% membership density.

I have read the draft ACTU submission to this Inquiry and the PFA supports the contents of that document. We do however offer the following comments, specifically as they apply to police.

The PFA made a submission to the Paid Parental Scheme Review 2013 and in that submission we raised the importance of supporting flexible working arrangements for policing families including the right to review and the 'right to request' flexible working arrangements.

The PFA has been involved in much of the debate around PPL and Childcare and Early Childhood Learning for a number of years. The information and submissions that we have provided to various Committees and other groups has been derived direct from operational police officers.

As I am sure the Committee is aware, police protect the welfare of our community; they should not have to do so while worrying about the welfare of their children. The nature of

policing work and the difficulties it poses for parents is unique. Whilst this is true of some other emergency services and shift work industries, there is an unpredictability faced by police that is not faced by any other type of worker in Australia.

The PFA has been a long term strong supporter of the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010. Our members have been able to access the 18 weeks parental leave pay under that Act, on top of the respective entitlements under the various state, territory and federal police enterprise bargaining agreements or award entitlements. In fact, negotiations our members' branches have had with the various state, territory and federal governments and police forces in respect to enterprise bargaining around PPL have always been predicated on our members also having access the PPL Act 18 weeks.

In addition to those 18 weeks, police are entitled to the following PPL entitlements across the country –

- VIC - a further 14 weeks of paid PPL after 12 months service,
- AFP - 16 weeks,
- NSW - 14 weeks after 40 weeks service,
- NT 14 weeks up to five years' service and 18 weeks with greater than five years' service,
- QLD – 14 weeks,
- SA – 16 weeks after 12 months service and 18 weeks after five years' service,
- TAS – 12 weeks after 12 months service,
- WA 14 weeks after 12 months service.

As a direct result of the PPL Scheme, the Police Association of Victoria have confirmed an increase in the length of time taken by members after childbirth. Coupled with other leave arrangements including 14 weeks paid PPL under their enterprise agreement it has allowed “most infants to be exclusively cared for by a parent for the first six months of life”. We believe a like scenario exists in all other jurisdictions.

There is also evidence of increased workforce participation of women in the police frontline and greater retention of women of childbearing age following the birth of their children.

We estimate that the changes being proposed in the Fairer Paid Parental Leave Amendment Bill 2015 will result in a loss of \$11,500 per member, who are predominantly birth mothers. For some police officers this will mean a reduced amount of time on parental leave and for others a separation from the workforce.

### *Not fair to babies*

The Coalition's previous parental leave policy stressed the value of giving every new mother 26 weeks off with paid leave, saying:

*a primary objective ... is to support women to have the best chance to breastfeed and bond with their infant for the six month period recommended by international and Australian health experts.*

Australian guidelines recommend that infants are fed nothing but breast milk for their first six months of life and continue to be breastfed into their second year.<sup>1</sup> These recommendations flow from extensive research indicating that breastfeeding is important to the health, growth and development of children. The way infants are fed has short- and long-term impacts that is well documented in national and international research.

Breastfeeding is a time-intensive activity. It can be difficult for mothers to maintain breastfeeding while they are working. The unpredictability of police work combined with nature of shiftwork make it extremely difficult and reducing the paid parental leave period will mean that the breastfeeding will cease.

### *Not fair to women*

The impact of shorter paid parental leave is not limited to infants. Mothers also suffer when they do not have enough leave available to them. Negative outcomes of an early return to work include poorer physical health and well-being, feelings of stress and poorer mental health.<sup>2</sup> Mothers also need time to recover from childbirth. Paid maternity leave can assist by ensuring that women are able to take an adequate recovery period out of the workforce following birth. By reducing the paid parental leave period some women may find it necessary to return to the workforce earlier which may be detrimental to either their health.

In most police jurisdictions there is an ongoing requirement for operational safety training qualifications. Coupled with the physical demands of frontline policing, birth recovery and operational readiness provides an extraordinary burden on women police to be fit for duty. The reduction in the time for maternal recovery will compromise the ability to return to frontline duties.

Taking away the additional weeks of paid parental leave, albeit at the minimum wage, is enough to make a real difference to mothers. Frontline police work combined with nature of shiftwork makes policing an occupation where the reduction of available paid parental leave will have an extraordinary impact on women.

### *Not fair to the community*

It is also important that police services are reflective of the communities they serve. The reduction of police women on the frontline will also impact on communities they serve. The advantages of women on the frontline are well documented. Currently, the community and Governments are attempting to tackle issues of domestic violence. Our members are first responders in those situations. Reducing the parental leave entitlements will have a flow on effect on the number of police women on the frontline to assist victims of domestic violence. In the past, police jurisdictions have obtained exemption under equal opportunity

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<sup>1</sup>National Health and Medical Research Council. Infant Feeding Guidelines *Information for health workers*. Canberra: NHMRC, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Paid Parental Leave Evaluation: Phase 1, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2012

legislation to ensure that they can deploy police women only in areas such as sexual assault and child abuse units. Police of childbearing age fulfil valuable roles including dealing with victims of sexual assault and child abuse. Community access to those police officers should not be compromised.

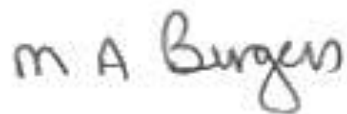
The PPL scheme is one of a range of measures required to support police parents balancing family commitments with the important and unique job of protecting the welfare of the community.

**We urge the Committee to not support the measures in the proposed Bill that will adversely affect many police officers as well as others in the community in relation to PPL.**

**We urge the Parliament to continue to ensure police are supported adequately across all stages of caring for children including continued access to provisions in the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 that allow our members to access 18 weeks PPL on top of what is available under their respective entitlements under awards or enterprise agreements.**

The PFA would be happy to provide further information to the Committee if that was required.

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "m A Burgess". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Mark Burgess APM  
Chief Executive Officer