

## **Press Release: Extend maternity leave by 3 months with pay in light of COVID-19** (Date 20.04.2020) 237,315 Signatures as of 15.09.2020.

Petition Website Link; <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/306691>. Petition Report; <https://t.co/7iCkWceFBt?amp=1>.

Thousands of new Mums and Parents continue to find it extremely hard whilst we deal as a nation to battle Covid-19 via measures of lockdown and social distancing. Whilst that is a must, they have been overlooked and not thought about by the Government. No help, no support for us Mums, Parents or babies. They are cornered struggling financially and with mental health.

**'Extend maternity leave by 3 months with pay in light of COVID-19' UK Parliament Petition launched on 20th April 2020** that has over 227,000 signatures. In 27 days it achieved a staggering 218,127 signatures <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/306691> alongside a change.org petition; <http://chnng.it/k6hNvXf2> that launched on **25th March 2020**, has over 35,000 signatures. We are asking for 3 months additional Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance of £151.20 per week or 90% of your average weekly earnings. That's approx. £1965.60 per person for 3 months, which is significantly lower than a person on furlough for 3 months.

In addition to Petitions Committee exploring the impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave, their inquiry has also identified a number of issues regarding existing entitlement to parental leave and pay, and the childcare sector. This also includes adoption pay and leave, special guardians and neonatal leave.

**On 7th May 2020**, the Petition's Committee held a virtual Evidence Session as part of their ongoing inquiry into the Government's handling of Coronavirus, with petition creators, signatories and experts; James Zammit-Garcia, Bethany Power, the Chair Catherine McKinnell, Professor Elizabeth Meins from University of York, Dr Cheryll Adams CBE Executive Director and Institute of Health Visiting, Emily Tredget from Happy, alongside other MPs. Full session of the meeting can be found here; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOFPLeE7dqQ>. Transcript; <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/361/default/>

This is Chair Catherine McKinnell, feedback of the evidence session; <https://www.facebook.com/183432182055909/posts/1129288250803626/?d=n>

**On 30th April 2020**, the petition Committee used a Facebook and an online survey to ask for their experiences maternity, adoption, and parental leave during the coronavirus outbreak. The survey was sent to the people who signed the UK Parliament Petition, which received over 100,000 signatures in less than two days and received the most responses the Petitions Committee have seen to date, with 26,000 responses to the survey and 24,000 on the Facebook post; <https://www.facebook.com/183432182055909/posts/1129288250803626/?d=n> Survey evidence here; <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/4258/default/>

**On 13th May 2020** the Committee issued an EDM for MPs to sign; <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/56967/campaign-to-extend-maternity-leave-by-three-months> as of 11.05.2020 we have 44 supporters. One being Justin Madders; Ellesmere Port & Neston Labour MP; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CATlggOAb5a/?igshid=1p6nnlihc9qdv>

**On 14th May 2020**, the Government issued their first response to the 10,000 signatures; 'The UK's Maternity Leave offer is already amongst the most generous in the World – up to 52 weeks of leave are available, 39 weeks of which are paid – and we currently have no plans to extend it.'

Government's first response to the petition, states that everything's fine at the moment and nothing needs changing. That's where the Petitions Committee at The House of Commons try to help, as petition reached over 100,000 signatures'. It's been shown to the Government that this isn't at all reflected on new Mums, Parents, Adopters and babies in a Covid-19 pandemic. This isn't reflecting those Mums who had their Occupational Maternity Pay furloughed for some of their leave. Another argument to the Government's response, in a 2019 report on family friendly policies, UNICEF used four measures to rank 41 different high- and middle-income countries. These included the full-time equivalent of paid maternity leave, which for the UK works out as 12 weeks and meant the UK was ranked 34 out of 41 countries. UNICEF also considered paternity leave provision and enrolment in childcare, which is seen as beneficial for educational and development outcomes. When all four measures were considered, the UK only ranked 28th out of 41 nations. Research commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2008 suggested that less than a quarter (23%) of mothers taking maternity leave took the full 52 weeks, and only 45% took 40 weeks or more.<sup>13</sup> It is unsurprising that a link was noted between income and likelihood to take longer leave, with those with



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higher maternal and partner income being more likely to take a longer period of leave. It's also been stated for Self-Employed workers and adopters are given unequal treatment of two schemes designed to do the same thing—provide support to new mothers during their maternity leave—is causing real hardship. Currently there is no support for Mothers or Parents having to take early neonatal leave, the Government recognised this issue, and recently announced plans to introduce neonatal leave, to cover up to 12 weeks when a baby is receiving neonatal care. They are still waiting. None of above helps any women in closing the gender pay gap and allow businesses to retain, whilst allowing families the time and flexibility to bond and spend the vital early months of their babies' lives.

**On 16th May 2020** the Committee asked petitioners to share their experiences on childcare and returning to work. Read a summary of what petitioners told us about childcare and returning to work during coronavirus: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/5350/default/>

**On 21st May 2020** at 09:30 Petition's Committee held a virtual Evidence Session as part of their ongoing inquiry into 'Maternity Leave and Pay During Coronavirus', with Chair Alain Gregoire; Maternal Mental Health Alliance, Chair Dr Trudi Seneviratne; Royal College of Psychiatrists Faculty of Perinatal Psychiatry, Josie Anderson; Campaigns and Policy Manager of Bliss, Sue Armstrong Brown; Chief Executive, Adoption UK and Neil Leitch; Chief Executive, Early Years Alliance. <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=SgMKtRpt0A>  
Transcript; <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/408/default/>

Alain Gregoire commented *"If you are looking for a priority group to support... maternity leave seems to be the best targeted example"*. Dr Trudi Seneviratne *"We are worried that a tsunami of referrals...may be on the way"*. Josie Anderson *"It is important that parents have the time which...they have effectively lost on the neonatal unit at home with their baby"*. Sue Armstrong Brown, *early trauma "has a lifelong consequence unless investment is made very rapidly"*.

The Committee has also received ongoing written evidence on issues from organisations and individuals. You can read them here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/192/the-governments-response-to-coronavirus/publications/written-evidence/>

**5th June 2020**, MP Catherine Mckinnel published an article; <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/coronavirus-is-having-a-devastating-effect-on-new-parents> "Experts have reported increased levels of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues among new parents since the pandemic began. The Government must take urgent action..."

**9th June 2020**, UK government announced 'parents returning to work after extended leave are eligible for furlough'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/parents-returning-to-work-after-extended-leave-eligible-for-furlough>

**Furlough** - Furlough unfortunately excludes many mothers and parents still; keyworkers, self-employed and work places that are not furloughing. It also seems to be discretionary to the employer, even if the parent still can't get adequate childcare. It doesn't seem to give any protection of leave, by giving the mother adequate time to return to work safely with their child in safe childcare. What employment rights does a Mother have during and after being furloughed after Maternity leave? As to be furloughed you have to end Maternity Leave. Can Mothers speak to their employer about changing their contract to discuss flexible working with ease? As currently the Maternity law is void to give 12 weeks' notice to an employer to discuss any contract changes with the employer who are on furlough. Where does this leave mothers who can't give 12 weeks' notice of employment changes? Also by Maternity law is void to give 8 weeks' notice to an employer of when they wish to return, this is very difficult for any mother and parent who can't access childcare. What happens if a mother is forced to quit her job due to childcare issues, is she then forced to pay back her Maternity? The issues with furloughing, it also does not address any of the issues, such as; the lack of support a mother or child has had, their mental health, the lack of bonding time with their babies, or preparing their babies to the world before returning to work.

**Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)** - Many mothers and parents are facing more mental health and postpartum issues, this number has increased due to the lack of maternity care parents are facing due to Covid-19. Many mothers and parents would qualify for SSP from a health criteria, however they have to end their maternity leave after SMP whilst giving 8 weeks' notice to their employer before stating they have returned to work to then qualify for SSP. This could place many mothers and parents are employment risk. Meanwhile mothers and parents don't qualify for SSP of £95.85 per week, because DWP calculate back 8 weeks of the employer's income. A mother or parent who is forced onto the unpaid leave has no income for DWP to calculate for SSP.



**Universal Credit (UC)** – Many mothers and parents are denied UC due to their household status not individual status. The threshold cap of what is seems to be a liveable income is far too low for working families that have rent, mortgage, council tax and bills to pay. This applies to families who have no or little savings. To be denied UC creates families in a difficult situation to afford living and to afford the start of childcare when able to return to work.

**On 10th July 2020**, on public PMQ, Boris Johnson was asked by a campaigner ‘Beth Shirley’ about the Petition **‘Extend maternity leave by 3 months with pay in light of COVID-19’**. And how new mums/parents on maternity leave are struggling with no health visitor and Government Coronavirus support. Boris Johnson expressed, he hasn’t known of the petition or thought about this before. He will look into the petition and promise to get back to us...  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sA1tSKNb9pwkt7vAxa3wgHK3Ha18-6v1/view?usp=sharing>

**On 11th June 2020** at 14:30, the Committee held their third virtual Evidence Session as part of their ongoing inquiry. Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets, Paul Scully MP was questioned. The Petitions Committee questioned the Minister on crucial issues regarding maternity leave and pay raised by petitioners and experts as the UK enters its 12th week since lockdown began. Chair of the Petitions Committee, Catherine McKinnell MP, lead the session, where Members of Parliament placed questions to the Minister on overarching issues raised by petitioners and experts since the start of the pandemic. You can watch the session here;  
<https://t.co/E4DnTNWUis?amp=1> Transcript; <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/511/pdf/>

Paul Scully spoke about furloughing being the option. He repeated the first Government answer as being “*most generous in the World...we currently have no plans to extend it*”. He seemed to say “*although we disagree on the central ask of the maternity petition there’s plenty we can work on to improve flexibility*” this isn’t at all reflected on new Mums and babies in a Covid-19 pandemic. Chair Catherine Mckinnell and her team requested for Paul Scully to read the report that will be configured and to take away today’s information to review and to put across to the Treasury. Catherine Mckinnell summarised saying “I have a rough figure of £850m that the policy would cost and in the scheme of the £15b that is being spent on the job retention scheme in order to provide that difficult support to the vulnerable group, it would appear to be a reasonable request ...”

This is Chair Catherine McKinnell, feedback of the evidence session;  
<https://twitter.com/CatMcKinnell/status/1271135250450710528?s=20>

**On Monday 6th July 2020; Petition Committee published the Petitions Report of the petition please click on link to view all of the petitions information and findings;** <https://t.co/7iCkWceFBt?amp=1>

The Petitions Committee and Catherine Mckinnell expressed how urgent the report needing a response. They asked for an answer before Summer Recess 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Catherine words ‘New parents need clarity now on what support the Government will provide for them in the midst of this pandemic – this can’t wait until the autumn.

**On 21<sup>st</sup> July**, Minister Paul Scully wrote a letter to Chair Catherine Mckinnell explaining the difficulty to respond before summer recess, however will reply before the 60 day deadline (6<sup>th</sup> July – 3<sup>rd</sup> September). <https://committees.parliament.uk/.../2186/docu.../20153/default/>

**On 28<sup>th</sup> July**, Catherine Mckinnell to Paul Scully expressed how disappointed she was in the Government’s failure to respond urgently to report on the impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave.  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/.../petitions-committee-cha.../>

**On 22nd July 2020**, on PMQ, PM Boris Johnson was questioned by MP Gavin Robinson, about the report on the impact of Covid-19 on maternity & parental leave. Also reminding PM Boris Johnson’s promise that he made on public PMQ that he will look into the petition report. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r88o5qv0V4Xh\\_33Cx8VZ\\_jUdaRIW-iE1/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1r88o5qv0V4Xh_33Cx8VZ_jUdaRIW-iE1/view?usp=sharing)

**9th September 2020**, (Days overdue) Minister Paul Scully wrote to the Petitions Committee, stating the Government’s response to the report on impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave, rejecting the request of the 3 month Maternity and Adoption Leave extension alongside rejecting all 12 recommendations.  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmcompetitions/770/77002.htm>

**9th September 2020**, Committee express the disappointment at Government response to its report on impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave; <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/326/petitions->



[committee/news/117406/committee-express-disappointment-at-government-response-to-its-report-on-impact-of-covid19-on-maternity-and-parental-leave/](https://committee/news/117406/committee-express-disappointment-at-government-response-to-its-report-on-impact-of-covid19-on-maternity-and-parental-leave/)

**The Petitions Committee has agreed to debate this petition on Monday 5 October in Westminster Hall, so MPs can scrutinise the Government's response to its report on the Impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave.**

*As the Government haven't been holding many Parliamentary debates in the House of Commons due to Covid-19. Chair Catherine Mckinnell and the Petitions Committee configured a report of all current findings and evidence, which was issued to the Government to respond. 12 recommendations were made and listed in the report to help all current pregnant, new mums, parents, adopters and babies. However the Governments rejection to the 3 month Maternity and Adoption Leave extension and 12 recommendations will be debated.*

**16<sup>th</sup> July 2020**, Chair Catherine Mckinnell challenged the PM Boris Johnson on the Government's 'disappointing' response to our report on the impact of Covid-19 on maternity & parental leave. That he has failed to respond to Public PMQ and PMQ by MP Gavin Robinson. PM Boris Johnson seemed to not know of the full rejections made and will look into this. Watch back (from 15:45): <https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/31e5cbee-1b69-4137-9c72-f0231cd32686>

*Many new mothers and parents who are taxpayers are being discriminated. Forced to take unpaid leave and to survive in debt, quit their job or return to work earlier. Many are faced with employment discrimination. There are many mothers and parents excluded with no help. There are also pregnant mothers are being discriminated also. It has been noted there is an increase amount of maternal and infant mental health referrals. The petition needs an answer now to include all.*

**Please contact Bethany Power on Twitter if you wish to know any further information or request any contact information; @BethanyPower\_\_**



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**The Petition has caught the Media's eye from TV, radio and articles. Here are a few listed;**

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-essex-53693086>
- <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-08-18/working-parents-suffer-professionally-due-to-childcare-issues-during-pandemic-poll-finds>
- <https://speakerpolitics.co.uk/headlines/161-coronavirus/2247-petitions-committee-chair-extremely-disappointed-over-lack-of-urgent-government-response-to-report-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-maternity-and-parental-leave>
- <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/government-should-act-immediately-pandemic-new-parents-mps-say-a4516201.html%3famp>
- <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/06/government-has-abandoned-new-parents/amp/>
- <https://www.workingmums.co.uk/government-criticised-for-failure-to-respond-to-urgent-request-for-action-on-parental-leave/>
- <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.thesun.co.uk/news/12042940/maternity-leave-extension/amp/>
- <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.thesun.co.uk/money/3167483/maternity-pay-leave-2020-paternity/amp/>
- <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/saira-khan-need-more-support-22148980.amp>
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/women-falling-covid-cracks/>
- [https://www.womensequality.org.uk/new\\_mums?recruiter\\_id=1435840](https://www.womensequality.org.uk/new_mums?recruiter_id=1435840)
- <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/charts-coronavirus-setting-back-womens-careers-finances-decades/>
- [https://www.metro.news/trends-why-mums-have-had-it-worse-during-covid-19/2094000/amp/?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://www.metro.news/trends-why-mums-have-had-it-worse-during-covid-19/2094000/amp/?_twitter_impression=true)
- [https://inews.co.uk/news/lockdown-severe-long-lasting-impact-babies-young-families-573003?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://inews.co.uk/news/lockdown-severe-long-lasting-impact-babies-young-families-573003?_twitter_impression=true)
- <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2020-08-28/new-mums-left-feeling-anxious-and-isolated-by-covid-19-pandemic>
- <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/12510301/covid-childcare-crisis-mum-struggle-mental-health/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-dorset-53983358>
- [https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nightmare-lockdown-new-mums-who-22625665.amp?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/nightmare-lockdown-new-mums-who-22625665.amp?_twitter_impression=true)
- [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/britain-can-t-go-back-to-work-without-childcare-jfvbjdc0s?fbclid=IwAR0XsABloSLxRIPX93KxZXG\\_9xiOfhFA9t1mazjMSJAIrZAURNMRWVCtxds](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/britain-can-t-go-back-to-work-without-childcare-jfvbjdc0s?fbclid=IwAR0XsABloSLxRIPX93KxZXG_9xiOfhFA9t1mazjMSJAIrZAURNMRWVCtxds)

