

Parliamentary reply by DPM Teo Chee Hean on paternity and childcare policies

THIRTEENTH PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE
WRITTEN ANSWER
MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2016

Mr Desmond Choo:

To ask the Prime Minister (a) whether the Government will consider legislating (i) a second week of paternity leave for fathers and (ii) an increased share of maternity leave that mothers can share with their husbands; and (b) what are the measures or incentives that the Government is further considering to implement to improve the participation rate by companies to provide paternity leave.

Mr Louis Ng:

To ask the Prime Minister (a) whether the Government will be reviewing childcare leave policies; (b) whether it will consider increasing the amount of extended childcare leave; and (c) whether it will consider pegging the amount of childcare leave to not only the age of the children but also the number of children one has.

Mr Teo Chee Hean (for the Prime Minister):

The Government is strongly committed to supporting Singaporeans in their marriage and parenthood aspirations. Leave is one of the range of measures to support parenthood and like many other countries, Singapore has legislated leave provisions to support parents' infant and child caregiving needs. These provisions have been progressively enhanced over the years to help parents better manage both their work and family commitments.

Childcare leave provisions were increased in 2008 from two days to six days per parent per year, for those with children below the age of seven. We extended these provisions further in 2013 so that parents with children aged seven to 12 can also enjoy two days of Government-paid childcare leave each year.

Parents with more children are able to enjoy the annual childcare leave entitlement of six days per parent for a longer period of time, until their youngest child has turned seven years old. They continue to enjoy two days of childcare leave per parent per year, until their youngest child is aged 13.

Beyond this, we have also enhanced our leave schemes to enable fathers to play an active role in raising their children. International studies have shown that children with more involved fathers have better physical, cognitive and emotional developmental outcomes. Greater paternal involvement in childraising also helps mothers to stay active in the workforce.

In 2013, we introduced one week of legislated Government-paid Paternity Leave, as well as one week of Government-paid Shared Parental Leave, which allows fathers to share a week of their spouses' Maternity Leave entitlement. This is in addition to unpaid infant-care leave of one week which both parents may take.

Last year we enhanced Government-paid Paternity Leave by an additional week, which employers may offer voluntarily. Taken together with infant-care and childcare leave provisions, fathers can enjoy up to five weeks of leave upon the birth of their child to bond with their new-borns and care for their wives.¹

In considering whether to provide parents with more leave to care for their children, we are mindful

of the possible impact on businesses' operational and manpower needs. In particular, given that childcare leave is provided for 12 years after birth, we are careful not to inadvertently affect parents' employability. Further enhancements to these leave provisions have to be considered, balancing both the needs of parents and concerns of employers and employees.

This is why the second week of Government-paid Paternity Leave was introduced on a voluntary basis. The Government is now considering when to legislate the second week of Paternity Leave, with a view to providing a reasonable amount of time for businesses to make the necessary adjustments.

At the same time, some parents have provided feedback that they would like more flexibility for mothers to share their Maternity Leave entitlement with fathers, even as overall leave provisions remain unchanged. This would enable fathers to play a larger role in caring for their new-borns, and allow parents to decide flexibly how best to care for the child according to their family circumstances. We are considering this proposal carefully.

The Government will continue to encourage companies to do their part by providing a family-friendly work environment, including the provision of flexible work arrangements (FWAs). Such measures can also help employers to attract and retain talent. Employers can tap on the Work-Life Grant administered by Ministry of Manpower, under which eligible companies can receive up to \$160,000 to help them defray the costs of developing, piloting and sustaining FWAs.

¹ The five weeks comprise paternity leave (two weeks), shared parental leave (one week), six days of paid childcare leave, and six days of unpaid infant-care leave.