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Paid Parental Leave now within reach - Tony Abbott must not block the scheme

Paid Parental Leave is finally within reach for millions of Australian families, with details of the draft bill for a national scheme released today.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow called on Opposition leader Tony Abbott not to block the bill and urged business lobby groups to support the scheme of 18 weeks universal taxpayer-funded leave.

"Australian families and women in particular are counting on this scheme being in place on January 1 next year," Ms Burrow said.

"This is an important reform in the way we help women especially to handle work and family commitments at an emotionally and often financially stressful time.

"Tony Abbott's declared tactic of opposing legislation for the sake of it has got many women worried that paid parental leave is about to hit the Senate scrapheap.

"If Mr Abbott is serious about helping women and families, we would urge him and the Coalition to pass the bill when it comes before the Federal Parliament in the next few weeks.

"If not, he will have a legion of angry, pregnant women to deal with."

The ACTU President said the scheme was long overdue, with unions and members leading the campaign for the last 30 years.

While most unions have successfully negotiated schemes at enterprise level with some employers, this has not been evenly spread across the workforce, with low-paid workers having least access to paid parental leave.

Ms Burrow said the PPL scheme would lay a solid foundation for all working parents, but the ACTU and unions also believe that employers should contribute to workers' superannuation during the period of paid parental leave.

"Women's retirement savings sit at a notoriously lower level than men's, and this measure would help bridge the gap," says Ms Burrow.

"We would also like to see two weeks of paid paternity leave added to the mix to encourage fathers to be home with their partners with the arrival of a new baby."

Ms Burrow said the Rudd Government's paid parental leave scheme will deliver on another long-held goal for working Australians and unions, following this week's announcement that it will raise the Superannuation Guarantee to 12%.

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