

## Hong Kong introduces statutory paternity leave!

Dear TWF friends

As some of you know, the Hong Kong Government has announced the introduction of statutory paternity leave. Under the Employment (Amendment) Bill which was passed by Legco yesterday, from March 2015, employees will be entitled to three days of paternity leave at 80% of their average daily wages. Under the approved Bill, an employee can take the three days consecutively or separately at any time from four weeks prior to the expected delivery date to up to 10 weeks after the birth. Hong Kong's civil servants have been entitled to five days of paternity leave at full pay since 2012.

**At The Women's Foundation, while we believe the introduction of three days' statutory paternity leave by the Government to be a step in the right direction, we hope the Government will continue to monitor the situation and consider further legal reforms down the road to promote a more equal society.**

In order to remain competitive, Hong Kong needs to ensure it has the best talent comprising both men and women in its workforce. If Hong Kong wants to retain more women in the workplace, employers need to offer more family friendly workplace policies for both men and women because greater gender equality in the workplace clearly requires greater gender equality at home. This means men need to be more active fathers and take up a larger share of managing the household. To get to this point, we need to change mindsets and stereotypes so that women and men, girls and boys are comfortable with a world where both sexes play an equal part as earners and carers. Government policies on maternity and paternity leave, and how companies choose to discharge their statutory obligations, will critically impact the kind of society we have going forward.

It is worth noting that many countries have come to realise that a system of statutory maternity leave complemented by token paternity leave (as is now the case in Hong Kong) straitjackets men and women into scripted gender roles, and stereotypes the man as the main breadwinner in the family, an assumption which no longer necessarily holds true in many dual income households. Accordingly, a number of countries like the UK have recently introduced the concept of parental leave which allows couples to choose which partner goes to work while the other takes care of the baby.

Besides monitoring the situation regarding paternity leave with a view to extending the current three days allowance, we would also urge the Hong Kong Government to extend the current 10 week **statutory maternity leave entitlement in Hong Kong to at least 14 weeks, which is the ILO's recommended minimum**, based on considerations of maternal and infant health and family well-being. At just 10 weeks maternity leave, HK is lagging behind over 100 countries including Mainland China which stipulates statutory maternity leave of 98 days.

In the new year, TWF will be launching a study into organisational best practice on parental leave models and we look forward to sharing these results with you. In the meantime, we encourage companies to lead the way in offering their staff maternity leave in line with global best practice and in parallel, to consider the adoption of a gender-neutral parental leave approach. With your cooperation, we can bring Hong Kong into line with international standards for family welfare and encourage more women to remain in the workforce.

All the best

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