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New Zealand to consider miscarriage leave for parents in bid to tackle 'taboo' subject

Wednesday 5 September 2018, by [AINGE ROY Eleanor](#) (Date first published: 14 August 2018).

Women and their partners could be entitled to three days of paid bereavement leave after a miscarriage or stillbirth

A bill legislating three days' paid bereavement leave for women and their partners after a miscarriage will be considered by New Zealand's parliament.

The Labour MP Ginny Andersen, who sponsored the bill, said miscarriage was still a "taboo subject" in [New Zealand](#) and paid leave to grieve for the loss of a baby - at any stage of the pregnancy - would bring the subject into the open. The proposed bill also covers stillbirths.

At present, New Zealanders are entitled to bereavement leave after the loss of a family member or child but that does not include the loss of a child who is not born alive.

The ministry of health describes miscarriages as "fairly common" and says one or two out of every 10 pregnant women will miscarry a baby.

"The lack of clarity has meant some women have been in the position of having to argue with their employer about whether they are entitled to leave because they have lost their unborn child," said Andersen.

"A lot of women have had more than one miscarriage and it can be very traumatic and difficult if you are trying to hold down a job."

Andersen said anyone who had a "confirmed pregnancy" would be entitled to the leave, but there would likely need to be some discussion over how a pregnancy would be confirmed. Once it was confirmed, a miscarriage at any stage of the pregnancy would be eligible for the bereavement leave.

Iain Lees-Galloway, the minister for workplace relations and safety, said he would support the bill and that it reflected the government's "compassionate, people-centred and progressive approach" to politics.

"A miscarriage is a terrible time for parents and this bill provides certainty for parents and employers around the definition of a miscarriage so that parents can grieve and spend time to work through the personal toll of a miscarriage," said Lees-Galloways.

Kathryn van Beek, who approached several MPs to sponsor the bill, had a miscarriage two years ago. Afterwards she discovered many New Zealand women had struggled to get time off to grieve and process their loss.

"Not everyone who miscarries will experience grief and feel as though they need to access

bereavement leave, but for those who do it is important they have the option and it is legislated," she said.

Andersen said she expected cross-party support from NZ First and the Greens for her bill, and had also had warm and positive responses from a number of opposition National MPs. "A lot of people are saying this is a very sensible idea, and we want to take the politics out of this one and have the whole house support it."

New Zealand is not the first country in the world to progress legislation for miscarriage leave. Indian law stipulates women are entitled to [six weeks' leave if they miscarry a baby](#), but because the vast majority of employees engage in informal work few are able to access it.

Some other countries have provisions for paid leave if a woman gives birth to a stillborn baby.

In the Canadian province of Ontario if a woman loses a baby 17 weeks or less before her due date [she is entitled to 17 weeks of unpaid pregnancy leave](#).

In the UK a miscarriage before the end of the 24th week of pregnancy [does not qualify for bereavement leave](#), but a stillborn child born after this date means the mother is entitled to maternity leave and associated pay.

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