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PETER JON'S REMARKS AT HUMA

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Cardus Presentation to Parliamentary Committee on Paid Parental Leave

Peter Jon Mitchell, Program Director, Family

Family Program Director Peter Jon Mitchell presents to the committee about Cardus' proposed reforms to increase the accessibility of paid parental leave.

OPENING REMARKS

Thank you for the invitation to appear today and thank you for the work of this committee in supporting families across Canada.

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which people, institutions, and governments work together for the common good.

I direct the family program at Cardus, which studies family formation and examines ways to enhance family stability.

Paid parental leave provides economic security and time for parents to develop important attachment bonds with children. Paid leave is correlated to increased infant health, lower risks of postpartum depression, increased father involvement, and lower risk of union dissolution.[1]

Paid leave policies serve two interests that exist in a degree of tension with one another. The Employment Insurance benefit is intended to attach parents to the paid workforce while also providing financial security and time to forge strong parent-child attachments during the early years of a child's life. This tension requires careful consideration when formulating policy options.

Not all employed parents can access paid parental leave. Parents who work part-time, or are in precarious work arrangements, or who are full-time students may not meet the federal eligibility threshold of 600 hours of insurable employment.

The current federal EI threshold can prevent some parents from accessing future parental leave when they choose to work fewer hours to provide unpaid caregiving. Some parents are unable to achieve the threshold before a subsequent birth or adoption.[2]

1 G. Garon-Carrier et al. "The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan: a policy example for reducing inequalities, supporting family functioning and healthy child development," Health Promotion International, 2026. P. 3

2 Jennifer Robson, "Parental Benefits in Canada: Which Way Forward?," IRPP Study (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, March 2017), 4, https://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/study-no63.pdf.

Our first recommendation is to reconsider the eligibility threshold. The Quebec Parental Insurance Plan threshold of $2,000 of insurable earnings provides an interesting proposal. An individual earning Quebec's minimum wage of $16.60 an hour, can be eligible after just 121 hours of work, compared to the federal threshold of 600 hours. Data suggests that in 2023, about 90 percent of births were covered under the QPIP compared to 78 percent under the federal EI system.[3]

Our second recommendation is to update the Family Supplement threshold for lower income families. The phase out threshold of $25,921 in net annual household income has not changed since 1997. At that time, the phase out threshold matched the net family income threshold at which the Canada Child Tax Benefit began to decrease. The CCTB increased based on inflation, but the Family Supplement remained unadjusted. A non-biding motion in the House of Commons in 2003 to increase the Family Supplement phase out threshold was adopted but never implemented.

Quebec adjusted the threshold to match earnings equivalent to 40 hours a week at minimum wage. The new threshold is indexed to inflation and will be adjusted to future increases in minimum wage.[4] Applying the same method based on the federal minimum wage of $18.15 an hour, would result in the phase out threshold of $37,752 annually.

Finally, given the health and developmental benefits associated paid parental leave, the committee could explore extending the length of leave.

The evidence shows that the introduction of the extend leave option under the current EI system did not reduce the likelihood that a parent would return to work.[5] Yet parents who opted for the extended benefit were more likely to be in partnered families, have higher income, work unionized jobs and have access to wage top ups.[6] This suggests other considerations regarding access to paid leave would need to be addressed before considering extending the duration of leave.

Paid parental leave offers families some stability during a significant life transition. More families should have access to this important benefit.

3 G. Garon-Carrier et al. p.3.

4 G. Garon-Carrier et al. p. 6,

5 Choi, Youjin, "The likelihood and timing of mothers' return to work and child care arrangements after parental leave, revisited," Economic and Social Reports. Statistics Canada, July 22, 2026

6 Evaluation of the Employment Insurance Maternity and Parental Benefit. ESDC, Nov. 18, 2022.

ABOUT CARDUS

CARDUS is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

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