

October 15, 2018

Attention: Stephanie Feldman

Dear Ms. Feldman

Our daughter Hadley was born on December 22, 2017, with a congenital heart defect. While her defect was treatable, it required surgery at a young age in order to repair her heart. The surgery, although complex and scary, had an optimistic prognosis. April 3, 2018, was a day that we will never forget. It was a day that no parent should ever have to go through; our daughter underwent open-heart surgery. As parents in the waiting room, nothing could ease the nervousness that you feel every time that a door opens, waiting to hear the news that your child made it through the surgery and is waiting for you in the recovery room. Our story did not end up that way. The doctor called us into a room to tell us that while the surgical repair went quite well, she developed a bleed in her heart muscle and her chances of survival were almost zero. We had to wait another hour to see our daughter while they transferred her from surgery into the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at BC Children's Hospital. Our daughter's heart wasn't beating and she was on life support. Wires, tubes and monitors were everywhere. Our happy baby was now being kept alive by machines. She spent two weeks on life support to allow her tiny body a chance to heal while we made decisions for her future. Life support is not a long-term option and her heart was not recovering, therefore, the only option was to transition her to a Berlin Heart to buy time. Our baby needed a heart transplant to survive. The procedure itself was risky and groundbreaking as our surgeon had to connect the Berlin Heart in a way that had only previously been done twice before. Again, our daughter was given a slim chance of recovering from the procedure and that the first 24 hours after would be critical. She fought and proved her strength as she pulled through. As time went on, more complications arose. Two weeks later, our daughter's journey came to an end. The minute that your baby dies, the last thing on your mind is your income, however, that is what the government of Canada imposes on you. Your income via parental benefits is immediately suspended. You are not given a mourning period. You are expected to return to work and carry on with your life, as if nothing had ever happened. For any parent, the implications are enormous, let alone if you are a single parent. Having gone through this, I can assure you that a parent is not mentally fit to resume work the day after a child passes. It's been over five months, and while I am mostly functional, I still have periods where it takes all my strength to keep from breaking down. As if this is bad enough, a letter came in the mail, stating that I owed the government over \$1000 for an overpayment that they had made as they did not receive notification immediately after the death of my daughter. I know that our situation is not unique. Other Canadians have lost babies. Some families are not as fortunate as ours. I am pleading to the Canadian government to change their processes to align with Canadian values. Allow parents a brief period to grieve without having to worry about their family income. Money had already been set-aside by the government for parental benefits in the first place. I urge you to consider extending parental benefits to continue for at least six weeks after the loss of a child to allow parents opportunity to heal and care for their other grieving children before parental benefits are suspended and grieving parents are expected to return to work.

Sincerely,
Nicole Stark, a grieving mother.