

I am writing to show support for Motion - 110 and because I would like to see change to the legislature surrounding service Canada and EI benefits, specifically as it pertains to families who have experienced infant and perinatal loss.

This cause personally impacts us as we had a beautiful son, Wilder who was unexpectedly stillborn at 40w5d in September 2017. Wilder was our third child and after a normal healthy pregnancy we were shocked to find he had passed when we went into hospital in active labour. The resources offered to us after his passing were minimal, and the supports and counselling we had to find by seeking it ourselves. The months following his birth were the hardest our family has ever known. Not only were we navigating the grief and trying to understand our child's death, but we also had to support our older children through the same loss.

At that time I was on maternity leave, and was eligible to continue my maternity leave until the end of the 15w claim. After which I went onto a medical leave/sickness claim which was another 15 weeks. I was told I was ineligible for paternity leave, which was the other 35 weeks of benefits. My husband also deep in his own grief, and was unable to work, therefore we had no extended medical benefits during this heartbreaking time. We both needed counselling and outside support, we reached out to our local hospice and they paired us up with a grief support person for 8w of one on one meetings , which although these support people were kind and lovely, they were not trained professionals. We needed more help than we had access to or than we could afford.

And then though still deep in grief, Four months after our loss we were pregnant once again. I called service Canada to see what this would mean for my employment insurance benefits. They explained that my claim could be extended 15w beyond the 52w claim bc of my medical claim, which would have brought my claim end date to about the end of October. I was hopeful I would be having the coming baby in Sept 2018 and that would mean only 1 month of benefits approx available to me.

I had no choice but to go back to work, at a time when I wasn't mentally or emotionally ready, in order to have the possibility of another maternity claim. I then learned I was expecting twins, and by the end of June I was no longer physically able to work, and went onto medical leave, and just skimmed by with the 600 hours required to have another claim. However, because I was only back to work for such a short time, my weekly benefit amount is also less than what it should be, because of the way the hours/weeks and benefit rate is calculated. I worked only 16 weeks, and the calculation is based on 22w so the amount is significantly lower, through if I was physically able I would have worked longer. In addition, every time I called to speak to someone at Service Canada I would have to re explain about our stillbirth, more than once the agent would say they didn't understand why I hadn't taken my parental benefits. I would request them to put it in my file so I wouldn't have to relive the pain and keep retelling, yet that never happened.

I have spoken with many other families, and mothers who have been in this same situation. It is quite common after a loss of a baby, to have another pregnancy within the next 3-6m and many women are unable, or choose not to return to work, and just accept the fact that there is no benefits or support from our government. Something has to change. There has to be some special conditions or special benefits in place for those that experience stillbirth and infant loss, including SIDS. Fortunately I was able to work and have another claim but we need something in place for future families in these situations.

In summary I believe there are some significant changes that can be made to reduce the financial and emotional hardship placed on Canadian families who have experienced perinatal or infant loss. My suggestions are as follows:

- That parents who have a subsequent child and are unable to go back to work during their pregnancy should be able to gain access to the 35 weeks of Parental Leave, from their past Maternity Claim they were approved for before their child passed.

-That parents are able to receive special bereavement benefits after the loss of their child. There should be no restriction on the amount of times a family can gain access to this benefit.

- That there should be consistent counselling services and supports available to families and children following the loss, in a timely manner.

-That hospitals and government agencies are better trained and informed on supporting families through infant loss and the bereavement period.

Thank you,

Kimberly Lockhart,