

## **BRIEF FOR MOTION 110 COMMITTEE**

Lori-Ann Huot

Program Coordinator – Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this brief is to present my thoughts, regarding the motion that the committee is studying, to determine the impact on parents who have suffered the loss of a baby; therefore, exploring to seek adequate support and compassion for these parents. It is my hope that through the information received from witnesses, the committee can make appropriate recommendations to the government to improve the support that bereaved parents receive after the loss of a baby. As a result, the increased support will assist in ensuring that parents are not further traumatized by financial and emotional stress due to the lack of well-structured and non-biased government programs.

### **Background**

Personally, I have experienced the loss of two babies. Loren in September 1998 to a partial molar pregnancy at 17 weeks gestation and Brooklynn in December 2002 (twin to my youngest daughter) to a sub-chorionic hemorrhage at 15 weeks gestation. The gestation of when my losses occurred prevented me from accessing any government programs for financial support while my husband and I grieved the loss of our babies. The love that I felt for my babies was not determined by gestation, instead, the love was immediate from the moment they were conceived. Not having any financial support after our losses, meant my husband returned to work immediately so that I could take time off from work, denying him the opportunity to mourn the loss of our babies. I could only take a few short weeks off because our family relied on both my husband's and my income. It was difficult to return to normal functioning at work as I was still grieving intensely as it was so soon after our losses.

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After experiencing this lack of support after the loss of my babies, I co-founded the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program in September 2002. Angel Whispers provides individual and group support to families that have been devastated by the loss of a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS, or neonatal death. I became the Angel Whispers Program Coordinator in January 2010 and am responsible for providing the individual support to grieving families and for facilitating all the support groups we offer.

In August 2016 I completed my Death & Grief Studies Certification through Dr. Alan Wolfelt with the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado.

### **Discussion**

The following points are to be considered:

1. In 2017, 3,159 stillbirths were recorded in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018)
2. 1 in 4 women will experience a miscarriage in their lifetime (Tommy's, 2018)
3. Grief is not something that can be reconciled in a typical 3-day bereavement leave.
4. Grief is the price we pay for love, there is no love greater than the love between a parent and a child.
5. Parents grieve for their baby along with the lost hopes and dreams for the future.
  - a. When a family loses a baby, they lose a 1 year old celebrating their first birthday, a 5 year old starting kindergarten, an 18 year old graduating from high school, a 25 year old getting married and a 30 year old starting a family.

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6. Miscarriage, Stillbirth, SIDS and neonatal death are losses that result in a disenfranchised grief that is generally not well understood by friends, family or society resulting in families feeling isolated.
7. Because the resulting grief is generally not well understood, families are often not well supported making it even more critical for both parents to have time together without one parent being hurried back to work before being emotionally ready.
8. The focus is often put on the grieving mother and her needs, leaving grieving fathers as forgotten mourners.
9. Unreconciled grief can lead to potential relationship issues, difficulties in effectively parenting other children and long term mental health challenges with depression and anxiety.
10. It has been found through research that “four in ten women [report] symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) three months after ... pregnancy loss.” (Tommy’s, 2018).
  - a. There are various PTSD symptoms that can be experienced by these mothers, such as, but not limited to, nightmares, insomnia, panic attacks, anxiety, flashbacks, obsessive, and intrusive thoughts.

While considering the points mentioned above, it is important to note that the current federal government benefits are only granted to a mother if she has given birth after 20 weeks gestation, as a stillbirth in Canada is defined as being a loss after 20 weeks gestation. Why are mothers and fathers penalized if they lose their baby prior to 20 weeks gestation by being denied those

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benefits? A parent's grief is no different whether they lose a baby at 18 weeks; experiencing labor and giving birth to a baby who has died, or a parent whose baby dies at 10 weeks gestation; where a miscarriage is experienced traumatically at home. Despite the circumstances surrounding the loss these parents are left emotionally, mentally, cognitively, physically, and socially affected.

### **Recommendations**

These are recommendations I would like the committee to consider:

1. A grief benefit that will be offered to grieving parents regardless of gestation, removing the current 20 week requirement.
  - a. No exclusions with regards to gestation.
2. A grief benefit that will be automatically accessible to parents.
3. A grief benefit that can be accessed by either or both bereaved parents. Perhaps a specific length of leave that can be shared by the parents (ie. 15 week leave where both parents can simultaneously take 7.5 weeks each).
4. A grief benefit that has no time restriction on when a family can access supports.
5. A grief benefit that can be accessed after each loss a family experiences (many parents experience multiple losses).
  - a. Commonly, a high percentage of women who experience a loss will become pregnant again within 18 months; this subsequent pregnancy does not always result in a live birth.

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- b. It has also been reported that “1 in 100 women have 3 or more miscarriages in a row” (Tommy’s, 2018).
6. Information on grief benefits that can be easily accessed by bereaved parents.

### **Summary**

Bereaved parents deserve compassion, understanding, and a non-judgmental opportunity to take the needed time to grieve for the loss of their baby. Both parents should have the opportunity to take time off from work to grieve and mourn for their much loved and wanted baby without the financial burden of unpaid leave from work. Time off from work allows bereaved parents to effectively grieve and mourn for their baby minimizing potential long term issues within their relationship, issues with parenting other children, and potential mental health concerns which accumulatively could have a much bigger financial impact on government programs than the creation of a benefit program that could be offered to these parents after they experience the loss of their baby. A grief benefit program would be a proactive approach to supporting these bereaved families instead of the reactive response and potential strain on other government programs that these parents would access in the future to address the complications of relationship issues, parenting challenges and mental health concerns.

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### References

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