

Members of Parliament,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Committee with a brief that speaks to the impact that a loss of a child has on the family.

Notice, I did say family and not only the mother.

My family was only 5 weeks from delivering our son Ivor. We didn't know it was a boy at the time. I had a relatively ok pregnancy. Ivor was a kicker and we'd often laugh at my tummy moving here, there, and everywhere. My daughter was delighted to feel it. We were 5 weeks away from a full 40 weeks, what could go wrong? We were in the home stretch and he was a kicker and according to all the ultrasounds, he was healthy.

One evening I said to my husband that Ivor wasn't moving much, I felt strange. The next morning I called into my maternity care unit and went to check on things. I did all the things that they told me to do, drink something cold and sweet, move around a bit, etc. We don't have family and I remember asking a good friend to meet my husband and I at the hospital because we needed someone to watch Lillian, our oldest.

We were in the ultrasound and I remember the moment they told me he was no longer alive, his heart had stopped. How could that be? He was healthy, he was ready to come, we were ready for him to come.

From that moment on I was either shut down or completely buried in grief. I don't even know how my little girl was doing at home and how was I going to explain this to her? I was looking at my husband and trying to be strong for him too, although, we were not ok. I had some sick leave I used until I delivered Ivor, I remember my moments with him, sobbing while apologizing for not being able to keep him alive. I told him he was loved and we were so sad.

I was given my 17 weeks of maternity leave. I was "lucky". My husband had used his vacation and sick leave to be with my daughter and I until we could have family at our house to help. My daughter didn't know what was going on and I am amazed at her resiliency to this day and wonder how much we relied on her to grow up during that time when she shouldn't have needed to.

I have thought about what would have happened if Ivor had died after my 17 weeks of maternity leave were up? What impact could it have had on our family if my husband was provided the time to truly grieve, to help me grieve, to keep me sane – trust me when I say, I was not sane a lot of the time after Ivor died. I wish my husband was there to help me, so we could get through that tragedy as a family. I didn't deal with the grief because I had a family to take care of and I had to recover from birth.

I would like to encourage this group to take into consideration having a father and a mother both being eligible for bereavement leave. It should not relate only to maternity leave. Maternity

leave is to provide a mother the appropriate time to recover from the physical hardship of pregnancy and birth. This is well earned, I can attest that pregnancy takes a toll whether you bring home a baby or not. Bereavement leave is different, it is for a loss of a child, whether they are stillborn, newborn, toddlers, pre-schoolers, school aged, tweens or teenagers. A child's age is not a factor, they were your child, your future and they had so much of your heart.

I implore you, please consider leave for both the mother and the father during this time. Three days of paid leave and two days of unpaid leave is simply not enough. That's barely enough time to mentally come to terms with what has just happened to you and your family.

I'm not able to give you any more of the story than I have now, I can't, I have not yet come to terms with it and it was 4 years ago, he was delivered on September 10, 2014. He was beautiful, he was ours, and he has a piece of our heart. I wear some of his ashes in a necklace with his name engraved on it to carry him with me at all times.

Committee members, parliamentarians, anyone who can make this change. Please consider this request. Please provide at least 12 weeks and consider providing 17 weeks of paid bereavement leave for both mothers and fathers who have lost a child.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story and state my request.

Sincerely,  
Chantelle Holmes  
Mother