Statutory Bereavement Leave

The situation

Research commissioned by Sue Ryder into the impact of bereavement* has demonstrated the need for better support for bereaved people in the workplace. Workplaces can play a big role in supporting employees through their grief and mitigating its consequences.

However, despite nearly a quarter of working age people experiencing a bereavement in the last 12 months, many employees often suffer in silence or are poorly supported. Some are even forced back to work without time to grieve, for fear of losing their job. This has negative consequences for the individual, the employer and the wider economy.

Not only can losing someone have serious consequences for mental and physical health, it also costs the UK economy an estimated £22.9bn a year, due to presenteeism, absenteeism and reduced employment. While bereavement will remain a fact of life, if just a fraction of the costs associated with bereavement could be mitigated through better support by employers it would provide a considerable boost to the economy.

Typically, UK companies offer 3-5 days compassionate leave for the death of a close relative, but it’s entirely at the discretion of employers. That leaves potentially thousands of people unable to take leave, without fearing what it would mean for their job security. At a time when an individual is experiencing the immediate grief of someone close dying, they should not have to worry about work at the same time.

Indeed, in response to the 'Jack’s Law' campaign, the Government has now given a right to statutory bereavement leave of two weeks for parents if they experience the death of a child under 18.

What should change

We believe that losing any immediate family member1 can be deeply devastating and as such, statutory paid bereavement leave of two weeks should be introduced for all these types of bereavement.

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1 An immediate family member would be a spouse or civil partner, partner, parent (including step-parent), sibling (including step-sibling), grandparent or child (including child over the age of 18).

2 Censuswide survey on behalf of Sue Ryder of 1,061 UK respondents aged 16+ who were bereaved, November 2019
While a **statutory minimum of two weeks bereavement leave** for the loss of an immediate family member is not in itself going to directly help someone grieve and recover from their loss, it would remove a significant burden from the shoulders of all those experiencing a close bereavement.

While such a right could incur some short term costs, ultimately it would lead to a significant saving for the UK economy and the Treasury through reduced staff absence, higher employee productivity and less reliance on the health and benefits systems post-bereavement.

The Government will shortly be introducing an **Employment Bill** to Parliament and we would like a statutory right to bereavement leave included in the Bill. By bringing in this legislation the Government would be taking a significant step in supporting people through the most difficult time of their lives.

**How you can help**

1. Support our call for two weeks statutory bereavement leave by:
   - **Writing to the Secretary of State** for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy to ask for these proposals to be included in the upcoming Employment Bill;
   - **Tabling parliamentary questions** on statutory bereavement leave and bereavement support in the workplace;
   - Raising these proposals during parliamentary debates and question times.

2. Show your support on social media using **#BereavementLeaveForAll** and share our dedicated advice page [www.sueryder.org/copling-with-grief-and-bereavement](http://www.sueryder.org/copling-with-grief-and-bereavement) to support people who are grieving at this time.

**Contact**

For suggested PQs and a template letter to the Secretary of State, please contact:

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*Survey evidence supports the case for expanding statutory bereavement leave:*

62% of people believe paid leave following the death of a parent, partner, sibling or child should be a week or more.

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*Sue Ryder commissioned an economist in September 2020 to conduct a literature review of current research. Additional research was commissioned with a survey conducted by Censuswide in September 2020 surveying 1,000 working age adults, 1,000 Scottish working age adults and 500 bereaved people.*

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*Sue Ryder is a charity registered in England and Wales (1052076) and in Scotland (SC039578). Ref no. 07246 © Sue Ryder. November 2020.*