



Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt, Comhionannais agus Athchóirithe Dlí

Changes in Maternity Leave

Mr. Michael McDowell, T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform wishes to announce the commencement of the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 by Order with effect from 18 October, 2004 so as to bring into effect a number of improvements to maternity protection legislation.

The main provisions of the Act are as follows:-

- A new provision reducing the compulsory pre-confinement period of maternity leave from 4 weeks to 2 weeks.*
- Provision for expectant mothers to attend one set of ante-natal classes without loss of pay (except the last 3 classes in a set). Provision for a once-off right to fathers to paid time off to attend the two ante-natal classes immediately prior to the birth.
- Provision for breastfeeding mothers who have given birth within the previous 6 months with an entitlement, without loss of pay, to either an adjustment of working hours or where breastfeeding facilities are provided by the employer, breastfeeding breaks.
- Provision for termination of additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of illness.
- Provision for an employee to postpone the period of maternity leave/additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of the hospitalisation of the child. Leave may only be postponed after 14 weeks maternity leave has been taken.**
- Provision that an employee's absence from work on additional maternity leave will count for all employment rights associated with the employment (except remuneration and superannuation benefits) such as seniority and annual leave.

For further information on the new provisions under the Act, please contact the **Equality Authority, Clonmel Street, Dublin 2, tel: 01-4173333, lo-call: 1890 245545.**

Note: The provisions at * and ** will have implications for Maternity Benefit payable by the Department of Social and Family Affairs for persons commencing maternity leave on or after 18 October, 2004.

Enquiries regarding Maternity Benefit Payments should be made to the Maternity Benefit Section, Department of Social and Family Affairs at Lo-call 1890 690690 or by e-mail to maternityben@welfare.ie