

It's Time for a More Compassionate Society ? Bill C-211

by KYLE SEEBACK, MP

The loss of a child is unimaginable for a parent under any circumstance. Parents who've experienced a stillbirth, a miscarriage, or the death of a child confront many complex and excruciatingly painful emotions, ranging from tremendous guilt to inconsolable grief.

It takes time for parents to process this tragic loss and begin the very long and difficult road of healing. Parents need support while they work through the stages of grief. This must change. It's time for a more compassionate society and with the recent passing of Bill C-211, a considerable step forward has been taken for bereaved parents enduring the loss of a child.

On December 14, 2021, my Conservative colleague, Tom Kmiec, Member of Parliament for Calgary Shepard, introduced Bill C-211, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (bereavement leave). This bill expands bereavement leave to eight weeks of unpaid leave for parents who have experienced a stillbirth, the death of a child under the age of 18, or the death of a disabled child in the parent's care.

The legislation is a significant step forward in demonstrating our shared support for the bereaved parent community and letting them know they're not alone in their overwhelming grief.

Bill C-211 acknowledges the unbearable pain associated with this type of loss while expanding bereavement leave to provide five days of leave for parents who experience a miscarriage. This is an important advancement in the rights of Canadian workers because the current bereavement system, as defined in the Canada Labour Code, only provides for a generic three days of paid leave and two days of unpaid leave for parents who experience the death of a child. The current system is clearly failing parents with its unfairness, lack of sympathy, and has an unrealistic view of the extent of the grief parents experience and for them to make the necessary arrangements.

My other Conservative colleague, Blake Richards, Member of Parliament for Banff-Airdrie, passed non-partisan Motion M-110 in the House of Commons in June 2018, which called on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) to initiate a study on the impacts of the loss of an infant child. The resulting study underscored the shocking failure of government programming to support grieving parents. Later in 2018, both MP Kmiec and MP Richards presented a motion at the Finance Committee that would've expanded bereavement leave in Budget 2018. Sadly, every Liberal member of the Committee voted against it at that time.

Three years have passed and a considerable gap has remained for grieving parents. I understand the pressing need for more compassion to be extended to bereaved parents, as I've personally experienced this type of loss.

On January 23, 2012, I lost my son, Elijah, during childbirth. There are no words to describe this loss and the trauma that parents suffer on top of the immensely difficult and long healing process. This is something MP Kmiec also knows all too well, as he lost his daughter, Lucy-Rose, in August 2018, after only living for 39 days. Bill C-211 is a bill, rooted in compassion, giving support to grieving parents when they need it the most.

I'm pleased Bill C-211 was quickly adopted by the government and passed on December 16, 2021, just days after MP Kmiec introduced it in the House of Commons. This shows there's wide recognition of the urgent need for this legislation to support bereaved families. I'm proud of the cross-party co-operation to quickly pass this bill, which has been long overdue.

I sincerely hope Bill C-211 will help to relieve at least some of the enormous burden on the shoulders of bereaved parents across Canada. I also believe Bill C-211 represents progress on the much-needed work towards building a more compassionate and understanding society for bereaved families. I encourage you to write me to share your thoughts on other steps that could be taken to support bereaved families.

I also invite you to share any questions or concerns you may have about any bills before the House of Commons. It's critically important that I know what my constituents are thinking. You can send me an e-mail at Kyle.Seeback@parl.gc.ca or write me at my parliamentary office at:

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Christmas is quickly approaching, making us especially grateful for our families and friends. From my family to yours, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and healthy 2022!