

GMB urges 12 month extension of maternity rights protections

GMB has called for a comprehensive extension of employee protection relating to maternity and paternity rights, including for those employed on zero hours contracts and agency workers.

The call comes in response to a government consultation that proposes legal protection from redundancy for pregnant women and new mothers on maternity leave being extended to six months after they return to work. There is also to be consideration as to whether the protections should be extended to other groups such as those taking adoption and shared parental leave.

The move comes in response to alarming research showing that over three quarters of women (77%) reported suffering discrimination or disadvantage as a result of pregnancy, maternity leave and/or on return from maternity leave.

This is equivalent to 390,000 mothers a year.

The research by the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy found 54,000 women a year losing their jobs due to pregnancy or maternity. It was found women were better protected if in a trade union.

GMB are calling for an extension of protection from dismissal from the moment the pregnancy begins – to include those on zero hour's contracts and agency workers. This would stop unscrupulous employers seeking to make employees redundant before the maternity leave begins. In addition, it argues, that there

should also be a right to return to work on flexible working terms, with dismissal only permitted in exceptional circumstances.

They also argue that there should be protection for the period of 12 months from the date of return to work to ensure protection for women who are breastfeeding and those who may be on temporary flexible working following maternity leave.

There are clear benefits in such an approach.

"This would reduce the costs to women of losing their jobs - both in litigation costs and societal costs of the difficulties of obtaining fresh employment as a new mother. A simple ban on dismissing pregnant women would ensure women were perfectly clear about their legal rights," said Susan Harris, GMB Legal Director. "Employers would see a reduction in the costs incurred for them in understanding, and then explaining clearer legal provisions as opposed to the existing more complicated provisions; more importantly it would reduce the costs to business of losing qualified and experienced women workers by having a more effective provision."



GMB want the government to extend protections being proposed and for much more of the burden to be placed on employers to explain why pregnant women have left their employment.

The union also supports the recommendation that the Government should implement a system similar to that used in Germany under which pregnant women and for a period after giving birth could only be made redundant in specified circumstances.

The consultation ended on 5 April 2019.

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FUNDING BOOST FOR VICTIMS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ABUSE



Rape and sexual abuse support services across England and Wales have been awarded increased government funding today (22 March 2019) – totalling £24m over 3 years – to help even more victims.

The move, which involves a 10 per cent increase in funding by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), will see 79 rape support centres awarded grants – more than

ever before. This will ensure, for the first time, that there are government-funded services in all 42 of the country's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) areas.

This will include a 50 per cent funding increase for services across Greater London – recognising the heightened demand for services in the region – with almost 15 per cent of all sexual offences occurring across the capital last year.

Nationally over 150,000 sexual offences were recorded by police last year, with 1 in 5 women having experienced some type

of sexual assault in their lifetime. This is despite the crimes often going unreported.

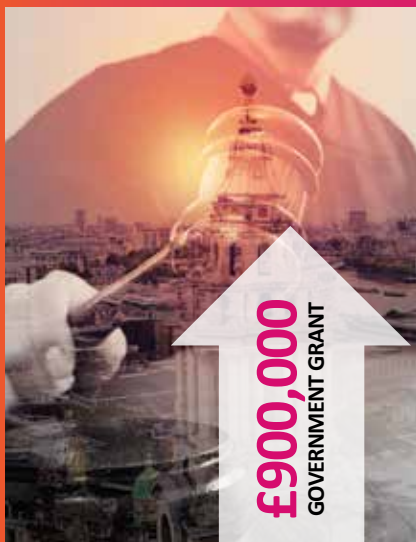
The money will go towards a range of services, such as tailored face-to-face support and counselling to help victims cope with and, as far as possible, recover from these horrific crimes.

Among the services receiving a funding boost are a national helpline and webchat service for male victims following a significant rise in the number of men and boys coming forward to report crimes and access support.

The extra money will also see the number of PCC areas with government-funded male support centres nearly quadruple from 11 to 41.

Funding has also been extended to include those who suffered abuse while under the age of 13, in recognition that many victims of child sexual abuse may struggle to access timely support.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE GRANT TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN FAMILY COURTS



In the draft Domestic Abuse Bill and consultation response the government announced its intention to improve support for victims of domestic abuse who are going through family court proceedings.

The Ministry of Justice announced that it has awarded a grant of just under £900,000 to two organisations who provide in-court support to vulnerable victims: the Personal Support Unit (PSU) and the Citizens Advice Witness Service.

PSU has been supporting litigants in person in family courts since 2001 and Citizens Advice has been supporting witnesses in criminal

court proceedings since 2015. They both have extensive front-line experience of helping victims and witnesses navigate court processes and feel safe at court.

Citizens Advice will be using the funding to extend their current Witness Service to selected family courts to provide information and practical and emotional support to victims before, during and after the day of the hearing. PSU will be using the funding to invest in further training of their staff and volunteers and to share learnings on best practice with a range of family justice stakeholders. The funding runs from January 2019 through to 31 March 2020, and will allow Citizens Advice to provide these services in up to 12 family courts across England and PSU in 24 courts across England and Wales.

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