

Women's Policy Group NI

Women's Policy Group Response and Endorsement to Private Members' Bill on Work-Life Balance Martina Anderson MLA

22nd April 2021

Dear Martina Anderson MLA,

The Women's Policy Group NI would like to take this opportunity respond to your public consultation [survey](#) on a Private Members' Bill on Work-Life Balance.

The [Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) (WPG) is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, NGOs, LGBTQ+ organisations, support service providers, migrant organisations, human rights and equality organisations and individuals.

Over the years this important network has ensured there is good communication between politicians, policy makers and women's organisations on the ground. We welcome the news of a Private Members' Bill on Work-Life Balance. It is imperative that urgent action is taken in Northern Ireland to tackle the pressures people have faced in managing their employment, home life and caring responsibilities, particularly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many organisations in the women's sector are working beyond capacity at the moment, and we have been responding to an unprecedented number of public consultations, proposed PMBs, calls for evidence and more. Therefore, we do not have the capacity to respond directly to your public survey on this Bill.

However, we have recently undertaken a significant amount of work in relation to women's workers' rights, the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities and the need to address the increased pressures on women trying to manage throughout the pandemic. The WPG would like to share this information with you as it relates directly to the issue of work-life balance and may be useful in the further development of your Bill.

This includes the following PMB consultation responses submitted recently on behalf of the WPG:

- WPG Response to Jemma Dolan's PMB on Banning Zero Hour Contracts – [here](#),
- WPG Response to Rachel Woods' PMB on Paid Leave for Victims of Domestic Abuse – [here](#),
- WPG Response to Mervyn Storey's PMB on a Carers' Act – [here](#),

We also have undertaken a significant amount of work on these issues through our **WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan**. Therefore, I wanted to send on the following documents to you as they may be useful for your Bill given the relevance to issues relating to work-life balance:

- Full Feminist Recovery Plan – [here](#),
- Feminist Recovery Plan Summary for the Department of Economy – [here](#),
- Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing on Women's Workers' Rights – [here](#),
- Feminist Recovery Plan Key Briefing on Carers' Rights – [here](#).

WPG Endorsement of ICTU Consultation Response:

Within our membership we have a number of Trade Union organisations, as well as ICTU, who have been involved in much of this work and are experts on issues relating to work-life balance and women's employment.

The WPG would, therefore, like to fully endorse the response to your PMB on Work-Life Balance submitted by ICTU, which is the umbrella organisation for trade unions on the island.

In particular, in line with recommendations within the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan, we would like to echo the following comments in the ICTU consultation response:

"We have long argued that tinkering around the edges of policy will fail to solve enduring inequalities in the labour market between women and men as well failing to tackle the burden of care falling disproportionately on women. Instead, what is needed is a robust legislative agenda accompanied by a comprehensive strategy to systematically tackle these issues, including a women's employment strategy which considers all of the issues which hold women back in work and in society as well as a family leave system which ensures that women and men are able to play a full and positive role in the lives of their children and wider family.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into stark relief the totally inadequate childcare support system in Northern Ireland, a system which sees childcare as an individual responsibility rather than a public good. "

We also welcome and endorse the following comments from ICTU:

- The call to extend the existing right to request flexible working to all, regardless of employment status. This would include agency workers; remove the qualifying period and make it a day one right; place a statutory duty on employers to inform employees of the flexible working arrangements available to them.
- The call to introduce paid carers leave, particularly given the unequal distribution of care between men and women in our society and the essential nature of all forms of care.

- The implementation of a statutory “Right to Disconnect” placing a duty on every employer, in consultation with their employees and where applicable their trade union representatives, to put in place a right to disconnect policy to establish the hours when employees are not supposed to send or answer work-related emails, texts or calls.
- We also share concerns around existing family leave frameworks. Current parental leave, paternity leave and pay frameworks in Northern Ireland are inadequate and should be considered within any Bill to improve work-life balance.

If you have any questions or queries about any of this information, or our endorsement, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me directly.

Kind regards,

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On behalf of the Women’s Policy Group NI