



## **Gingerbread's submission to the parental leave and pay review call for evidence**

August 2025

### **About Gingerbread**

Gingerbread is the leading charity working with single-parent families. Our mission is to champion and enable single-parent families to live secure, happy and fulfilling lives. Since 1918 we've been supporting and campaigning with single parents to help them meet their family's needs and achieve their goals. We want to create a world in which diverse families can thrive. We won't stop working until we achieve this vision. Whatever success means for a single parent – a healthy family, a flexible job, stable finances or a chance to study – we work with them to make it happen.

### **Submission statement**

Gingerbread welcomes this review, and we are keen to ensure that any changes to the parental leave and pay entitlements system are inclusive of single-parent families, particularly those who are not co-parenting and where there is no second parent. As such, we are pleased that the review will include a focus on 'fairness and equality', including for single parents, as one of its 'cross-cutting considerations'.

In the current system, there are disparities in entitlements that disadvantage single-parent families. Of note, couple-parent families are typically entitled to up to 41 weeks of paid parental leave, comprising 39 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and 2 weeks of Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP). In contrast, single-parent families—where no second parent is present—can access only one form of statutory pay (either SMP or SPP, as applicable), resulting in a reduced overall paid leave entitlement compared to couple-parent households. In addition, the Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) offer, which allows parents to share up to 50 weeks of maternity or adoption leave and up to 37 weeks of pay between them, excludes single fathers/ non-birthing parents where the other parent does not qualify for maternity or adoption leave.

The combined effect of these policies can be significantly challenging for some single-parent families. For example, a single father who is granted full custody of a child at birth (such as in cases involving safeguarding concerns) would only be entitled to 2 weeks of paid parental leave. If the mother of the child is not employed, and therefore not eligible for SMP/ leave, then the father also cannot access the SPL offer.

Further, the SPL and ShPP offer does not extend to family members or friends. This means that single mothers/ birthing parents cannot allocate leave to a member of their





support system, i.e., their child's grandparent, leaving them with less flexibility in how their child is cared for compared to those in couple-parent families.

More widely we recognise that some of the current discussions and campaigns around parental pay and leave have identified a need for a non-transferrable portion of leave for fathers/non birthing parents. The aims of this type of policy are laudable – reducing gender inequality and securing better involvement of both parents with the child. However, we are concerned that it would result in some single-parent families having access to less parental leave and pay. It is of utmost importance that any future policy changes to the parental leave and pay system do not inadvertently discriminate against single-parent households.

There may also be a need for additional consideration around how leave is divided between the two parents where both are involved with care of the child, but who are not together.

More broadly, we would like to see greater support for families returning to work from parental leave, such as with upfront childcare costs for families in receipt of Universal Credit when returning to work from maternity leave and additional support for parents with a disabled child.

We would also like the needs of single parents to be more fully considered as part of policies around entitlements for unpaid parental leave that can currently be taken by each parent for each child until the child is 18. Current policies mean that there is less unpaid leave available for single-parent families, particularly for those single parents who are parenting entirely alone. This issue becomes even more acute where the child has a disability. We note that parents with a disabled child (who is entitled to Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment) can take this leave with more flexibility, in blocks of a day rather than a week. However, there is no legal right to additional parental leave for parents with a disabled child. This can be challenging where there are complex care needs or additional medical appointments and there is no other support to help the child attend those appointments. The review should also look at the merits of making some of this type of leave paid leave, particularly where the child has a disability.

Gingerbread recommends:

- Single-parent families should be entitled to the same amount of paid parental leave as couple-parent families. To enable this:
  - SPP should be transferable in certain circumstances, including for single-parent families where no second parent is present.





- SPP should be extended to 41 weeks for single fathers/ non-birthing parents where they are not eligible for SPL and ShPP and where no second parent is present.
- The SPL and ShPP offer should be expanded to enable single-parent households to allocate leave to members of their family and friends.
- The Government must involve single parents in the design of any new parental leave or pay policy to ensure that it works effectively for their family type
- The review should look at the broader support available to families returning to work after having a baby.
- The review should look at offering additional parental leave entitlements to single parents, particularly those who are parenting entirely alone and making more support available for parents with a disabled child.

