

Edmonton

## Changes urged for new bill granting unpaid leave for pregnancy loss

Advocate proposes more inclusive language to cover all types of pregnancy loss

[Michelle Bellefontaine](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 30, 2022 8:00 AM MT | Last Updated: April 30



NDP MLAs Janis Irwin, left, and Rakhi Pancholi say the NDP caucus plans to introduce amendments to Bill 17. (Jamie McCannel/CBC)

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A Calgary organization that supports people affected by a pregnancy loss has met with the Alberta government to request changes to a new bill that allows grieving parents three unpaid days away from work.

Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, amends the section of the employment standards code that grants job-protected leave to employees dealing with the death of a family member.

If passed, employers must grant bereavement leave to an employee and their spouse or common-law partner if they experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth. The provision also applies to people who were expecting to become parents as a result of surrogacy.

Aditi Loveridge, founder and CEO of the Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre, wants the bill's wording tweaked to use the broader term of "loss of pregnancy."

"Because if you're saying miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion and termination for medical reasons, those all absolutely deserve to be in the bill and it's leaving out all of the other many forms of loss," Loveridge said.

"If I was to go to my employer and say I have cancer, that employer does not get the right to ask me what type of cancer I have. And I think that this bill needs to be treated with the same kind of respect."

- **FIRST PERSON** [My baby's name is Joy. After two miscarriages, my pregnancy was anything but joyful](#)

She also wants surrogates and adoptive parents included among those qualifying for bereavement leave.

Loveridge spoke at the news conference about the bill on April 21. Since the event occurred prior to the tabling of the Bill 17 in the legislature, she wasn't able to read the actual wording until later.

She met with staff from Labour and Immigration Minister Kaycee Madu's office to make suggestions on how the bill could be tweaked.



Aditi Loveridge is the founder and CEO of the Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre. (Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre)

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The NDP Opposition plans to propose amendments when Bill 17 is debated by committee of the whole.

Madu said the bill doesn't preclude someone who had an abortion from receiving bereavement leave, but NDP MLA Janis Irwin, critic for women and LGBTQ2S+ issues, wants to propose amendments to make that more specific.

"As it currently stands, the bill talks about miscarriage and stillbirth," she said. "And so we want that definition of pregnancy loss to be expanded to include termination for medical reasons (TFMR) as well as abortion."

In an email to CBC News, Madu's press secretary Roy Dallmann said any suggested amendments will be considered.

## Barriers to access

Bill 17 also raises the issue about how unpaid leave can be a barrier to those who need it.

Rakhi Pancholi, NDP MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, lost two pregnancies within seven weeks before she had her first child.

Pancholi was able to access one week of paid sick leave after the second miscarriage. But she acknowledges that she had privilege that some women, especially those who work in minimum wage jobs, don't have.

"I don't know if you're going to feel necessarily comfortable going to your employer or being able to take days off without getting paid," she said. "That could mean the difference between putting food on the table."

Still, the NDP will likely keep their focus on job-protected leave versus paid leave.

- [Labour, employment code overhaul brings Alberta law into 'mainstream'](#)
- [New law lets Albertans take time off work to care for critically ill loved ones](#)

Loveridge believes that three days isn't enough time to recover from the physical and psychological effects of a pregnancy loss. When she appeared before a committee last fall, she suggested three weeks.

Loveridge said the three days of bereavement leave should be paid to include any employee grieving the loss of a family member.

Bill 17 limits bereavement time to three days within a calendar year. Loveridge would like the provision changed to three days per incident.

"Let's say my grandmother dies and I (had used the days off) for my loss of pregnancy, then I no longer can take time off for the death of my other loved one," she said.

Bill 17 is based on a private members bill introduced last fall by Jordan Walker, the UCP MLA for Sherwood Park. While Bill 220 was approved for debate by the standing committee on private

bills and private members' public bills, it fell off the order paper when the session was prorogued.

Loveridge said she is grateful to Walker for getting the ball rolling as legislation will help the community she represents.

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