

2017.03.14

4.10 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding the application of policies in the States of Jersey work places to assist breastfeeding mothers in their return to work: [(1(171))]

What action, if any, has been taken towards putting in place policies in States of Jersey workplaces to assist breastfeeding mothers in their return to work, in accordance with the recommendations and guidelines from 2013 of the Breastfeeding Working Group?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The States of Jersey are fully supportive of nursing mothers who wish to breastfeed on their return to work. Facilities are made available to returning mothers and work is being undertaken to secure facilities on a permanent basis at each States location. A parent's pack for all employees who are, or are about to be, parents is also under preparation and will be introduced this year.

4.10.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Is there a target date for completion of this work, whereby all States of Jersey workplaces will have these facilities in place?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not aware that there is a target date for each building. There is a target date for the individuals undertaking the piece of work that the Minister for Home Affairs, in her responsibility for constitutional and community affairs, and myself have asked to be reported on the timescale of those places being made available. We are expecting a report back after Easter and then, hopefully, I will be in a position to give a more detailed timetable of when sites, or rooms, will be available.

[12:15]

4.10.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister accept that encouraging breastfeeding for longer periods is a thoroughly good thing, and does he not accept that the simplest way to encourage breastfeeding is to extend the period of paid maternity leave beyond the paltry 2 weeks that we have now got?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The evidence certainly shows what the Deputy suggested in his question about the benefit of breastfeeding. There are circumstances where that is not possible, but one should encourage - and the States as a good employer should encourage - its employees to do so and continue to do so as long as they wish to do so. The Deputy also makes a fair point that if there were greater periods of paid maternity leave that may, for some nursing mothers, allow them to breastfeed for longer periods. But, I would suggest that it should be a matter of choice and individual nursing mothers should be in a position to be able to make that choice. I know that Social Security are doing more work with regard to family-friendly legislation, and she has come to this Assembly and been criticised for prioritising that piece of work among other pieces of work that some Members - perhaps even that one, who is now asking the question - have asked her to do. So, it is being prioritised, it is an important piece of work, but it is not just the ability to nurse, it is also the ability to be able to express, and that does require a safe environment in which to do so.

4.10.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister says that the facilities are in place and now he wants to get more permanent facilities, but does he know, or can he confirm, that we have facilities in place at the moment in every place

where women work for the States and, if not, why not? Secondly, can he give us a number? As one of the largest employers, surely we should be leading by example and it is not rocket science; could the Minister please enlighten us?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Just to be clear, I did not say the assertion that the questioner has now made: I said that work was being undertaken to ensure that there are facilities available. That that piece of work, as I said, the Minister for Home Affairs and myself have asked to have that reported back to us after the Easter recess, to ensure that there is an actual programme to deliver those facilities. Of course, it seems quite straightforward that there could be a room, which is lockable, with a comfortable seat, with fridge-like facilities. But this Assembly does not currently have that provision available. There is a piece of work to ensure that those facilities are provided, because we recognise the importance of them.

4.10.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Can I take it from that answer that there are none for breastfeeding mothers employed by the States of Jersey at the moment and, secondly, is he saying that these people should be locked in a room? I am really confused; it is not very friendly to me. It is an absolutely natural thing, does the Chief Minister not agree that most places of work can find somewhere for a woman to breastfeed - the most natural thing in the world - her baby?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure if the questioner is wilfully misunderstanding the points that I am making but, of course, nursing mothers can nurse anywhere, in my view, that they think is appropriate and they wish to do so. But, this is not a question about that, this is a question that we are undertaking a piece of work to ensure that there is a safe, secure, environment should those nursing mothers wish to avail themselves of such an environment. It is not simply about nursing, it is also about expressing and to do that the best practice tells us - it is not me just standing here and answering off the top of my head - best practice tells us that there should be a room, which can be secured, with a comfortable seating provision and with fridge facilities. We are working towards what is best practice.

4.10.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

I thank the Chief Minister for his answers. So, just to clarify, are all States of Jersey workplaces that do employ women working towards having these facilities; and also could States Members have the information that he is expecting in, I think he said, April?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

They are and they can and I will also be liaising with P.P.C. to request that they consider that equivalent facilities are available for the States Assembly as well.