For family or friends who step up to raise a child.

Debate on the potential merits of statutory paid employment leave for kinship carers

Westminster Hall, Tuesday 20 October 2026, 4 to 4.30pm, led by Melanie Onn MP

Key messages

- **Unlike adoptive and other working parents, kinship carers have no right to paid leave from employment after taking on the care of babies and children.** This forces them into poverty and the benefits system and robs children of the protected time they deserve to heal from trauma and settle into their new homes.
- **It's vital the government's parental leave and pay review, set to conclude early next year, finally closes this unfair gap in the law** and delivers a first-ever statutory right to pay and leave for kinship carers. This would deliver significant benefits for kinship children and their families, employers, local authorities and the state. The likely numbers who would take up an entitlement are relatively small, meaning a low total cost to the exchequer, but are significant enough to require action delivered through the parental leave system to ensure consistency.
- **Employers and businesses support this too: 76% want to see the government take action to deliver a new statutory entitlement**. Leading Kinship Friendly Employers have delivered their own policies but can't do it alone. A joint letter, coordinated by Kinship, was sent to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Science and Trade just last week (15 Oct) calling for a new right to be delivered in this Parliament, co-signed by leading employers including Tesco and B&Q as well as trades unions (e.g. Unison, Usdaw, TUC) and other organisations.
- There are some policy design challenges which reflect the unique circumstances of kinship care, including the typical lack of note and uncertainty about the permanency of arrangements at the beginning. However, **Kinship has worked with workplace leaders and kinship families to design a two-part model for how to deliver a new right** which meaningfully adapts other models of pay and leave for those with caring responsibilities whilst minimising complexity for government and employers.

Supporting figures

All of the figures below, unless otherwise specified, are taken from Kinship's surveys of kinship carers across England and Wales.

How many kinship carers are forced out of work?

- **45%** of kinship carers in work stop working when they take on the care of a relative or friend's child.

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- **8 in 10** never return to paid work, suggesting labour market withdrawal for kinship carers is often permanent.

What are the impacts on families and the state?

- **26%** of kinship carers say the lack of paid leave left them struggling to afford living essentials and **28%** had to borrow money to stay afloat.
- **41%** of kinship carers report increased stress of anxiety amongst children and **32%** say the lack of paid leave made it harder for them to help their children manage their trauma.
- **4 in 10** kinship carers who give up work are plunged into the benefits system, resulting in additional unnecessary cost to the state.

What difference could paid leave make?

- **More than half** of kinship carers say a similar right to paid leave as available to new parents and adopters would have enabled them to continue working.
- **66%** of kinship carers say it would help children bond and settle into their new home and **48%** say it would reduce financial pressure on families.

In addition, YouGov polling commissioned by Kinship has found that **76%** of UK employers support a government-funded paid leave scheme for kinship carers.

Case studies

Kinship carer Lucy, 32, and her partner 32 from Cleethorpes were refused paid leave from their corporate companies when they became kinship carers to their 2-day-old nephew in 2023.

Lucy received six weeks compassionate leave but couldn't cope juggling a baby and a full-time job and had no choice but to temporarily take sick leave, before placing her 4-month-old nephew in childcare and returning to work.

> *"I obviously didn't want that to happen as it's vital for newborn babies to build a bond and have 1-2-1 developmental support, but again I had no choice as I had to keep earning to keep our home and bills stable.*
>
> *"You go through so much stress when you become a kinship carer and paid employment leave would have been one less thing for us to worry about. Instead of having that time with him I was worried sick all the time. Why should our children be disadvantaged?"*

Kinship carer and mother-of-two Samantha, 42, from Doncaster had to give up her full-time teaching assistant job so she could care for her 7-month-old great nephew when she couldn't get paid leave from work.

> *"I thought I was done with nappies and night feeds and had teenage children and a job I enjoyed. But suddenly it was a case of either I took in my baby great nephew, or he would be adopted.*

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"I had colleagues who were taking adoption and maternity leave but there was nothing in place for kinship carers like me. It was a hard decision to make, but I had no choice other than to quit my job.

"If I'd had the opportunity to take paid leave from work with the option of working flexibly, that would have been a massive help. It's not fair that we are doing the right thing by keeping children within the family but are not receiving any support to help us do that.

"Now I'm forced to rely on benefits, I can't work and my mental health has suffered."

More case studies can be found in our ***Making work pay***... and ***Forced Out*** reports.

Employer support

There are several employers who have joined Kinship's Kinship Friendly Employer scheme and have their own paid leave policies, including John Lewis, B&Q, Tesco, Asda, Dentsu, Transport for London, cardfactory, Lloyds Banking Group, and the Department for Education.

But 76% of UK employers want to see the government step up to deliver a new statutory right so that no kinship carer misses out on vital support. Co-signing our joint letter sent last week to the business secretary:

Mary Redcliffe, Director of People Operations and Experience at B&Q said:

"We have a Kinship Care Leave policy not only because we believe it's the right thing to do – to give equitable leave – but also because it helps us to retain talented and skilled colleagues.

"Whilst many employers are supportive of Kinship Care Leave, the lack of statutory provision means there's inconsistencies and uncertainty for kinship carers. It's a gap that needs to be closed and we're supportive of creating greater consistency through statutory provision."

Natasha Rice, Group Reward and Wellbeing Director at Tesco said:

"Providing paid kinship leave is the right thing to do for families and for business. At Tesco, it helps us retain talented colleagues and provide them with security at a time in their life when they are stepping up and providing a safe and loving home to a child.

"While there's growing support for kinship carers amongst employers, there are still far too many instances of people being unable to access the support they need and that's why government backing, and raising awareness, is crucial."

More information

- Designing a new right to paid leave for kinship carers (Feb 2026)
- Making work pay for kinship carers (May 2025)
- Forced Out: delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace (June 2023)

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