Civic Governance: Policy Library

Strengthening Parental & Maternity Leave Entitlements for Municipal Elected Officials

CENTRE FOR CIVIC GOVERNANCE

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About the Policy Library Pilot Project

The Centre for Civic Governance is embarking on a new project to compile a Policy Library that will tangibly contribute to equity efforts for racialized folks, women, and gender minorities in elected office. The Library will serve as an all in one resource where you can find precedent, how-to-guides, best practices, and visions for how to build on past success. Our current priority areas include:

- Advancing Feminist Policy
- Protecting Electeds from Harassment at Work
- Racial Equity & Accountability
- Intersectional Policy

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Status of Parental & Maternity Leave in BC

A lack of clear parental & maternity entitlements for local elected officials is a major barrier to recruiting and retaining a diverse voices in local government. Currently barriers include EI exemption and remuneration gaps, potential dismissal from office, and a lack of supports for parents returning to work.

Elected officials are EI exempt

Elected officials are not considered employees and do not pay into Employment Insurrance

Without EI protections, local elected officials are also ineligible for Parental & Maternity Leave benefits. Lack of guaranteed income while on leave is a major barrier

Motions for Leave

Local Electeds must currently pass motions with their council to grant maternity or parental leave

Local electeds can be dismissed if they are absent for 4 consecutively scheduled regular meetings requiring electeds to pass motions in council to grant any kind of leave

Lack of support upon return

Limited support exists for electeds who are returning from parental leave

Systemic issues facing most parents in BC also apply to local elected officials. Affordable childcare,

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Provincial Bill-18: Standardizing Parental Leave

The British Columbia Provincial Government is preparing to bring in new legislation that amends The Community Charter, Regional Districts, The Vancouver Charter, The Islands Trust, and Cultus Lake Parks Board to include standardized paid parental leave for local elected officials across the province. Bill-18 Housing and Municipal Affairs Statutes (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2026 has passed its first reading and is on track for a second reading in the fall of 2026.

This new legislation ensures that parents are entitled to 26 weeks (roughly 6 months) of paid parental leave. This amendment means parents holding political office would not be required to pass a motion for leave in their council. It also guarantees that those accessing this leave would not be disqualified and removed from office due to their absence from meetings during parental leave. Consideration is also given to quorum and how local councils should approach quorum if multiple elected officials are on leave.



What this legislation doesn't do

- Offer specific leave for birthing parents (maternity leave)
- Flexibility for electeds to perform duties while on leave should they wish to
- Wrap around supports for parents returning to their elected positions (ie. childminding, care giving allowances)

Further Clarification Needed: Clause 109.5 (3a) states: "While on parental leave, the council member continues to hold office but must not exercise a power or carry out a duty". Further clarification is necessary on the limits of this power and its contradictions with clause 109.5 (4) that stating that: "A power exercised or a duty caried out by a council member who is on parental leave under this section is not invalid by reason only that it was exercised or carried out in contravention of subsection 3 (a)."

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Local Examples

While Bill-18 would be transformative in making it possible for parents to consider running for public office, there are some further policy options and precedent from BC municipalities that will offer stronger protection to parents who hold public office.

SQUAMISH PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY 2019 & NORTH SAANICH PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY 2024

Description	The Squamish and North Saanich Parental Leave policies provide fair support for parents who hold elected office each offering strengths and areas for improvement. For example, although Squamish provides a paid parental leave, there is no additional support for birthing parents. The policy is capped at 6 months of leave regardless of birthing status. Squamish's policy also indicates that leave can only begin after the birth or placement of the child, limiting flexibility and failing to address parents' needs to prepare for the arrival of said child. In contrast, North Saanich specifically protects an additional 17 weeks of maternity leave for a birthing parent. On the other hand, where Squamish and all other policies provided paid leave, North Saanich markedly does not. As elected officials, councilors and other electeds are not entitled to Employment Insurance protections meaning they cannot access EI related to parental leave. While North Saanich provides an incredibly flexible 72 weeks of leave, it is reasonable to assume that accessing this benefit without pay is untenable for many families.
Keep	• North Saanich's extended leave and flexibility • North Saanich's maternity leave entitlements • Option to indicate specific duties they wish to continue during leave
Discard	• Unpaid parental leave • Inflexible leave start dates

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2024 POWELL RIVER REMUNERATION UPDATE

Description	Updated in 2024, this remuneration package offers parents the greatest flexibility and support in caregiving. Like the provincial legislation, Powell River offers paid parental leave at 26 weeks but combines that entitlement with North Saanich's specific 17 weeks of maternity leave. Powell River also allows parents who are elected officials to begin their leave up to 4 weeks prior to the due date or placement date. Powell River, like both Squamish and North Saanich includes a clause for officials to identify specific duties should they wish to continue them during their leave. Most importantly, Powell River's remuneration update provides wrap-around support in the form of "Family Care" reimbursements of up to $40/day up to a total of 10% of the elected's annual pay. Further consideration could be given to attaching this rate to the Consumer Price Index to ensure this benefit keeps up with inflation.
Keep	• Maternity leave entitlements • Flexible start dates • Option to indicate specific duties they wish to continue during leave
Discard	• Family Care reimbursements with no attachment to CPI or similar index
Strategy	• This leave brought in through a remuneration update. Consider if incorporating this ask in a regular civic process might be a lower effort way to achieve your goal



The Case for Parental AND Maternity Leaves

The inclusion of parental leave dismantles the assumption that a mother or birthing parent should be primarily responsible for care and therefore uniquely entitled to leave; however, parental leave on its own fails to account for the medical realities of pregnancy and birth. Maternity leave should be protected as an additional leave for birthing parents to recover from or prepare for the birth of a child. Pregnancy and birth are significant medical events from which a birthing person should be entitled to leave that specifically addresses their personal preparatory or recovery needs not just to protect the time required for child rearing

Birthing is working: Maternity leave protects the birthing parent, not just the time required for child care

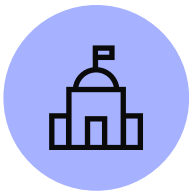
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Community Mobilization and Strategy



Media Coverage

Use plain language included in the talking points below. Consider how much media attention will support or detract from this adjustment. What strategy are you planning to employ here. Does media coverage support other communities in building precedence to pass their own Maternity Leave benefits?



Getting Council on Side

Communicate with your allies on council to understand their position on introducing improvements to parental and maternity leave. Are your opponents adamantly opposed or could they be swayed? Consider how opponents might view the additional entitlement: are they concerned about costs? Loss of capacity?



Community Mobilization

The choice to mobilize the larger community on this issue depends on what your goals are as a politician and the political climate you face. Due to the nature of this protection being geared toward elected officials rather than the general constituency, de-politicisation might make the most sense in most cases.

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Talking Points

Use this page to collect practical tools, references, examples, and guidance that support stronger civic engagement and more accessible public participation.



Closing the gap

Despite serving their communities, municipal elected officials are NOT considered employees meaning they are exempt from Employment Insurance (EI) exempting councillors from claiming EI parental and maternity benefits



Building on Basics

The Province's Bill 18 secures parental leave for Municipal councillors but [*Your Municipality*] is bringing forward further amendments to ensure the health of birthing parents (or mothers if that resonates better in your community) and their families.

- These include up to 17 weeks of paid maternity leave and up to 62 weeks of paid parental leave, aligning parental and maternity benefits with EI benefits available to other workers



Recruiting electeds that represent our communities

Introducing more fulsome support for councillors who are or planning to become parents makes serving the community easier for young people. This will foster more diverse and representative local councils



Birth is work

While Parental Leave protects against the work of childcare defaulting onto women, failure to provide Maternity Leave in addition to Parental Leave deminishes the labour of pregnancy and giving birth. Parental Leave does not account for the significant and unique health event that a birthing parent may need to prepare for and recover from regardless of their relationship to childrearing. Further, including maternity leave ensures that more diverse routes to family are protected including protecting the work of surrogates.

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Sample Motion

Provincial legislation needs to work for the smallest villages, the largest cities and everything in between. Therefore, Bill-18 should be understood as a starting point from which individual municipalities can improve protections in a way that works for their specific needs. Here is a sample motion to build upon the incoming provincial legislation and ensure parental/maternity leave policies are strong enough to recruit and retain more diverse public officials
Use this sample language if you wish to bring an individual motion to council or incorporate this language if you choose to embed these entitlements in a remuneration review process.

WHEREAS the Province of British Columbia has introduced Bill-18 HOUSING AND MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS STATUTES (PARENTAL LEAVE) AMENDMENT ACT, 2026 to include parental leave entitlements for municipal elected officials

WHEREAS maternity leave benefits are not included in Bill 18 failing to provide protections birthing parents to recover from the significant medical event of pregnancy and birth

WHEREAS childcare in BC remains a major barrier for affordability and parents returning to work

WHEREAS The City of Powell River updated their council remuneration package to include family care reimbursements of up to $40 per day to a maximum of 10% of member's pay

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

THAT ____ Council ask staff to report back on options to include maternity leave as a part of councillor's remuneration & benefits agreement

THAT ____ Council ask staff to report back on options on family care reimbursement options for councillors performing their duties

THAT mayor of ____ write to the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs for clarity on clauses 109.5 subsection 3 (a) and subsection 4 regarding continuance of duties while on parental leave

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References

Bill 18, Housing and Municipal Affairs Statutes (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2nd sess, 43rd Leg, British Columbia, 2026

City of Powell River, by-law no.2772, *Council Remuneration and Reimbursement Bylaw* (2024)

District of Squamish. Legislative Services (2019) *Council Maternity and Parental Leave Policy*. squamish.civicweb.net/filepro/document/171519/Council%20Maternity%20and%20Parental%20Leave%20Policy.pdf

District of North Saanich. Council Policy (2021). *Council Maternity & Parental Leave*. northsaanich.ca/media/file/cou-022-council-maternity-parental-leave

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