Dear

I am writing about a subject close to my heart and to urge you to ask the Government to take action now to support parents of premature babies facing the trauma of neonatal intensive care.

The Government gave recognition earlier this year, following campaigns led by charities such as The Smallest Things, of the special needs of families whose babies require neonatal intensive care after birth, announcing [neonatal leave and pay](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020) for parents affected to be included within the forthcoming Employment Bill. These reforms however will not come into effect until 2023 and do not come soon enough for families in neonatal intensive care right now.

I passionately believe that time spent in a neonatal unit, helplessly watching a fragile baby in an incubator covered in wires and tubes and surrounded by beeping machinery, should not count as parental leave. Not only is precious time with a newborn replaced by fear and worry over health issues (or even survival), but the journey does not end when (and if) a baby leaves hospital.

[A 2017 report by the premature baby charity The Smallest Things](https://www.thesmallestthings.org/after-nicu-report) found that nearly half of premature babies were re-admitted to hospital following discharge with 46% of parents reporting ongoing medical difficulties following premature birth. These parents are subjected to huge amounts of stress as they worry about their fragile newborn baby. Parents can spend valuable months of their parental leave commuting between home and the hospital, often at great financial cost, instead of bonding with their baby at home.

The uncertainty, worry and level of separation faced by families with babies in neonatal intensive care have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Many units have taken difficult decisions to restrict access for families and parents have struggled to access professional and peer support via health visiting and outreach services, as well as parent groups during this time. In addition, finding appropriate childcare for a baby born early, who might not be meeting milestones or has additional medical needs, is challenging in the current climate. Urgent action is required to ensure parents have the time and support they need.

[The Impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave report](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmpetitions/526/52603.htm), published by House of Commons Petitions Committee on 6 July 2020, has made a number of recommendations including:

*“…the Government should pilot the planned delivery of neonatal leave and pay reforms for those affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. If a success, the date of the general introduction of these measures could be brought forward”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Will you support parents facing the immediate trauma and long-term impact of premature birth by writing to the Government and asking them to take swift action, responding to and implementing the Petitions Committees recommendations for families in neonatal intensive care.

Kind regards,

[Insert contact details including home address]

1. *House of Commons Petitions Committee: The Impact of Covid-19 on maternity and parental leave, p45, para 92* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)