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New House bill spells progress for working mothers

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The House of Representatives Legislation Body (Baleg) has unanimously endorsed a bill on mother and child welfare containing a provision that extends maternity leave to a minimum of 6 months, paving the way to a better working environment for mothers.

Lawmakers are expected to approve the House-initiated bill at the next plenary session, following Baleg's endorsement last week.

Luluk Nur Hamidah, a lawmaker from the National Awakening Party (PKB) who was among the legislators that proposed the bill, expressed her hope that the government would prepare a presidential letter and an inventory of issues (DIM) for deliberating at the next session.

The landmark bill grants a minimum maternity leave of six months, three months more than the current leave regulated in Law No. 13/2003 on manpower. The bill also guarantees full pay for the first three months, followed by 75 percent pay for the next three months.

It also entitled women to "pre-pregnancy, pregnancy and post-natal health services", Luluk told *The Jakarta Post* on Tuesday.

Furthermore, the bill stipulates a minimum leave of 1.5 months following a miscarriage, or as advised by a doctor. The current provisions grant a mere three to four days off in the event that a woman miscarries.

Article 6 of the bill grants paternity leave to husbands for a maximum of 40 days following the birth of a child, while it grants a seven-day leave to fathers following the loss of a pregnancy.

Luluk said the provisions on paternity leave aimed to build the understanding that husband and wife, as a family unit, were both responsible for maternal health and childcare.

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She also noted that all stages of a pregnancy were "difficult" without "support from the [workplace] and the state", and that the bill granted extra break times for working mothers to breastfeed or pump breast milk.

Another provision in the bill requires both public and private employers to provide maternity and childcare facilities, such as a lactation room on public transportation or in the workplace. It also stipulates more flexible, more mother-friendly working hours.

'Progressive' bill

Theresia Iswarini of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) said on Thursday that parental leave could strengthen the bond between parents and their children, creating a supportive environment for children's growth and development.

Theresia called the new bill "progressive", saying that its provisions showed the state's presence in supporting the welfare of mothers and children.

"If all that could really [become reality], that would be great," she told the *Post*.

Theresia added that the provision on supporting facilities for working mothers, such as a lactation room or daycare services, was also important so mothers could take care of their children at work.

"This is urgent, especially in factories. There are many women in the [national] workforce, but does that number match the procurement of infrastructure for working mothers?" she said.

Two women die every hour in Indonesia due to complications during pregnancy, childbirth and after delivery, according to a 2021 report from the United Nations Population Fund, which cited data from the Intercensal Population Survey 2015.

Indonesia recorded 4,614 maternal deaths in 2020, compared to 4,196 deaths the previous year, with 50 percent of the deaths occurring in West Java, East Java, Central Java, Banten, North Sumatra and Aceh.

While the country still has a high maternal mortality ratio, the latest available data recorded 305 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015, nearly 70 percent higher than its goal to reduce the maternal mortality ratio to 183 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2024.

Indonesia's maternal mortality ratio fell to 228 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2007, but then it rose again in 2012 to 359 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Working women continue to face inequality across the country, with a report by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) revealing that 54.2 million women made up the country's total workforce of 138 million people in 2020.

According to the 2018 National Labor Force Survey, only around half of Indonesia's working-age women were employed, compared to 80 percent of working-age men. This imbalance has persisted for at least two decades, despite rising educational attainment among girls and declining fertility rates.

Underrepresentation of women is even higher in middle-class jobs, which make up just 15 percent of all jobs in the country. According to World Bank estimates, while women occupied 35 percent of all jobs in 2018, they filled just 29 percent of all middle-class jobs.