

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

When the House is Not a Home: Assessing the Family-Friendliness of Canadian Legislatures

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Abstract

Calls for more family-friendly assemblies, specifically those able to accommodate representatives who are pregnant, postpartum or have young children, have become urgent in the last decade, as a mini-baby boom in the federal parliament and the provinces has called the inclusivity of legislatures into question. Drawing on interviews with legislative clerks, this article asks two questions: 1) Are Canadian legislatures family-friendly? And 2) what approaches to family-friendly legislatures emerge from policies and discussions within these legislatures? It identifies patterns both in the types of changes that are proposed and those which are actioned, finding that changes have leaned heavily on the least consequential improvements. Many calls for change continue to run up against structural challenges that have been, thus far, ignored. Although legislatures are more family-friendly than in previous decades, this article argues that the future of inclusive parliaments hinges on a broad rethinking of the parliamentary role.

Résumé

Les appels en faveur d'assemblées législatives ouvertes à la famille et enclines à faire bon accueil à des représentantes enceintes, en post-partum ou ayant de jeunes enfants, sont devenus urgents au cours de la dernière décennie, alors qu'un mini « baby-boom » au parlement fédéral et dans les provinces a remis en question l'inclusivité des assemblées législatives. S'appuyant sur des entretiens avec des greffiers, notre article pose deux questions : 1) les assemblées législatives canadiennes sont-elles favorables à la famille ? et 2) quelles approches favorables à la famille ressortent des politiques et des discussions au sein de ces instances ? Il identifie des modèles à la fois dans la nature des modifications proposées et dans les changements mis en œuvre, en constatant que ceux-ci se sont fortement appuyés sur les améliorations les moins conséquentes. De nombreux appels au changement continuent de se heurter à des défis structurels qui ont été ignorés jusqu'à présent. Bien que les organes législatifs soient plus favorables à la famille qu'au cours des décennies précédentes, cet article affirme que l'avenir des parlements inclusifs dépend d'une refonte générale du rôle parlementaire.

Keywords: family-friendly legislatures; gender-sensitive parliaments; inclusivity; gender and politics; maternity and parental leave; representation

Mots clés: législatures favorables à la famille; parlements sensibles au genre; inclusivité; genre et politique; congé de maternité et parentalité; représentation

Canada has seen a significant push for more family-friendly assemblies in the last decade. Although the nature of families and their concerns vary widely, in general, the focus has been on creating changes and accommodations for representatives who are pregnant, postpartum or have young children.¹ These changes have been driven in large part by an unprecedented rise in the number of pregnant and recently postpartum representatives, which has created a sense of urgency around many of these transformations. While some legislatures have convened committees to contemplate creating more family-friendly parliaments, including the federal government and Alberta in 2016, and New Brunswick in 2021, others have taken a piecemeal approach, addressing specific policies as they arise, or have explored suggestions about family-friendly parliaments under the auspices of increasing women's representation in office (as in the Northwest Territories in 2019 and New Brunswick in 2021).

This article asks two questions: 1) Are Canadian legislatures family-friendly? And 2) what approaches to family-friendly legislatures, if any, emerge from policies and discussions within these legislatures? To answer these questions, I map the policies and infrastructure thought to signify family-friendliness in the provinces, territories and the federal government, with insights from interviews conducted with legislative clerks in 2023. As legislatures look to the practices of their counterparts, the same types of suggestions for change repeat, ranging from very minor structural changes, like the addition of change tables in washrooms, to major considerations, like on-site childcare and options for virtual participation; none have proposed any major rethinking of the way that politics is done. I group these policies along five interrelated dimensions, which track the most common suggestions made to create more family-friendly parliaments in the literature on gender-sensitive parliaments (Childs, 2016; IPU, 2017): 1) predictability, which refers to the legislative calendar and sitting hours, 2) modernization, which refers to updating infrastructure and policies, 3) the availability of childcare, 4) options for maternity and parental leave, and 5) the availability of alternative forms of participation.

Through this audit, patterns emerge both in terms of what issues are raised and which have been actioned. Even though similar packages of changes have been proposed in legislatures that have turned their attention to family-friendliness, these changes have not always been implemented. Commonly, those changes that have no effect on the running of the legislature are the first to be adopted, though even when formally in place, they may go underutilized because the accommodations fail to address more fundamental challenges with the role. Changes seen to alter business as usual, like virtual participation, or implicate major structural changes or commitments, like in-house childcare, are less often done. Notably, virtual participation has only become a real option in many legislatures because of the COVID-19 pandemic and not considerations of inclusivity, a framing which

becomes important in calls to return to “normal.” I find that many calls for change continue to run up against structural challenges that have been, thus far, ignored.

So, are Canadian legislatures family-friendly? The short answer is no. Certainly, they are more family-friendly than they were even a decade ago. The language of family-friendly parliaments has entered the parliamentary lexicon alongside a list of potential changes that have either been enacted or can be called on. Without minimizing the significance of these steps for the sense of legitimacy felt by parents in legislatures or the doors they might open, in what follows, I find that the actual changes that have been made, with a few notable exceptions, have been small. I further contend that, even if all the proposed changes were enacted, while the experience of pregnancy and parenting in politics would change for the better, the effect would not be truly inclusive legislatures; rather, the success of future family-friendly policies hinges on a broad rethinking of the parliamentary role, attentive to both the implications and framing effects of formal and informal rules.

Approach

Considerations of family-friendly legislatures are embedded within a significant scholarship on gender-sensitive parliaments (IPU, 2011; Wängnerud, 2015; Childs, 2016), which collectively ruminate on what it would take to see parliaments as institutions responsive “to the needs and interests of both men and women” in their work as well as their “structures, operations, [and] methods” (IPU, 2011: 6).² This literature is premised on rectifying the “incongruity” of parliaments that are unequal in terms of participation, infrastructure and culture, when it is these very bodies that purport to represent people and craft the laws and policies that bind them (Childs, 2016: 6).³ Appropriately, family considerations play a central role in this literature, with concerns of family/work balance topping the list of the greatest challenges faced by representatives (IPU, 2017: 4). Questions about family-friendly legislatures, then, reflect a narrower subset of considerations of gender-sensitive parliaments.⁴

There is no uniform vision of what family-friendly legislatures must encompass. In Sarah Childs’ 2016 report, *The Good Parliament*, she makes forty-three recommendations to the United Kingdom’s parliament in the name of creating a diversity-sensitive parliament, which include numerous provisions in the name of family-friendliness, such as creating leave policy for new parents, which would include options for remote participation (20-21), permitting infants “in the Chamber and committees” (21), the addition of more ad hoc childcare in addition to the existing on-site childcare facility (22), and a move toward “normal business hours” for the legislature (34). Similarly, in their 2017 Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) devotes a section to the facilitation of “work-family balance,” making five specific recommendations (16): 1) Adjust sitting hours to allow parliamentarians more time with their families, 2) create childcare and family spaces in parliaments, 3) enact parental leave, 4) if longer leaves are not possible, consider implementing alternative measures, “such as accepting parental leave as a legitimate reason for missing a sitting day,” and 5) offer breastfeeding representatives alternatives to on-site participation, such as proxy voting. As evidenced by the above

works, the scope of change considered necessary for family-friendliness varies but is generally thought to include practices and policies “that ensure non-discrimination in the conditions of work, hours of operation and provisions for leave including opportunities for family time” for representatives with caregiving responsibilities (Palmieri and Baker, 2022: 62). However, despite the significant overlap in suggestions for reform, avowals of family-friendliness continue to “mean different things to different people” (Allen et al., 2016: 568). Examples of parliaments that have actively sought to entrench family-friendly practices are also rare (Allen et al., 2016: 550). Notable exceptions include the creation of crèche facilities in the Swedish and German parliaments and daycare facilities at the Scottish Parliament and the United Kingdom parliament at Westminster, the availability of substitute representatives for parliamentarians on leave in Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Portugal, parental leave in Israel’s Knesset, the Scottish Parliament, and the Welsh Assembly (Allen et al., 2016: 556), and proxy voting for nursing mothers in Australia and new parents in the United Kingdom (OECD, n.d; Allen et al., 2016: 556; Childs, 2016: 22). Looking to these examples, these often disparate initiatives make it difficult to establish patterns based on practice.⁵ Still, there are some emergent trends in family-friendly legislatures.

Findings from the limited literature on family-friendly parliaments suggest a disconnect between what the IPU (2011: 1) calls a parliament’s “operational and institutional culture,” in which family-friendly policies are overtly supported but covertly resisted. Research, thus far, suggests that at the root of these concerns are disagreements about the degree to which parliaments and the roles of representatives are immutable (Allen et al., 2016; Palmieri and Baker, 2022). For many politicians, a culture of parliament that resists work-family balance is seen as something that “cannot and should not change” (Palmieri and Baker, 2022: 69). The implication of these beliefs is damning for aspirations of family-friendliness. As Thomas and Bittner (2017: 4) maintain, such beliefs about how to succeed in politics mean that “unless women can remove or at least minimize family obligations, or the *anticipation* of future family obligations,” they may not see a political career as a real option. Representatives were most reluctant to challenge provisions that might “mark them as ‘entitled,’” such as travel support for families (Palmieri and Baker, 2022: 69). Allen et al. (2016: 568) also found divisions in attitudes toward family-friendly practices based on sex and conclude that women may be, on average, less satisfied with family-friendly practices but are either less willing to speak out or unaware of the stark gendered nature of the divide evidenced in statistical findings (Allen et al., 2016: 563).⁶ Additionally, they point to continued cultural limitations of even the most effective policies, noting that they “have not eliminated the sense of compromise faced by many politicians” (Allen et al., 2016: 569). Collectively, this work focuses on the challenges of entrenching a culture of family-friendliness in legislatures that have already committed to institutional and policy change.

This article builds on this emerging literature with a focus on Canadian legislatures. Parliaments across Canada have recently embarked on efforts to make their legislatures more family-friendly, but no work has as yet been undertaken to understand the motivations for, approach to, or reception of these initiatives. In addition

to beginning to fill these gaps, this work contributes to understandings of the operationalization and reception of family-friendly parliaments in the wider literature on gender-sensitive parliaments. To this end, it employs a feminist, institutionalist approach to understand the creation of family-friendly legislatures across Canada.

Institutions play a profound role in structuring political life. Their influence goes beyond the strictures imposed by the written rules and unwritten conventions that dictate the way they function. These “rules” are also gendered, both in terms of shaping and restricting behavioural norms (Chappell, 2006: 226) and producing influential outputs, like legislation, in ways that reproduce these expectations and patterns (Annesley and Gains, 2010: 925). A feminist, institutionalist approach seeks to systematically uncover the ways in which the “formal and informal dimensions” of institutions are gendered (Kenny, 2014: 679-80). A core assumption of this approach “is that legislators enter political organizations that are not gender neutral but have been created to maintain and reflect male dominance” (Wängnerud, 2015: 61). There are few aspects of politics where these interplays are likely to be as stark as in discussions of modernizing legislatures to accommodate family life. Although family-friendly policies are not and should not be “women’s issues,” it is nonetheless still true that women continue to perform the lioness’ share of reproductive labour. Moreover, the realities of pregnancy, birthing and nursing still implicate the birthing person’s body in unique ways that require consideration.

While important, the written rules of an institution “never tell the whole story” about how these institutions actually function (Childs, 2016: 7). Moving beyond formal rules requires the characterization of informal norms and arrangements as they intersect with formal arrangements. This is achieved through qualitative engagement with actors who understand the way these rules “structure behavior on the ground” (Kenny, 2014: 681). In addition to researching the rules, regulations and standing orders federally and in the provinces and territories, I conducted interviews in the summer of 2023 with clerks in nine out of thirteen provinces and territories, as well as a human resources representative in the federal government.⁷ Clerks have a unique perspective on family-friendly legislatures. As non-partisan, permanent officials, they are charged with offering impartial advice on parliamentary procedure to Members. Their role in the interpretation and application of rules, as well as their interactions with Members, affords them insight into the way these rules are utilized and experienced. Because they work in permanent posts, most have also seen the way changes to governments and legislative membership have influenced practices and policies. For these reasons, clerks have a unique perspective on the creation and application of family-friendly policy. Their positions also require them to act as neutral arbiters, and most clerks asked to be referred to in more generalized terms to prevent any perception of partiality in their answers. To protect their identities, I refer to all clerks without referencing their jurisdictions or other identifying factors.

Are Canada’s Legislatures Family-friendly?

A representative’s role comes with many privileges, including a competitive salary, a pension and prestige, but from a familial perspective it is rarely seen as desirable.

Research drawing on exit interviews from Canadian MPs foregrounds the familial burdens MPs experience, in which “many MPs [when asked to discuss the negative aspects of their political careers] immediately and without cues pointed to the pressure it applied to their family lives” (Koop et al., 2013: 37). The burden experienced by representatives was exacerbated by having young children and the greater the distance between Ottawa and their constituencies.⁸ Writing in 2013, Royce Koop and colleagues (41) suggest that:

Canada’s geography, the inherently competitive nature of politics, the justifiable demands for representation that their constituents place on MPs, and the commendable desire of MPs to learn and investigate in fulfilment of their oversight roles all make it unlikely that being an MP will become a highly family-friendly job anytime soon.

Around the time this observation was made, the federal government was experiencing the start of a “baby boom” among elected officials. The 2011 election brought in a wave of new NDP MPs who soon had babies, sparking more urgent discussions about how to manage parenthood and politics. Of course, these MPs were not the first to give birth while in office; that honour goes to Sheila Copps in 1987, who was later followed by Michelle Dockrill (1998), but pregnant and postpartum MPs were, until recently, a rarity in Canadian legislatures. To date, only sixteen MPs have given birth while in office, eleven of them after 2011.⁹ MPs have always had families, of course, but typically, the representative was not the one carrying the child or the one expected to take on most of the care work. Provincial legislatures have also seen more representatives experiencing pregnancy. Of the thirty-nine representatives who have given birth while in office provincially or in the territories, twenty-four have done so in the last eight years.¹⁰

In the last decade, several legislatures convened committees to consider how they might create more family-friendly parliaments. The House of Commons and Alberta were the first to do so in 2016. Alberta was the first to release a report and recommended a slate of changes, including changes to the *Legislative Assembly Act* to permit members to be absent from the House for reasons of “pregnancy, childbirth or the care of a Member’s child following the birth or adoption of that child for one regular Spring or Fall sitting of the Legislative Assembly.”¹¹ The report recommended explicit permission for Members to bring infants in their care onto the chamber floor (that infants not be considered “strangers” in the House), the creation of more family-friendly infrastructure, such as a family room, change tables and high chairs, and improved access for other family members and caregivers on site. They also suggested the government investigate the possibility of creating an on-site childcare facility for Members and staff.¹² The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC, 2017) released similar recommendations when they tabled their report in 2017, including that “pregnancy and parental leave be reckoned as a day of attendance of the member during a parliamentary session” (4), that infants be allowed on the floor when in the care of a member (6), the inclusion of more family-friendly infrastructure, like a family room (7), and the potential broadening of daycare services, which are already available on the hill, to include infants and more flexible hours (6). Other recommendations from the interim

report were notably absent, such as those concerning the timing of votes and the parliamentary calendar (2016: 4). These same core recommendations—some form of maternity and parental leave, recognition that infants are permitted on the floor of the legislature, and the creation of designated family areas and amenities—also appear in New Brunswick’s April 2021 *Infant Policy for Members*.¹³ New Brunswick differs in having no recommendations for on-site childcare, although a report by the Standing Committee on Procedure, Privileges and Legislative Officers in June 2021 concerning the encouragement of more women candidates recommends the establishment of a legislative sitting calendar and amendments to the standing orders to allow for virtual participation options for both House and committee business (8).¹⁴ Similarly, in March 2019, the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly in Northwest Territories tabled an intermediate report also focused on the recruitment and retention of women.¹⁵ Although not explicitly a family-friendly initiative, four of the seven recommendations from the report tackled issues of family-friendliness and were swiftly adopted by the legislature. Specifically, these were 1) the inclusion of childcare expenses as part of the constituency work allowance (9), 2) the inclusion of childcare as an allowable election expense (9), 3) calls to investigate “practical measures to make the legislature family-friendly,” like the addition of a family room and infant change stations (16), and 4) calls for allowances be made for “Members to be absent from the Assembly, without financial penalty for up to four months due to pregnancy, childbirth or the care of a Member’s child following birth or adoption” (16).¹⁶

In the next section, I group these concerns into five dimensions that reflect a convergence of the range of suggestions made in the literature on gender-sensitive parliaments (Childs, 2016; IPU, 2017). I select these five dimensions for two reasons. First, the literature is remarkably analytically consistent about how to bring thematic order to changes in this area. These five dimensions are in keeping with that work. Second, these categories bring the conceptual clarity necessary to understand the extent to which changes focus primarily on superficial choices and informal practices. The first of these dimensions is predictability, which concerns the parliamentary calendar and sitting times. The second is modernization, which entails a range of practices and policies including the creation of family-friendly spaces, facilities, and changes to policies and practices to improve family-friendliness, like allowing infants on the floor of the chamber. The third is leave, specifically maternity and parental leave, although this category could also encompass more general leave for the care of dependents. Fourth, childcare, especially the availability of on-site childcare. Fifth and finally, the availability of alternative forms of participation for Members, such as proxy voting and remote participation, to allow Members time away from the legislature while on leave and the ability to reliably manage their schedules and family responsibilities. Certainly, there is overlap between some categories, but there is also value in considering these issues discretely, as they have often been implemented separately in practice, motivated by different objectives and evaluated on different metrics.

In keeping with the longstanding practice of slow and primarily informal change within the Westminster system (Malloy, 2023: 17; Scholtz, 2018: 665), the next sections show that shifts in the name of family-friendliness have been incremental and

favoured unofficial or temporary changes. These changes have also been overwhelmingly piecemeal, with only three legislatures—the House of Commons, Alberta, and New Brunswick—motivated by committee recommendations grounded in the creation of a larger project of family-friendly parliaments, and not all the recommendations in each case, it is worth noting, were enacted.¹⁷ The effect of this informal, piecemeal change is that the motivations for specific changes in each legislature are distinct and often not understood to be connected to the creation of a family-friendly legislature; rather, they are often attributed to the imperative of addressing the immediate needs of a given member. However, this informality is also widely seen as a strength because it allows legislatures to be more responsive to the specific needs of Members.

Another notable trend is the scope of reforms, which have been overwhelmingly minor. Changes were more readily taken on when they required only a small investment of time or money or shifts in policy and practice that did not challenge the existing architecture of parliament, such as the addition of change tables to legislative buildings, permitting infants on the floor of the chamber or in committee meetings, or paid “leave” for new parents. Changes that may be costly or risk altering the way politics is done have been widely ignored, like on-site childcare, or, in the case of alternative forms of participation, like virtual presence, implemented in some cases but not in the name of family-friendliness. Instead, inclusivity was a byproduct of the original push for virtual meetings to keep parliaments running in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the following sections begin to make clear, the impetus for family-friendly policies and practices implicates the approach, evaluation and longevity of these policies and practices. Is the objective to improve life for elected representatives? Is it to address the specific needs of Members as they arise? Is it to bring more women and young people into politics? Different understandings have different implications, which I explore in the penultimate section. There, I argue that when practices are not predictable (that is, official), a career in politics becomes a gamble for anyone with young children or considering having children. Assumptions that asking for accommodations and negotiating a web of informal arrangements have no associated costs ignore the deeply gendered dynamics of pregnancy, birth and childcare.

Predictability

When the legislature is in session, representatives can face long and often unpredictable hours as well as constantly changing schedules. This lack of predictability in scheduling impedes their ability to make caregiving arrangements, which may necessitate significant lead time. For representatives in ridings that are distant from the legislature, this often means arranging care in multiple cities. The significant challenges these realities pose lead Ashe (2020: 78) to suggest that scheduling changes are “among the most family-friendly and gender-sensitive reforms.”

The call for family-friendly hours and set schedules, or at least some advanced notice of schedules, is not new in politics and comes up consistently in discussions of family-friendly houses.¹⁸ Suggestions to address these concerns include compressing the sitting week, making Friday a constituency day, adherence to fixed election dates and aligning the parliamentary calendar with the school calendar.¹⁹

The federal government adopted a set sitting calendar in 1982 that aligns with the school calendar but has remained obstinate about sitting hours (Ashe, 2020: 78).

The number of days a House sits is dictated by standing orders and often varies by government. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Yukon operate on a four-day sitting week and have also abolished night sittings, while Quebec has compressed its sitting week to three days. Other governments, including British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, have reduced the number of late-night sittings.²⁰ Many legislatures have remained inflexible about providing calendars or changing sitting time. Even the PROC did not recommend eliminating night sitting to maintain flexibility in the calendar.

Modernization

A push to modernize legislatures captures a lack of existing infrastructure to meet the needs of a more diverse membership, in this case, the needs of Members with infants and young children. The need to make changes to both legislative buildings and the policies governing how they are run reveals the patriarchal structures on which they were erected. The extent to which legislative buildings are designed for men is apparent in, for example, the reality that women's bathrooms were often not included near the chamber. Speaking to the PROC about her experience of the House in the late 1980s, Sheila Copps explained that “[t]he situation was so bad in those days that they had women's bathrooms only on every second floor because they didn't think you'd actually have women serving in Parliament. You had to run from the first to the third to the fifth to actually get to the bathroom, so we didn't even have a bathroom outside the chamber (PROC, 2016).” Similarly, Linda Reid, who first became an Alberta MLA in 1991 and is now Alberta's longest-serving woman representative, noted that an official rebuffed her query when she asked if a women's washroom could be created near the chamber, asking “How long are women going to be elected?”—“Long enough to go to the bathroom,” she replied (Meissner, 2018).

Repurposing spaces and updating policies to better serve the needs of representatives has been part of every discussion surrounding family-friendly parliaments. For those with young children, this has meant the need for family spaces, which might include a private space to breastfeed close to the chamber and security clearance for caregivers in these spaces to provide them assistance. Many of these changes are very minor but help to signal inclusivity, like adding change stations in bathrooms or family rooms and highchairs in the dining area. Legislatures across Canada have made strides in making some of these adjustments. Baby change stations have been installed in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick (only in the women's washroom), Manitoba (Pursaga, 2018), Saskatchewan, Alberta (only in the women's washroom), British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Some legislatures, including New Brunswick, Quebec and Alberta have also created family rooms and/or breastfeeding rooms. When asked about these changes, multiple clerks also pointed to the challenges in finding spaces or repurposing old spaces because of the historical status of the buildings themselves.

One policy that has received significant attention in the context of Members with infants is the “stranger” rule. This rule prohibits anyone but elected

representatives and designated staff from being present on the floor of a legislature while it is in session. If enforced, this rule would bar infants from the floor. The ability to bring infants onto the floor is especially important for Members who need to breastfeed or who lack childcare.

With one notable exception, in which MP Saina Hassaina was asked to remove her baby from the chamber,²¹ I can find no evidence that the infant of any representative has ever been ejected from a Canadian legislature. When the stranger rule has been tested with infants, speakers have opted not to impose the rule. Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon have all officially amended their stranger rules to specify that an infant, when in a member's care, does not constitute a stranger. The stranger rule was never included in the standing orders in Quebec, meaning it did not need to be revoked for the House to allow infants. Other legislatures, while they have not amended this rule to specify that infants are not strangers, have informally ignored it when infants have been brought into the chamber. Speaking about instances before formal changes to the stranger rule, or its absence, one clerk said:

I think there was just sort of a recognition that, at least for infants of that very tender age, it wouldn't be appropriate to exclude them. We should allow a parent to bring that infant in and for them to be in the House.

Another clerk also noted this tacit recognition, saying that, when an infant was brought on the floor, "the speaker didn't even react or acknowledge" the baby in any way. Across the country, the norm is rapidly becoming the acceptance of infants in the chamber.

Maternity and Parental Leave

Where maternity and parental leave has been put in place in legislatures, it bears a limited resemblance to the kind of leave widely associated with these terms. In Canada, if you pay into Employment Insurance (EI), you are entitled to a percentage of your salary (33-55%, depending on the length of your leave) up to a weekly maximum (currently \$390-\$650, depending on the length of leave)(Government of Canada, 2023). Some employers will further top up this percentage. Additional protections, found in provincial employment acts, are also available to employees during this time, including guarantees of being reinstated to the same or an equivalent post upon return to work.²² This is time you are expected to be entirely disconnected from your work. Indeed, although it is often referred to as leave in the House, the media, and even some reports, in official terms it is called a reduction of indemnity. As one clerk made clear, this wording was carefully chosen.

Considerations of maternity and parental leave for representatives have focused exclusively on formal recognition of their absence from the House to ensure that they are not financially penalized or subject to other forms of sanction for their absence.²³ None of these provisions include constituency work, meaning they do not amount to a formal release from the position for a set period. Four of the provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan) and the federal government have instituted formal maternity/

parental leave. Newfoundland and Labrador was the first to do so in 2009, with the other legislatures following suit, starting in 2019. In Quebec, the provision for leave, added in 2022, is contained in the Code of Ethics for Members.²⁴ Others, like Ontario and Prince Edward Island, simply do not levy any penalties for absentee Members. One clerk asserted that the lack of formal policies in such cases is “by design,” saying: “Members are at liberty to do whatever they need, as it concerns illness and parental leave. They aren’t answerable to the speaker or the legislature. Members do take leaves and will be absent at their own discretion.” Other legislatures who have Members who have attempted to arrange leaves have done so by requesting time off through the speaker. This practice was used in other legislatures before formal leave mechanisms were put in place. Importantly, by all available accounts, this leave has always been granted. Alberta and British Columbia, for example, have representatives who have had to rely on this approach. But, this model, as described by one clerk, is not “paternity or maternity leave by any stretch of the imagination.” It must still be requested and, thus, it can be denied.

Even in jurisdictions where leave is in place, clerks noted that Members are not taking extended leaves (with leaves reported by clerks ranging from three days to a few months).²⁵ Instead, Members almost all continue working at near full capacity in their constituencies, with few even taking more than a few weeks away from the legislature if it is in session. The need to continue representing constituents and the lack of accepted conventions for covering off responsibilities mean Members often feel significant pressure not to take time away. As one clerk noted:

There are certainly options in terms of having a colleague from your party or someone from an adjacent constituency step in, but it’s not the same thing. That person doesn’t have the same legitimacy because they haven’t been elected by those constituents, and I think that’s the big challenge that has to be overcome for Members to be really comfortable taking that leave.

Another clerk characterized the system’s inability to balance the important roles of representatives with time away as a “vexing problem both from our perspective and the perspective of Members,” noting that Members “know that job security is not there” when they are planning leave. Another clerk, speaking to the same pattern of short leaves, said that Members attempting to keep their commitments to their constituents “is why they aren’t taking long leaves.” This emergent pattern suggests that the creation of maternity and parental leave is more of a symbolic provision than a promise of extended time away to heal and bond with their infants. It serves as an attestation that representatives should not need permission to be absent from the legislature in the first weeks of their child’s life or because of issues relating to pregnancy or birth; that these are normal, human concerns and not exceptional cases.

When asked about leave arrangements for Members, clerks across the board stressed the uniqueness of the role of representatives when thinking through these considerations. Members are not employees, meaning they do not pay into EI. Moreover, their roles are not structured to allow anyone to take over in their absence, a reality that makes taking time away difficult to justify, even when it is permitted. They have responsibilities to their electorate to represent them, regardless of their personal situation. Put differently, the role of a representative was not

designed with any personal interruptions in mind, and certainly not care responsibilities; it presumed men would be representatives and that their partners would serve as their support network, what Jonathan Malloy calls the “‘family back in the constituency’ model,” which he characterizes as “increasingly problematic for women MPs with children or planning to have children, and also for men who do not want to be disconnected from their families like their predecessors” (2023: 180). Thus, without meaningful change to participating in the legislature or a dramatic rethinking of the structure of the role of MPs, recognition of maternity and parental leave is likely to remain, in large part, a symbolic gesture to legitimize a short leave of absence from the legislature.

Childcare

High-quality, reliable childcare is a huge barrier to returning to work for all working parents. Representatives face some additional barriers, in that they often need childcare in the capital and their constituency, and they may not have, or feel they can take, any time away after a birth. They may be breastfeeding and subject to sudden changes in the sitting schedule. Many childcare facilities also do not offer care for newborns. In general, legislatures, like most workplaces, have not made strides in helping Members address these concerns.

Most legislatures do not have great childcare options and do not offer assistance to help their Members secure care. Until very recently, only the federal government offered on-site childcare. Importantly, the daycare’s hours do not align with parliamentary sittings; it only offers full-time spots for children eighteen months or older and does not prioritize the children of MPs.²⁶ This has meant that the daycare is either not an available option for Members, either because their children are too young, they cannot afford to hold a spot both there and in their constituency, or they simply cannot get a spot. Two provincial legislatures have since announced their own plans for childcare facilities. Quebec’s national assembly opened on-site childcare in September 2023, while British Columbia is in the planning stage of its own childcare facility. Each of these facilities has taken a different approach to the provision of care. Quebec utilizes a drop-in model, which allows representatives to pay by use, meaning for those who travel with their children, they do not have to pay for a full-time service they can only utilize on sitting days.²⁷ In British Columbia, the daycare is being imagined as accessible to the local community, with spots reserved for the public as well as legislative staff and MLAs, but with no preference given to legislators. The focus on childcare for communities and workplaces is important to note here, as multiple clerks raised concerns about fairness in the provisions of childcare services. Many stressed the need to “look at the entire workplace, not just Members” because employees are often “in the same boat” when it comes to the challenges of, for example, late sittings and unclear scheduling. Thus far, all legislatures that have or are working to implement childcare have taken this more expansive approach.

Outside of on-site childcare, there are few other options for representatives. The only substantive exception comes from the federal government, where MP Christine Moore pushed the House for more concrete childcare options and was eventually able to secure access to a nanny service through the House (Raj,

2016). MPs pay out of pocket to arrange care, but parliament deals with security clearance, making it a much more accessible childcare choice. Nannies can be arranged at short notice, on site, making this a real option in light of the last-minute realities of the job. No other legislatures have this service, although some have set aside additional funding to cover the costs of childcare outside of normal business hours.²⁸

Alternative Forms of Participation

One of the key functions of representatives is voting. Normally, a representative must be present in the legislature to fulfil this function. There are, however, some notable exceptions. In the Canadian case, these have generally taken the form of pairing or virtual participation.²⁹

Pairing is a practice meant to preserve the balance of votes in the House by matching representatives with a member of an opposition party who agrees to abstain from voting in the divisions where the other member is absent. Pairing is normally done by convention and, as such, does not influence the voting record of absent representatives. Two exceptions to this practice in Canada are the legislatures of Manitoba³⁰ and Ontario,³¹ which each describe pairing arrangements in their rules and regulations, which means these arrangements are recorded and not simply marked as an absence for representatives. While by no means equivalent to casting a vote, these arrangements are meant to soften the effect of an absence by a representative on the outcome of a vote to allow them time away without compromising their constituents or party.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult for some to imagine what a virtual option to allow Members to participate in politics remotely might look like, although it was suggested (for example: *Elect Her*, 2019: 66). In deliberations on approaches to a more inclusive and family-friendly parliament, the potential of virtual options that would allow MPs to work and vote remotely were discussed. Such options were already in place in some countries, like Spain, which allows remote voting for Members in some situations (Kraemer, 2020). Likewise, electronic voting had already been used in Canadian municipalities, by both provincial and federal political parties, and for a 2016 plebiscite in PEI on electoral reform (Goodman and Essex, 2020). Even so, these options were not considered at length, in large part because the mechanisms to realize them were not clearly laid out before the committee. However, the need for parliament to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that many debates about alternative forms of participation in the House that were given cursory attention in discussions surrounding maternity and parental leave were revisited with urgency. The push to allow virtual participation grew substantially after the pandemic forced the use of such measures to allow governments to continue functioning. What was before a vague idea became the norm in many legislatures.

Of all the proposed avenues for creating more family-friendly parliaments, virtual attendance and voting seemed to be the most divisive amongst clerks. As the only proposed change that implicated any real alternation in the operation of the legislature, this is perhaps unsurprising. Although all clerks recognized the potential significance of virtual attendance as an accommodation—“obviously virtual

voting opens up certain opportunities and is more convenient”—many displayed significant reticence about the growth of this practice, which was presented as disrupting politics as usual.³²

“[T]here’s no substitute for being there in the House,” one clerk commented, going on to stress the significance of in-person interactions to the role:

Sometimes the discussions that go on between MLAs off the floor of the House, which are every bit as important as the ones that take place on the House floor, they set the stage for compromises, and that can lead to an agreement on some matter in the House. It’s much harder to conduct those conversations when people are appearing virtually. I think that is the concern that most Members have; losing the collegiality and that ability to have free discussions outside of the House, and to find compromise and common ground outside the House.

These sentiments were echoed by others, who say the job requires people to show up in person to interact offline with their colleagues: “I mean, lots of deals get done, for instance by Members meeting in person offline. The dynamic change... it’s not quite as effective as it could be.”

Similar debates are ongoing amongst federal politicians. There, the language is less about collegiality and compromise and more about scrutiny and effectiveness, although no decisive argument has been made to explain why virtual participation might undermine the role of parliamentarians. Bittner and Thomas (2020) point out that virtual parliaments “eliminate spontaneity” and practices like heckling, neither of which they see as especially harmful, and certainly any concerns on these fronts would pale in comparison to the “loss of diverse voices due to requirements of physical presence.” The hybrid model in Ottawa, at least, is here to stay—the House adopted a motion to keep virtual options in place in June of 2023 (Canadian Press, 2023).

Interestingly, the degree to which clerks perceived the desire for this option by Members varied widely. While one clerk characterized the push for virtual participation as “the big rallying cry” right now for Members, another explained that “the posture here was strong for in-person meetings; they didn’t want a virtual meeting schedule for the House. There was nothing really contentious about it.” But even in legislatures where there is a desire to return to in-person practices, what about just constraining virtual participation to need? One clerk referred to the idea of on-demand virtual participation as “a real slippery slope,” citing concerns that Members would stop showing up if given the option. Attempts to do so have already been met with roadblocks. For example, Nova Scotian MLA Kendra Coombes (NDP), the only known member of the assembly to give birth while in office, gave birth via C-section in July 2022. Two weeks later, the legislature called an emergency session. Her caucus requested permission for her to be able to participate virtually because she was still unable to travel. The clerk conducted a poll of all MLAs outside of the legislature to ask if they would support her working from home for the session but failed to get the necessary unanimous consent. After facing backlash against the decision, a resolution was put forward formally making the same request. In this instance, Coombes was given permission to participate (Henderson, 2022). Coombes spoke out about the process, saying, “There is a

feeling of having to ask my colleagues, the majority of whom are men, for this permission that leaves a bad taste” (Henderson, 2022).

Overall, views of virtual participation by clerks seemed bogged down in justifications for the need to move to the virtual realm to ensure legislatures could function while public health measures prevented groups of people from congregating. The impetus for these changes was a state of emergency, which was not without technical challenges, and many clerks seemed eager to leave such arrangements behind, suggesting that virtual arrangements were detrimental to the functioning of legislatures. The value of virtual options for the promotion of inclusivity was a minor consideration for many clerks, as greater inclusivity was a byproduct of the move to virtual participation rather than the reason for enacting these changes. Many of their concerns were rooted in the sense that this technology would be abused by those who could and should travel to the legislature.

Analysis

As the above sections make clear, the availability of family-friendly provisions varies, sometimes significantly, by legislature. Interestingly, clerks were divided on the form these policy changes should take; specifically, are formal policy changes or informal arrangements in the best interests of representatives and the legislature? Adjudicating between these positions, however, relies on another question, about which the clerks interviewed also disagreed: What is the motivation for undertaking these changes? This section considers the contours of these debates and their implications.

In thinking through what family-friendly parliaments could and should look like in a system heavily reliant on informal arrangements and norms, questions arise about the implications of formal change and informal pressures faced by parliamentarians. Significant aspects of the Westminster system are governed by norms and conventions, and clerks were divided on the benefits of creating formal policies. Although many supported the formalization of these changes, others felt that creating official policies might be unnecessary or entrench more restrictive options than are currently available. These issues were most often raised around questions of leave as the only family-friendly policy, besides virtual participation, with implications for a representative’s work that also required representatives to make individual, ad hoc arrangements. One clerk, for instance, suggested that the best option to protect leave would be to simply “leave it alone”:

Right now, Members have the freedom to take whatever time they need off and decide with their caucus. I think that works best for Members and it is not being abused. When Members are absent for any period of time, they made the decision, and they can still serve their constituents despite their absence through their offices.

Another explained that the decision not to have formal policies is “by design.”

In essence, Members are self-employed; they are selected by their constituents. Each one of them does their job differently. Members are at liberty to do

whatever they need when it comes to concerns such as illness and parental leave. They aren't answerable to the speaker or the legislature. Members do take leaves and will be absent at their own discretion.

Questions about the utility of different types of leave seem especially pertinent considering comments about representatives not taking full advantage of official mechanisms like leave. There are a few considerations at play here. Sticking with the example of leave, the difficulty is that the provisions in place address a short term financial, and possibly legitimacy, issue with taking time away after having children, but not the more substantive disincentives for taking leave, like leaving their constituents without representation or fears of not being re-elected. Financial forgiveness for an absence is common practice for many reasons in legislatures, including illness, bereavement and constituency or portfolio commitments, and adapting this policy to specify pregnancy, postpartum, and maternity and parental leave only requires the addition of some wording and the removal of the requirement to first request time away. I do not wish to minimize the significance of these changes for politicians who previously had no such guarantees. Changes to formal rules, as Waylen (2014: 216) attests, help to "end officially sanctioned gender bias," but they may not be complete, and they too can be subverted through informal practices. At the same time, these changes, as one clerk put it, "are not parental leave in any sense." Changes that address lingering concerns require either a rethinking of the role itself, or the addition of other protections and accommodations that act as a package of options representatives can use to tailor their familial choices. Some legislatures have come further than others in this regard.

Some clerks suggested informal arrangements were valuable for their flexibility. Perhaps, in dealing with arrangements on a case-by-case basis, representatives could structure their arrangements around their own needs without having to submit to an existing structure. Here, we must be attentive to the gendered dimension of informal rules. Although these rules may be hard to pin down, Canadian legislatures continue to be masculine institutions, even though this is "not a permanent and static characteristic" of legislatures (Erikson and Josefsson, 2022: 22). Thus, informal negotiations and arrangements within this model seem likely to place women at a serious disadvantage. First, setting aside the very real time considerations of meeting with all the appropriate people, discussing, and settling on arrangements, which is itself burdensome, requests that are not standard may be met with pushback. The extent of what is appropriate to request may also be untested, making it difficult to gauge what to request. Second, if the utilization of formal protections by legislators is any indication, representatives in this position will mostly err on the side of asking for less than they need. Third, such a system is heavily reliant on the actions of trailblazers, who are willing to carve out new pathways within the profession and set the parameters for what is possible. This work can be politically fraught and emotionally taxing and may simply be too much to ask for most representatives. Fourth, the need to ask for considerations, rather than have their needs anticipated or provided for, marks pregnant women and parents of young children as outsiders. Without clearly articulated and well-trodden policy pathways, they may see themselves, or be concerned that others will see them, as

taking advantage of the institution. These concerns were born out with approaches to leave in general and other benefits like familial travel allowances, which clerks reported were widely underutilized. Representatives do not wish to be seen as benefiting from services or privileges that are not available to their constituents. When they are asked to break new ground, which implicates public funding or recognition, in service of their participation, it is reasonable to expect many not to ask, to ask for less than they need, to feel beholden for what considerations they receive or to feel unable to utilize the provisions that are provided. Put differently, informal arrangements are gendered.

The above responses were also rooted in assumptions about the motivations of a given legislature's decision to enact family-friendly policies. The language adopted in policy documents speaks to family-friendliness and inclusion broadly, but the immediate motivator in each case differed. Most commonly, clerks recognized that a policy was created to accommodate an individual representative, although a push to modernize parliaments or encourage the recruitment and retention of women were also mentioned. This knowledge influenced the policies that emerged and public perceptions of them. If the assumption is that policies are there to assist existing Members, as some clerks suggested, arguments for flexibility have more merit. If, however, they are about inducing broader change, like the recruitment and retention of women, as other clerks understood them, such explanations seem problematic. Here, a chicken and egg problem emerges with certain elements of legislative infrastructure—Are there fewer women in politics because family-friendly policies are not in place? Or are family-friendly policies not in place because there are fewer women in politics? As evidenced by the raising of family-friendly parliaments as a concern by committees seeking to improve women's representation, it seems likely that women are not entering politics because they do not see how their own familial situation or family plan is compatible with the institution. As one clerk pointed out, while they see their legislature as extremely flexible, this is perhaps not widely known or appreciated: "I think I am biased [about the flexibility of our policies and practices for women] because I am in the thick of the legislature." When legislatures seem responsive to the changing needs of Members, which most often occurs through formal recognitions, these changes become more visible and signal institutional acceptance.

Even when the explicit motivation for change is expansive, actors on the ground may interpret these changes as more individual because changes to family-friendly parliaments have thus far been overwhelming reactive. That is, despite the language in policy documents, clerks were aware that these changes were being enacted in the service of a specific member or Members of the legislature. One clerk noted that their legislature would only make changes "when required," and another suggested that their legislature would consider policies only when the issue is "a live one," suggesting that these changes are assumed to be a reaction to the individual needs of Members as they arise. This framing coheres with the nature of changes seen thus far. Advocacy for policy change has largely been motivated by the immediate need for accommodations by one or more individuals within a given parliament, say, because they are about to give birth. In this way, any changes are framed as individual considerations rather than social or political goods, even when the language of policy recommendations speaks to more expansive principles. While,

optimistically, we can see this as part of a longer-term shift, this reality is one reason why these accommodations could be difficult for representatives to confidently utilize. As noted above in considerations about informal rules, representatives do not want to be seen as receiving special treatment. Moreover, while ad hoc changes may solve problems for specific representatives, there is a ceiling on their potential. If the objective is to make parliaments welcome to parents and pregnant people and, crucially, for the public to see that, members of the public who might self-select out if they are not confident that parenting and serving in parliament can work must see these changes as part of an intentional program. Resistance to entrenching inclusive policies will continue to code legislatures as institutions that do not or may be unwilling to accommodate the demands of pregnancy, postpartum and family life. While family issues are not women's issues alone, the realities of pregnancy and postpartum life, alongside continued domestic labour imbalances, implicate women in specific ways.

Importantly, the changes undertaken by Canadian legislatures in the pursuit of family-friendliness offer insight into the implications of the form and motivations of these pursuits. First, they demonstrate that motivations matter. If a policy is thought to be in service of an individual member, it is more likely to be informal and structured around their specific needs. These changes are also likely to be minimal in scope. Changes taken up with an aim to broader institutional changes, such as increasing the recruitment and retention of women, appear to be better motivators for expansive change and shifts in institutional culture. Second, as discussed above, informal changes are highly gendered and unlikely to serve the goal of institutional change. Third, small symbolic changes matter, but we must not exaggerate their importance—they do not allow for the real participation of most parents with young children. Representatives that do continue to fulfil their duties require generous domestic supports, be it from a partner, parents, friends, or hired help, which substantially disincentivizes participation, and they may still not be able to parent their children in the way that they want. Rather than piecemeal change, a package of policy changes seems necessary to spur demographic change. This will entail childcare and leave considerations and virtual participation, among other changes not mentioned in legislative discussions of family-friendliness, such as cover for constituency work following a birth or adoption, and it will take time for the institutional norms and public acceptance to make such changes something parents feel able to utilize without compromising their careers or constituents.

Conclusion

Family-friendliness has seen renewed focus in Canadian legislatures, accompanied by varying degrees of formal and informal change. So, are Canadian legislatures family-friendly? Relying on their own criteria for family-friendliness, legislatures are markedly more family-friendly than they were even a decade ago. Canadian legislatures show some emergent patterns in the types of changes they have suggested and implemented in the name of family-friendly parliaments, but the gulf between suggestions for change and actual change is notable.

Many legislatures have undertaken meaningful consideration of how to adjust their buildings and policies to signal that infants, families and parents of young

children are welcome. Still, in most instances, these formal changes have leaned heavily on the least consequential improvements. The availability of a change station in a washroom is not on the same level as in-house childcare or the option for remote participation. Other, more significant changes to address family-friendliness have been entirely absent from these discussions. For instance, no suggestions for change have called into question the fundamental challenge of the role of representatives and family life, namely, that there is no one with the same democratic accountability able to replace them if they take time away. Instead, family-friendly parliaments have prioritized attempts to adapt the roles of representatives to the demands of family life, with no attention to what happens when it turns out that these demands are not compatible. In this way, policies have been implemented with little or no overt attention to the gendered dynamics of political life.

This article closes with somewhat of an interim conclusion. Most obviously, this research suggests that changes in Canadian legislatures need to be more comprehensive and systematic, focused on consistent change rather than changes in response to one specific elected representative's needs. Even so, it is not clear that incremental or informal change is necessarily bad or that it produces roadblocks to future change. Political culture matters immensely. Indeed, the limited literature on family-friendly policies (Palmieri and Baker, 2022) suggests that representatives may be some of the most significant gatekeepers when it comes to enacting more inclusive policies. More work needs to be done to understand why some legislatures have implemented more comprehensive policies while others have not, and to isolate the effects of existing changes.

More deeply, scrutinizing the accessibility of legislatures to families raises far more fundamental questions than "Where should we put a change table?" asking us to reconsider the principles of constituent representation, single-member districts, and the significance of physical chambers, to name but a few. Future work in this area will have to answer questions about the role of the elected representatives in Canadian democracy, the design of the institutions central to that democracy, and indeed what values should guide democratic renovation in the twenty-first century. These questions are not limited to consideration of family life but extend to other dimensions of inclusivity, including concerns of geography, ability and race.

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Notes

1 Although committees often consider older children as well, there seems to be a consensus that a child's pre-school years are the most significant years in terms of bonding and career interruptions. Attempts to accommodate older children and other dependents, such as older relatives, have also been noted. The inclusion of workplace safety, including policies on sexual harassment (PROC, 2017) has also been suggested as an expansion of the family-friendly mandate.

2 The concept of gender-sensitive parliaments was coined by the IPU in 2011.

3 The study of gender-sensitive parliaments is itself an extension of gender mainstreaming, an approach originating with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) that forefronts “the systems and structures that give rise to group disadvantage” (Duncanson and Woodward, 2016: 6) with the end goal of achieving gender equality (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997). Today, gender mainstreaming informs approaches to institutional policies in countries worldwide, including Canada’s gender-based analysis plus approach.

4 Concerns of family-friendliness are not easily disentangled from broader considerations of gender equality. Issues of family-friendliness are necessarily embedded in other action items for gender-sensitive parliaments, such as calls for the gender mainstreaming of policy, the equal participation of men and women in office, and a focus on “the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions” (IPU, 2017: 7).

5 In New Zealand, the focus was on the entrenchment of internationally defined equality norms within the New Zealand legislature, cautioning that the “full institutional entrenchment [of these norms] cannot be taken for granted,” as norms are effectively “works in progress” (Palmieri and Baker, 2022: 72).

6 They also found differences in attitudes rooted in age and the distance legislators must travel to work, but not based on parental status (Allen et al., 2016: 568).

7 Clerks from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Yukon did not respond to requests for interviews.

8 The study also mentioned the supportiveness of their spouses and “advancements in communications technology and ease of travel” as factors influencing the extent of familial strain they experienced (Koop et al., 2013: 38).

9 These numbers are based on an extensive Hansard and media searches for any mentions of representatives who were pregnant, breastfeeding, or had recently given birth in Canada. In many instances, I was also able to confirm my findings with the relevant legislative clerks. There is, appropriately, no central repository of information on the pregnancy and birthing experiences of representatives, making this the most direct way to estimate these numbers. Recognizing that it is always possible that some representatives were missed in this count, this number is best thought of as a reasonable approximation.

10 Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec all had three or more Members give birth since 2016, while British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador each had at least one representative give birth since 2019.

11 Special Standing Committee on Members’ Services. Subcommittee on Family-Friendly Workplace Practices and Policies. 2016. “Final Report—Review of Family-Friendly Practices and Policies for Legislators.” Legislative Assembly of Alberta, twenty-ninth legislature, second session, October 2016.

12 Special Standing Committee on Members’ Services. Subcommittee on Family-Friendly Workplace Practices and Policies. 2016. “Final Report—Review of Family-Friendly Practices and Policies for Legislators.” Legislative Assembly of Alberta, twenty-ninth legislature, second session, October 2016.

13 Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. 2021. “*Infant Policy for Members*.” Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. 2021, sixtieth legislature, first session, April 12. https://www.legnb.ca/content/committees/procedure_privileges_leg_officers/reports/60-1/20210611PPLOCSecondReport.pdf.

14 The Standing Committee on Procedure, Privileges and Legislative Officers. 2021. “*Second Report*.” Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. 2021, sixtieth legislature, first session, June 11.

15 The final report was released in June 2019 and entailed additional recommendations, but none specifically targeting family-friendliness, as these had already been taken up by the legislature.

16 Since this piece was written, British Columbia’s Working Group on Parliamentary Culture has also released a report, *Working Together to Build a Better Parliamentary Culture at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia*, that includes recommendations on creating a more family-friendly culture in the legislature.

17 I do not include the Northwest Territories in this list because their policy document focused explicitly on the recruitment and retention of women rather than family-friendliness, although the outcomes of this approach were similar.

18 Report of the Committee, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Eleventh Report, House of Commons, forty-second parliament, first session; Vecchio, Karen (Chair). 2019. “Elect Her: A Roadmap For Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics.” Standing Committee on the Status of Women, forty-second parliament, first session, 66-67.

19 Vecchio, Karen (Chair). 2019. “Elect Her: A Roadmap For Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics.” Standing Committee on the Status of Women, forty-second parliament, first session, 66-67.

20 Julia Green (Chairperson), Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly. 2019. “Interim Report.” 18th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, 16-17.

21 In this instance, a page was dispatched by the speaker who told Ms. Hassainia that she could not have the baby with her during the vote. A representative of the speaker later clarified that he had not instructed the page to ask her to remove her baby but to sit for the vote (CBC News, 2012).

22 For example, Ontario's *Employment Standards Act*, guarantees employees the right to reinstatement in the same or a comparable job, if their former job "no longer exists" (53(1)).

23 The degree to which other sanctions matter varies by legislature. Some, like Ontario, do not apply any deductions in salary for absences.

24 Their Code of Ethics specifies that issues relating to "the Member's pregnancy, the birth of the Member's child or the adoption of a child" and "maternity, paternity or parental leave" are valid reasons to be absent from the assembly (35(1)(2)). Quebec National Assembly. "Code of Ethics and Conduct of the Members of the National Assembly." Last modified October 25, 2023. <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/pdf/cs/C-23.1.pdf>.

25 Notably, of the legislatures that have enacted leave, not all have offered a timeline for this leave. The federal government allows absences without penalty for up to one year, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia leave the timeline to the discretion of the member, and Newfoundland and Labrador specify that the leave shall be for one regular sitting within a year of the child's birth or the beginning of the child's care by a member. When a reasonable timeframe for leave is not described, a representative might, in theory, try to take a much longer leave, but in practice, the opposite seems to be true. House of Assembly Management Commission, Newfoundland and Labrador. 2009. "Directive Number 2009-009." https://www.assembly.nl.ca/ManComm/Directives/Directive2009-009_MembersLeave.pdf.

26 The Children on the Hill daycare was opened in 1982 to serve federal employees (Children on the Hill, N.d.).

27 Facilities will also be open to employees at the assembly. The daycare will have ten spots and can accommodate children from birth to age ten, with spots for up to four infants (Plante, 2023).

28 The Northwest Territories, for example, covers extraordinary expenses relating to childcare and travel for children under eighteen.

29 These options are by no means exhaustive. For example, proxy voting, in which a representative gives their vote to another representative or party whip to cast on their behalf so that they do not need to be physically present, has been used in the United Kingdom (UK, 2018), Australia (IPU, 2011; 95), and New Zealand (PROC, 2016: 3) in limited cases.

30 "Rules, Orders and Forms of Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba." Last amended September 28, 2022 at 14(8). <https://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/business/rulebook.pdf>

31 <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/standing-ordersv>.

32 It is worth noting here that objections to virtual participation are not wholly rooted in concerns about shifting the institutional culture; many have focused on the complications for legislative staff when running synchronous sessions. For example, federally, the health and safety of interpreters has been central to considerations of whether to make a virtual option permanent (CAPE, 2023).

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