

Parenting Giving parents a break

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A public forum asking whether or not current parental leave is adequate for new parents in Newfoundland and Labrador will be held this Tuesday at the Holiday Inn in St. John's.

The open-to-all meeting is being hosted by GEMMA, a society for the promotion of infant mental health operating in Newfoundland and Labrador.

On Friday, chair of GEMMA, Deborah Capps, said the plan is to draw attention to existing issues and ongoing debate regarding leave for new parents. In particular, she said, the financial impact of having children and the benefits that are available to self-employed, single or adoptive parents will be addressed. "I think (the availability of benefits) impacts for some people whether they'll have children or not," said Capps.

Past chair with the organization, Melba Rabinowitz, said she has come across the concerns while working with young parents.

Rabinowitz said some new parents are foregoing part of their leave time because of financial concerns, parents are returning to work before they have to because they need the money and some parents are even running short of money while on parental leave.

"We know young women who are going to the food bank now who have never been in their life," she said.

"Women don't have enough resources during that time period to relax and do what children need."

GEMMA is wondering how severe the

problem is and how it is affecting children and families in the province.

"If parents are strapped or tired or worried, that affects the dynamic of the parent-child relationship,"

Rabinowitz said.

The public forum on Tuesday (from 7 to 9 p.m.) will include addresses from Lana Payne, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, and Linda Ross, CEO of the Newfoundland Advisory Council on Status of Women, as well as the stories of three or four new parents.

Capps said with federal level discussions on parental benefits for self-employed women currently ongoing, the forum topic "seemed timely."

The federal-level debate began building in September of 2008, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged that current Employment Insurance (EI) rules mean self-employed Canadians do not receive EI payments when they take leave, as they do not pay into the program beforehand.

Harper said "a re-elected Conservative government will permit self-employed Canadians to access

maternity and parental Employment Insurance benefits." The move would be optional, with self-employed, would-be parents able to "opt-in" to the financial support program. The government's work towards that particular goal continues, with EI reforms under debate in Ottawa.

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Weblinks

<http://www.gemma-nl.org>