



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01683**

### **Name of petitioner**

Jennifer Edmonstone

### **Petition title**

Support for families with multiple births

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide better support for multiple birth families, including both financial and non-financial support.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

- Liaised with Paul Masterton MP, Jackson Carlaw MSP and former MP Kirsten Oswald;
- Former MP, Kirsten Oswald, assured me that she would speak to employers' groups to encourage employers to reference families of multiples in their policies;
- Liaised with the Twins and Multiple Births Association ("TAMBA"); and
- Liaised with members of the East Kilbride Twins and Triplets Club.

After discussions with the named politicians, it was decided that the best way to progress these issues would be to submit a petition to the Scottish Parliament.

### **Petition background information**

Through my own recent experience, I believe that there is a lack of support for families who have multiple births from a single pregnancy (twins, triplets, etc.).

Multiple births are generally treated the same as singleton births in terms of support available to families. However, while this approach may benefit government and employers, it puts families who have multiple births at a disadvantage.

There are a lot of similarities in the way singleton and multiple births are treated. In fact, while it is understood that the UK Government and the Scottish Government have responsibility for different aspects of support, there are very few differences, even although one parent is having one child and another parent is having multiple children. For example—

- maternity leave: up to approx. a year of maternity leave (plus holidays accrued in that time);
- maternity pay: whatever the employer offers (if anything) but the statutory maternity pay of £139.58 per week is the usual;
- general paternity leave: up to two weeks leave
- childcare vouchers: £243 per month for a basic rate taxpayer and £486 per month if your partner is also eligible. This of course covers all children.

But there is a stark difference between having two (or more) singleton children (separate births) and having multiple births. One example is in terms of returning to work where, as a generalisation, the more children a family has in one birth, the less likely it is that they will be financially and physically able to go back to work in a full time (or close to full time) capacity due to high nursery fees for multiple children at once, whereas it is more likely that this would be possible for a parent of a singleton child.

There is also a concern in terms of the provision of child benefit, due to the financial pressure of having multiple children at once (e.g many families have premature children, struggle to breastfeed and therefore rely on expensive formula milk; many pieces of equipment, such as car seats, beds, food, etc., require to be bought twice).

For singleton births, child benefit is £20.70 per week for the first child, and £13.70 for subsequent children.

The same payment mechanism applies to multiple children i.e. £20.70 per week for multiple birth child 1 and £13.70 per week for multiple birth child 2, 3, 4 etc.

The Twins and Multiple Births Association ("TAMBA") also recognises that there is a need to address this issue. They have collaborated on studies and published a number of reports that show how having multiples affects families financially, emotionally, socially and physically. These include "The Effects of Twins and Multiple Births on Families and Their Living Standards" and "Cost of Childcare in Households with Multiple Births". Yet there has been little, if any, progress.

Better provision and accessibility of services such as Home Start, multiples' clubs and infant feeding specialists would I believe be a positive start for parents and their multiple birth children, as would encouraging healthcare professionals to be mindful of multiple birth families (for example, providing one prescription / minor ailments treatment per child, rather than grouping multiples together).

Having multiples is a privilege. However, it is well documented that relationship breakdown, high risk pregnancy, financial worries and post natal depression, to name a few, are more prevalent in families with multiples.

Improved support would help families be better off financially, physically and emotionally, easing the transition to parenthood, reducing the financial strain, encouraging parents of multiples back into the workplace and supporting family relationships.

#### Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/supportformultiplebirths>

#### Related information for petition

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

**YES**

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

0

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

01 / 03 / 2018

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**

Do you agree with the proposal in the petition?

What are your thoughts on how child benefit is calculated in relation to multiple birth children?

Are there any particular aspects of support that you would like to see improved?