

Some time ago Christopher Jeffery contacted me about his campaign for carers to have the right to take a few days paid leave a year, if needed, and subsequently he put his case, very movingly, to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Carers. He persuaded me that it was a strong case. So I was pleased to be able to argue for it during debates on the Children and Families Bill in the House of Lords. Realising that it was unrealistic to expect immediate acceptance by government, I tabled an amendment simply calling for a review of the case for carers leave. Carers leave would enable those who combine paid work with caring for frail, disabled or chronically sick loved ones to take a few days paid leave a year. This could be, for example, so they could take the person being cared for to a medical appointment or look after them on their discharge from hospital.

As Carers UK argue in a recent report, 'the evidence base for supporting working carers is growing, and it is compelling'. More than 3 million people combine paid work with unpaid care and the numbers are predicted to grow as the population ages. The danger is that, without the safety valve of a right to a few days' leave, carers will either reduce their hours or give up paid work altogether. A Carers UK survey found that a fifth of carers had given up paid work because of workplace difficulties around caring and two in five use annual leave to care. Seven in ten carers who had given up work, reduced hours or taken on lower paid work were over £10,000 a year worse off. The [Carers UK report](#) states that 'one of the most frequent issues raised around work difficulties with employers was carers' access to leave.' Many felt they were 'operating on the edge' of using too much leave and risking disciplinary action. This all added to the stress of juggling paid work and care.

It doesn't have to be like this. A growing number of countries in Europe and beyond now have provision for some form of paid care leave – examples include Japan, the Netherlands and Australia. The UK risks becoming a laggard. And as provisions for parental leave are gradually strengthened, the absence of any statutory paid care leave becomes the more difficult to justify. Common sense, the business case, social justice and plain compassion and human decency are all on its side. And so is public opinion. Nine out of ten respondents to a Carers UK/YouGov survey last year supported the idea.

The government rejected the amendment, although the Minister, Viscount Younger has been willing to discuss the issue with myself and representatives from Carers UK. I really do believe that we are at the beginning of the road of a campaign whose time has come. Baroness (Ruth) Lister of Burtersett.