

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

CARER'S LEAVE BILL

Wednesday 9 November 2022

CONTENTS

CLAUSES 1 TO 3 agreed to.
SCHEDULE agreed to.
Bill to be reported, without amendment.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 13 November 2022

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: IAN PAISLEY

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| † Aiken, Nickie (<i>Cities of London and Westminster</i>) (Con) | † Hollinrake, Kevin (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy</i>) |
| † Ansell, Caroline (<i>Eastbourne</i>) (Con) | † Hunt, Jane (<i>Loughborough</i>) (Con) |
| † Bailey, Shaun (<i>West Bromwich West</i>) (Con) | † Hussain, Imran (<i>Bradford East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Blomfield, Paul (<i>Sheffield Central</i>) (Lab) | † Jarvis, Dan (<i>Barnsley Central</i>) (Lab) |
| † Chamberlain, Wendy (<i>North East Fife</i>) (LD) | † Stevenson, Jane (<i>Wolverhampton North East</i>) (Con) |
| † Champion, Sarah (<i>Rotherham</i>) (Lab) | † Tracey, Craig (<i>North Warwickshire</i>) (Con) |
| † Cunningham, Alex (<i>Stockton North</i>) (Lab) | |
| † Dinenage, Dame Caroline (<i>Gosport</i>) (Con) | Anne-Marie Griffiths, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| † Dorans, Allan (<i>Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock</i>) (SNP) | |
| † Duguid, David (<i>Banff and Buchan</i>) (Con) | |
| † Hart, Sally-Ann (<i>Hastings and Rye</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 9 November 2022

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

Carer's Leave Bill

9.25 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I have a few preliminaries for the Committee to bear in mind. Switch off your telephones, please, or at least switch them to silent. No food or drink is allowed, except for the water provided. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to them at the usual address.

My selection for the grouping for today's sitting is available in the room. No amendments have been tabled, so we will have a single debate on all the clauses and schedules in the Bill.

Clause 1

CARER'S LEAVE

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause 2 stand part.

Clause 3 stand part.

That the schedule be the Schedule to the Bill.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I thank everyone who is here today—those here voluntarily and those I spoke to very nicely. I welcome the Minister to his place. He is the fourth Minister I have worked with on this Bill, and I am grateful for his support and for that of his predecessors, including the previous Minister, the hon. Member for Watford (Dean Russell). I also thank the officials in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for their excellent work and support over recent months. It is lovely to see them here today.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to carry this Bill through scrutiny in Committee and, I hope, on to its final stages in the Commons. It is wonderful to see so much good work and cross-party co-operation to ensure that this important piece of legislation progresses. I am delighted we are here today to take a step closer to introducing a much-needed new leave entitlement for unpaid carers. We all know the many challenges facing unpaid carers, of which juggling work is just one.

The Carers UK published its "State of Caring 2022" report yesterday, and I will take this opportunity—I take every opportunity—to thank it again for its support. I see one of its representatives in the Gallery. As the most up-to-date evidence that we have about unpaid carers, I will refer to it a few times this morning. I am sure other members of the Committee who have a particular interest will have also seen it, and I encourage

those who have not to do so as we all have unpaid carers in our constituencies. It is an impressive piece of work, but it is hard reading because it lays out all the ways in which unpaid carers are still, arguably, being failed.

According to the report, we can currently estimate that one in five adults in the United Kingdom are providing care. That is a huge number. It is hard to estimate how many of those are also in employment—a conservative estimate is 2.3 million. We will need to wait for the publication of the England and Wales census later this year—Scotland's is next year—to get more accurate estimates, but we know that the numbers are high and ever increasing.

Tempting as it might be, I will not use this morning to provide a summary of the report and all its many recommendations. The Minister knows that I am keen on other recommendations being implemented, especially those that relate to carer's allowance, but I know we all have places to be, so I will return to the matter in front of us: the Carer's Leave Bill.

The Bill would put on the statute book for the first time employment rights specifically designed to help unpaid carers with one week of unpaid leave per year for those in full-time employment. That is desperately needed, with 75% of respondents in the Carers UK research worrying about juggling work and care. A significant number of others have either already gone part time or given up work entirely. That was certainly my experience in North East Fife. When I tried to find constituents who would directly benefit from the Bill, a number of people got in touch with me to say that they had given up employment as a result of their caring responsibilities.

We know that employment is a vital lifeline for many people. It is not just about income, although that is clearly a key issue. The majority of carers state that they are also worried about managing their monthly costs, with almost all making spending reductions, including a quarter cutting back on heating and eating. I want to pause here and reiterate that one in four—an estimated 2.5 million unpaid carers who selflessly help others—are having to cut back on their essentials. For most, that means nearing, if not already experiencing, destitution.

In addition to the financial element, this is also about health and wellbeing. On average, carers rate their life satisfaction and happiness distinctly lower than the general population: 4.7 compared with 7.4 and 4.8 compared with 7.4 on a scale of one to 10. Anxiety, stress, loneliness and burnout are common factors. The Bill alone will of course not resolve those issues, but I would argue that a carer being able to use their annual leave for their own rest, being able to take leave from work without feeling at a disadvantage, enjoying their workplace as a regular respite from care rather than work, and having an employer increasingly more likely to recognise and support them in all their roles can only help. I am sure that others present agree.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member on getting a Bill to this stage, and welcome the Government's support for it. I, too, pay tribute to the army of carers out there. I am part of the all-party parliamentary group on carers, and carers tell me that the ideal situation would be to get paid leave for carers in the longer term. The Bill is a good step

forward, but will she join me and carers organisations in asking the Government to look seriously at that, and to bring back paid leave for carers?

Wendy Chamberlain: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. My party's policy is to have paid leave, but the Bill is an important step, putting statutory rights to request leave on the statute book in for the first time. I hope that it is an initial step in doing much more to support carers in all their guises.

Before looking at the text of the Bill, I will briefly mention that it also benefits employers. As I outlined on Second Reading, I have had the pleasure of meeting several businesses that already have carer-friendly employment practices. The evidence that they shared made it clear that having such practices not only is the right thing to do but produces financial benefits through staff motivation and lower turnover. It is a win-win.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I welcome this private Member's Bill and the Government's support for it. Does the hon. Member agree that this is a timely Bill, particularly with more women going into the workplace? Women of my generation are very much the sandwich generation: we have elderly parents and children. Also, with medical advancements, more children are surviving disabilities that they might have died from earlier. That means that there is an increased pressure on families to provide care for children as they grow older.

Wendy Chamberlain: I absolutely agree. There are so many different iterations of carers and who they are providing care to. I have certainly seen that myself. It is really important that the Government support the Bill, because that provides better recognition. We know that one of the UK's productivity challenges is the number of people who are economically inactive, which has increased post covid. We also know that it tends to be older women, and if the Bill is an opportunity to help them to get them back into the workplace, that can only be positive.

The text of the Bill sets out in detail the legal framework for the entitlement. Large parts of it are very similar to other leave entitlements that are already in operation. That avoids adding complexity, both for employers and employees who will make use of carer's leave. The main aspects of the entitlement are as follows: the Bill requires the Secretary of State to make regulations to entitle an employee to be absent from work in order to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. There will be no qualifying period, meaning that eligible employees will be able to make a request to take carer's leave from the first day of their employment. A broad approach has been taken to defining the key terms of eligibility, a dependant and a long-term care need in order to ensure that eligibility is as open as possible, and can encompass the many different circumstances in which a dependant might need care.

I will pause on that element to highlight its importance, because a significant issue is simply getting carers to recognise themselves as such and, therefore, as entitled to support. As I said on Second Reading, my husband is a carer to his mother but would not recognise himself as a carer. Over half of carers take more than a year, and 36% take three years, to recognise themselves as

such. As those are the proportions of carers who now see themselves as such, there is potentially an unsurveyed cohort that we do not know about. Making the definition as broad as possible is vital to start conversations, and to show people the different forms that care can take and, vitally, that support is available.

The Bill's overall objective is to ensure that carer's leave is available to those caring for someone with a significant and long-term care need, but flexibility and a light-touch administrative burden are fundamental features of the new entitlement. It will allow for a proportionate process to be put in place through regulations to enable employers to plan and manage absences arising from carer's leave.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady on her work, and the Government on their support for this important Bill. She will not be surprised to learn that more than one in 10 residents in my constituency are a carer for a loved one or near neighbour. My understanding from my constituents and the business community is that they are supportive of the Bill, and that employers may fear nothing from it. Those with caring responsibilities do not even tend to take the allowance given to them, but the flexibility and recognition is what makes it so incredibly valuable.

Wendy Chamberlain: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. When we engage with employers on such things, they recognise the importance of retaining and motivating their staff. They invest in their training and development and want them to stay with them. I think the Bill will really help employers on that front, and as a result will help their employees as well.

No amendments have been tabled to the Bill, so I will now discuss the clauses and schedule in greater detail. Clause 1 is uncontroversial and is simply the route to provide for the substance of the Bill through the schedule. For the legislation to achieve its policy aims, it may be necessary to amend existing legislation, and clause 2 allows for that to happen. Clause 3 addresses a procedural point, setting out the extent of the Bill, making provision for commencement and providing the short title. I commend the clauses to the Committee.

The substance of the Bill is contained in the schedule. This is the most important part of the Bill. Part 1 of the schedule creates carer's leave as a concept by inserting proposed new sections into the Employment Rights Act 1996. First, this part of the schedule covers who is entitled to carer's leave. The key definitions of a dependant and a long-term care need are set out in the Bill. The schedule then goes on to address the length of the entitlement, which shall be a minimum of one week.

A cap on the length of leave that employers will be required to offer is not set out in the Bill but will be included in regulations. As set out in the Government's response to the consultation on carer's leave, I understand that it will be one week. Of course, there is no cap on the amount of leave that employers can offer if they wish. I am sure that we all know from speaking to employers and others in our constituencies that there are employers who go far above what is set out in the Bill. Regulations may also provide for how the leave can be taken, which includes providing that the leave is available to be taken non-continuously. Regulations can

[Wendy Chamberlain]

provide that particular activities are, or are not, to be treated as providing or arranging care, but I understand that the Government's intention is not to further define those activities.

Part 1 goes on to set out the protections offered to employees while they are on carer's leave. In particular, it provides that regulations must create an entitlement for employees to return from carer's leave to a type of work prescribed by those regulations. That sounds technical, but basically it covers remuneration, bonuses, redundancies and when the leave is taken immediately after other types of leave, such as maternity. This part of the schedule also allows for regulations to be made to address notice, evidence and procedural requirements. A framework will be created through regulations that will be clear and simple for employers and employees to follow. Importantly, the Bill makes it particularly clear that the regulations can provide that an employer cannot require an employee to supply evidence in relation to their request for leave. Finally, part 1 of the schedule sets out when an employee may make a complaint to an employment tribunal. I commend it to the Committee.

Part 2 of the schedule contains further amendments to primary legislation affected by carer's leave. It sets out the consequential amendments that will be required to ensure that the measure is effective and does not have an adverse impact on existing legislation. I do not propose to explain each in turn; I will simply commend part 2 as a whole. I thank Members for their time, interest and presence this morning.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): It is a delight to be a member of this Bill Committee. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife on bringing the Bill, and I am absolutely delighted that the Government are supporting it.

Unusually, we find ourselves in violent agreement on the reasons behind the Bill. Prior to the pandemic, it was calculated that about 4.9 million people across the country were juggling some kind of unpaid care with paid work. As the hon. Lady said, it is almost impossible to quantify that work because so many carers do not identify themselves as such and often go without the support and help they need. We know that such caring work has an almost unquantifiable impact on their lives and causes undue stress. As a result, those people may find that they have to leave the workforce.

Many of us never consider that we might become unpaid carers, but Carers UK has calculated that two thirds of us will end up fulfilling that role at some stage in our lives. I saw that for myself when my mum was an unpaid carer for my nan. At the time, we were running our family business, and as I had just had my first child, my mum was part of that sandwich generation that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster spoke about. Of course, the responsibility for caring so often falls to women, which is why so many fall out of the workforce. I saw the impact that those caring responsibilities had on my mum, on her professional life and on every aspect of her own health and wellbeing.

Staying in work while providing such care can be incredibly challenging. That is why the Bill is so important. I am honoured to chair the all-party parliamentary group

on carers, which is proud to support the Bill. We know that, in prioritising someone else's health and care needs, carers up and down the country are not prioritising their own, which can have a massive impact. People do it not for reimbursement or money, but almost entirely out of love and responsibility, and we must recognise that.

As our population ages and changes, and as the way we work changes, we need to ensure that we change with them, because the number of people juggling work and care will only ever increase. We already lag behind other countries when it comes to workplace rights for carers. Many advanced and further ageing economies—including Japan, Canada, the US, Germany, Ireland and France—have some form of carer's leave in place.

Leave entitlement for carers was a Conservative manifesto commitment for the 2019 general election, so it is disappointing that it has not been introduced by a Conservative Government, but I am grateful to the hon. Member for North East Fife for doing so. I am pleased, however, that the Conservative Government recognise that the right for unpaid carers take up to a week of leave could make a real difference between somebody staying or leaving the workforce.

It would be a good thing for employers, too, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said. We always talk about the productivity gap, the skills gap and retaining excellent and experienced staff, but people's caring responsibilities often kick in during the second half of their working lives, when they are at their most experienced and have the most expertise. Businesses face the enormous financial burden not only of losing them and their expertise at that stage, but of the ensuing recruitment costs. I am pleased that the key definitions and parameters that are built into the Bill align with existing provisions for other family leave, making them easier for employers to implement. That is important because we want to minimise the burden on employers and make arrangements easier for employees to understand.

I think this is an excellent piece of legislation. Carers have done so much for our country—they save the NHS and our social care system so much money—so this is the best thing we can do to give something back. That is why I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Paisley. I wholeheartedly congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife, who has fought a serious campaign on this subject. She speaks from her heart, and from her constituents' experience, which is the best place from which to try to make a change.

I also congratulate the Government on listening, and on agreeing to this Bill, but I will challenge them a little towards the end of my speech, if that is okay. The Bill is indeed a crucial step forward. It is important partly because it is recognition of what carers do and bring to this country. They do an enormous amount, and the services that they provide save the Government a lot, but as the Bill recognises, that comes at enormous personal cost to the carer. In 2019, over half of respondents to the Multiple Sclerosis Society's family and friends survey said that they did not have the support they needed, and more than one in three had given up work altogether to care for someone with MS. It is not right and not productive that an average of 600 people a day leave work to care for someone.

9.45 am

As hon. Members have said, a lot of people do not recognise that they are carers. The Bill goes part of the way to ensuring recognition of them in the public domain. Hopefully employers will recognise the problems that some of their staff have. The Bill does not cover young carers—I have done a lot of work with them—but we need to do more for carers across the board, rather than segmenting them in the way that we do.

According to Carers UK, one in seven working carers say that if they do not get unpaid leave, they will have to reduce their hours or give up work altogether. This is at a time when the UK has many job vacancies, and staff are really needed. We cannot afford to lose those employees. I point out to the Minister, however, that when the measures are introduced, there will be a cost to employers. If this leave became paid care leave, or the Government provided something that people could draw down, in the way that they can draw down statutory sick pay, it would take pressure off employers, who are having a tough time as well.

I am pleased that the Government support the Bill, but I ask the Minister to commit to looking at the broader picture, and at how carers are trying to survive. According to the Multiple Sclerosis Society, a third of carers say that they have not had a break in two years. Caring is an immense responsibility and can take a huge toll on people's mental health. We are talking about people who may not actively seek help, because they do not want to let down the person they are caring for. We need a broader awareness campaign about the pressures on carers, so that, for example, the GP can pick up on them when a carer goes to see them for a routine vaccination.

More generally, this Government, and Governments, have failed carers. The Government should look at providing support for carers in the cost of living packages that they bring forward, because in the past 12 years, the carer's allowance has increased by just £15.20, which goes nowhere near meeting the cost of inflation. Unpaid carers are unsung heroes in our communities. I urge the Minister to do all that he can to ensure that they get the recognition, and the support package, that they deserve.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife on a really good Bill. It is a step in the right direction, and I wholeheartedly support it. As hon. Members have said, there are 4.2 million unpaid carers across the UK. They must be valued, heard, and given the support and advice that they need to provide their priceless care.

I have been a carer, and I cannot tell hon. Members how difficult it is. My mother died when I was quite young of acute myeloid leukaemia. There were two and a half weeks between her diagnosis and death. For my father, it was a different matter. He had a nasty cancer, and I ended up having to care for him for the last six months of his life. I had just gone back to work as a solicitor, and I had him living with me. I cannot tell hon. Members how difficult it was; there was guilt about not being there for him every day when he was dying. We were in a financial position to get a live-in carer, who was my guardian angel, and I am very grateful for that.

The Bill is a step in the right direction, but I urge the Minister to think about increasing the number of weeks in question, so that people can be paid for up to four weeks for caring for their loved ones, and for giving palliative care to a loved one who is dying. I urge him to think about that, because I cannot tell him how difficult it is to be a carer in those circumstances.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye, who brought her personal experience to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife on the Bill and also reflect the same warmth and consensus that is felt when we all agree on something.

Leave for carers in employment is a hugely important part of the more comprehensive package that we need to provide for those providing care for loved ones. I want to briefly mention a group who are not in employment but whose employment opportunities are affected by their caring responsibilities. I do so as chair of the newly formed all-party parliamentary group on young carers and young adult carers. The 2011 census suggested that there are some 180,000 young carers in the UK, one in eight of whom are under the age of eight. We know that is the tip of the iceberg, as the numbers are estimated to be closer to 700,000 and, as has already been said, many of them do not recognise themselves as carers, not just for the same reasons as adult carers, but because it has been their entire life.

The Carers Trust estimates that one in 12 children and young people take on mid to high-level care for a family member. The average age is 12 and the average annual income for their families is £5,000 lower; 68% are bullied at school, with 26% have been bullied because of their caring role; 45% report having a mental health problem; they achieve nine grades lower at GCSE than their peers; and if they get into further or higher education, they are four times more likely to drop out. All of that clearly affects their life chances, employment opportunities and career prospects, but they receive very little mention in the adult social care White Paper.

Nickie Aiken: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising the important issue of the pressure that young carers take on throughout their lives. When I was at the Children's Society, I led work on a report on the life chances of people who had been young carers and it was shocking that their educational attainment was often non-existent, which often meant their employment possibilities were also non-existent. I hope that he will work with me, and I am more than happy to join his APPG, to ensure that young carers have a voice. They tend to be the silent children who just get on with things.

The Chair: Order. We are slightly out of scope at this point. I know the hon. Member for Sheffield Central knows that, and I have given him some room to put those important points on the record.

Paul Blomfield: Thank you for that guidance, Mr Paisley. I welcome the offer to work together and I will certainly take the hon. Lady up on that.

I will draw my remarks to a close by simply asking the Minister to reflect on the need for a strategy for young carers to ensure that we are more effective in identifying them and providing the support that they need.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for North East Fife on this important Bill and on making an excellent contribution. As I said not too long ago when my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central introduced another important Bill, it is very difficult for private Members' Bills to get to this stage. Any hon. Member who manages that is worthy of tribute, as I am sure the Committee will agree. I also congratulate other hon. Members who have contributed today, some with their personal experiences, but all making an excellent case. The House is at its best when it comes together, and this is such an important issue.

The Opposition welcome and support the Bill. We welcome the support that it will provide for thousands of unpaid carers across the country. I pay tribute to and thank Carers UK for all its work in this area. As rightly pointed out by the hon. Member for North East Fife and by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham, 5 million people are working as carers as well as being in full-time employment; 2.5 million people have been forced out of work because of their caring responsibilities; and more than 2 million people have been forced to reduce their hours. That is clearly an unacceptable situation.

For far too long, unpaid carers have had to rely on the goodwill of their employers or have had to take annual leave to fulfil their caring responsibilities. It is therefore right that this wrong is being addressed in the Bill. However, we lament that it has taken so long for such a Bill to appear before Parliament, given that the Government have promised to legislate on the matter for a number of years. As has been mentioned, they set out an intention for such legislation in their 2017 manifesto and again in their 2019 manifesto. It has taken five years—and only by their supporting a Back-Bench MP's private Member's Bill—for legislation finally to get to the Floor of the House. That should not be the case; it should have been a Government measure as part of a much broader employment Bill, which the Government have promised on a number of occasions, but it remains in a place of "in due course", which we never see.

I am disappointed that the Bill seeks to legislate only to create a statutory right to unpaid carer's leave, not paid carer's leave, as Labour's new deal for working people would do and for which we will legislate under the next Labour Government. I absolutely recognise, however, the restraint of the hon. Member for North East Fife in drafting the Bill, knowing that it must have strong support from the Government even to progress to this stage, much less to be introduced and entered on to the statute book. It has therefore been necessary to draft a Bill with a smaller scope to ensure that it is not blocked by Ministers. That is in no way to suggest that this is not a huge step in the right direction.

This is very much an enabling Bill, which will require further regulations to enact the relevant laws to benefit carers. I urge the Minister to give a timescale for and certainty about implementing such regulations. We support the Bill and we hope to see it return to the House on Report and Third Reading as soon as possible.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kevin Hollinrake): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley.

I thank my several predecessors who have done a lot of work on this, including my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough in her time looking after the legislation. Most of all, I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife for her work on the Bill and for her explanation to the Committee of the various clauses and schedules. It was interesting to listen to her comments—reflected by those of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport—about the fact that most people providing care, such as her husband, do not even recognise themselves as carers. Reflecting on that, we have all—or people of my age might have—been in situations where we have provided care and support on an informal basis at times. There are armies of people out there doing a wonderful job for their relatives and their dependants, with lots of other benefits for society as a result.

There were some excellent contributions from Members on both sides of the Committee. Lots of people in our constituencies are in need of such support, so it is hugely important that this piece of legislation has been introduced.

Improving carer's leave through the Bill will mean that unpaid carers who are balancing caring alongside paid employment will have greater flexibility to take time out of work if required. On Second Reading, Members on both sides of the House, some of whom are serving on this Committee, related their personal experiences of caring. I thank them all for sharing their personal stories in heartfelt contributions. The Government recognise the important contribution made by unpaid carers and the considerable challenges they face in balancing work with their caring responsibilities. I am pleased to be here today to reiterate that the Government fully support the Bill.

10 am

Alex Cunningham: I thank the Minister for giving way, and welcome my fellow northern MP to his new role on the Front Bench. I welcome the Government's support for the Bill. The hon. Gentleman heard my remarks about paid carer's leave, but may I alert him to another cost-neutral Bill—my private Member's Bill, which will have its Second Reading next Friday and which would provide protection and rights for terminally ill people?

The Chair: You do not need to answer that intervention, Mr Hollinrake.

Kevin Hollinrake: That was a wonderful piece of self-promotion, but I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments and will address the points he made.

Numerous groups of people will benefit from the entitlement conferred by this Bill, including older workers, women and those with disabilities or long-term health conditions. Whether they are providing care or in need of care, the Bill represents an important step forward in supporting their needs and giving them a better chance of remaining in work. There is also a strong business case to be made for employers supporting unpaid carers in their workforce, and some employers already provide excellent examples of this. The hon. Member for North East Fife pointed out that there are big benefits for employers in helping employees to enjoy their workplace and strengthening the connection between employer

and employee. Many employers already provide carers' rights without needing legislation requiring them to do so.

As the hon. Lady set out, the Bill is straightforward. The detail of the entitlement is contained in the schedule. The clauses and schedule give the Secretary of State new powers to make regulations entitling an employee to be absent from work in order to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. I will briefly explain the Government's policy and how the regulations will be used, which was set out in the Government's response to the consultation on carer's leave published in September 2021.

Eligible employees will be entitled to one week of unpaid leave per year. This will be available to take flexibly, in single or half-days, to best meet the needs of unpaid carers. Reference is made in the Bill to regulations that in particular provide that an employer cannot require an employee to supply evidence in relation to a request for leave. I agree that employees should not be required to provide evidence to demonstrate their eligibility to take carer's leave, and this will be reflected in the regulations.

The Bill provides a power to make regulations relating to notices and other procedures. Our position, set out in the Government response to the consultation, is that employees making a request to take carer's leave should give notice to their employer. Our policy is to align the notice provision with that for annual leave—twice the duration of leave requested, plus one day, subject to a minimum of three days' notice. The regulations will also allow employers to postpone but not deny a leave request.

I reiterate the Government's support of the Bill, and again thank the hon. Member for North East Fife for her work in getting it to this stage. I agree that clauses 1 to 3 and parts 1 and 2 of the schedule should stand part of the Bill.

To respond to some of the comments made, the hon. Member for Stockton North talked about making the leave paid. I understand his view, but point out that this is a minimum entitlement, which sends a signal to employers who are currently not demonstrating that degree of compassion to people in need. I think many employees would provide paid leave as a matter of course. One benefit of the leave being unpaid is that it gives more flexibility about how that leave can be taken, including half-days and single days.

I would point out—I think the hon. Member for Rotherham reflected on this—the cost to business. As set out in the explanatory notes, the cost to businesses is £4.7 million in set-up costs and then £40 million per annum to provide the leave. As she said, businesses are facing a pretty hard time right now and we have to be cognisant of the pressures they are under. If businesses do not pay for this, the cost would fall on taxpayers, who are also having a pretty hard time right now, but I think the Bill strikes the right balance between flexibility and affordability.

The hon. Member for Rotherham also pointed out that there are savings for all of us in the legislation. It is good for society, good for the taxpayer, good for businesses, and it is obviously good for people in need of care.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bradford East, pointed out that the legislation has taken time to come forward, which is a fair point. We did commit to it

in our 2019 manifesto—he was right to say that—but we needed to consult on these matters because other people are affected, including employers. The consultation finished in 2021. It talked about wider employment measures, and we are bringing forward various pieces of legislation. Only last week I sat on the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Bill Committee with the hon. Member for Barnsley Central. We have the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill, the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Bill, and the Employment (Allocation of Tips) Bill, so there is a raft of legislation we are supporting that will improve terms and conditions for employees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye spoke touchingly of her personal experience of looking after her father in very difficult circumstances. I think many of us can share her emotions. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central talked about the incredible work that younger carers do and the impacts of that both socially and in education. He made a very fair point because that is another area that we need to look at in greater detail.

The Government continue to support measures to provide unpaid carers in work with much-needed flexibility to manage their caring responsibilities alongside remaining in work. Supporting the Bill is in line with our ongoing commitment to support workers and build a high-skilled, high-productivity, high-wage economy. I look forward to continuing to work with the hon. Member for North East Fife to support the passage of the Bill. I conclude by thanking the hon. Member for North Antrim for his excellent chairing of today's Committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I call Wendy Chamberlain.

Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you, Mr Paisley, for your excellent chairing of the Committee this morning. I also thank the Minister and Government Members for supporting the Bill. I thank all Members for serving on the Committee. An early morning slot on a Wednesday is not the most popular time—I have helped everyone get their prayer cards in for Prime Ministers' questions. I am grateful to all members of the Committee for being here.

I just want to touch on some of the comments made in interventions and speeches. I agree with the hon. Member for Stockton North that the Bill needs to be a first step and we should look at paid care. When we think about the other leave entitlements that are paid, this needs to be a first step. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster mentioned that we increasingly have sandwich generations, so we need to think about how we better support them. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastbourne: it is important to know that there is support in our constituencies. It is great that we are in violent agreement here, but also important that we know we reflect the wishes of our constituents.

I know how much the hon. Member for Gosport, the chair of the APPG on carers, cares about the subject, and I know about the work she has done. She commented on the love and responsibility of carers, which struck me as so many carers do it because it is a loved one that they are looking after. That responsibility and the management of the caring admin can be a real burden for people.

[Wendy Chamberlain]

The hon. Member for Rotherham mentioned carers who had had no breaks in two years. It is very telling that so many carers take annual leave, or even sick leave, for caring responsibilities, and they do not self-care as a result. We need to think about how we better support them.

My friend the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye spoke of her personal experiences of palliative care, which we should all think about. We want to provide care for our loved ones, particularly at end of life, and I hope the Government will look favourably on her comments.

I say to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central that, having met Fife Young Carers, I am very conscious of the burden that is placed on young carers, and of how that caring burden can prevent them from realising their own future potential in the workplace and so on. How do we help with that?

The Bill is a vital piece of legislation that will support unpaid carers. From the conversations today and on Second Reading, it is clear that there is much more to be

done, but I believe that this is an important first step towards easing some of the burden, and I look forward to continuing to work with everybody present.

I am grateful to Members for their congratulations. I am very conscious of the fact that getting a private Member's Bill to this stage requires working with the Government to find areas of consensus and look at the scope of the Bill, but I got a white ball with my number on it pulled out of a glass jar. That is how we started this private Member's Bill journey, so luck always comes into it to some extent.

The Chair: I thank the hon. Member for those kind comments about this historic Bill Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported, without amendment.

10.12 am

Committee rose.