

Member of the European Parliament

Roberta Metsola
President of the European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Bruxelles, Belgique

5 May 2025

Subject: Fair parental leave and democratic representation

Dear President Metsola,

As three Members of the European Parliament—and soon-to-be mothers—we are writing to you not only as elected representatives, but also as women who are living through a moment that fills us with both joy and frustration.

Becoming a parent while serving in the European Parliament is a profound and personal experience. But as we prepare to welcome our children, we are also confronting the harsh reality that this institution—so proud of the rights it has helped secure for parents across Europe—has yet to offer those same protections and flexibility to its own members.

For us, it may already be too late. The reforms we are calling for—maternity and parental leave, the right to temporary substitution and remote voting—may not arrive in time to support us. Nevertheless, this fight is not just about our own pregnancies. It is about future MEPs—mothers, fathers, parents—who should never have to choose between fulfilling their democratic mandate and being present for the first days, weeks and months of their child's life.

We are proud of the progress the European Parliament has made in defending the rights of working parents across the Union. But these values must be reflected within our own house—the very heart of European democracy.

As you are aware, there is currently no formal recognition of maternity or parental leave for MEPs. We have no right to remote voting. There is no system in place to temporarily assign our votes or responsibilities to a colleague. In practice, this means that pregnancy and early parenthood leads to a loss of representation—not just for us, but also for the people who elected us. This is not only sexist and discriminatory; it is fundamentally undemocratic.

This is not a new issue. A manifesto calling for these reforms was presented in June 2023, with broad support across party lines. We are grateful for your engagement at that time and for the efforts, you have made to explore solutions. However, nearly two years later, tangible change has yet to be delivered.

Can we agree that it is not a possibility to let another term pass without action?

The absence of clear rules combatting this discriminatory practice sends a troubling message—not only to us, but to every young person considering public service. With the average age of MEPs at 53, and only a handful under the age of 30, the lack of support for balancing family life with political responsibility is a barrier to participation, especially for women.

The European Parliament showed during the COVID-19 crisis that it could be agile. Remote voting was possible then—and it can be again. We are simply asking for the same flexibility when it comes to parenthood.

We therefore urge you, once again, to champion the following reforms:

- Official Recognition of Parental Leave
- Amend the Rules of Procedure to allow maternity, paternity, and parental leave for Members of Parliament
- Temporary Substitution
- Create a mechanism to allow MEPs to appoint a trusted colleague to act on their behalf during a defined leave period
- Remote Voting During Leave acting as an intermediate solution for the inexistence of other opportunities

It is time for the European Parliament to lead by example. Let us ensure that becoming a parent does not mean stepping back from public life, and that our institution truly lives up to the values of equality, fairness, and representation that it so strongly defends. To show not only in words but also in action that women—seeing as we handle most of the parental leave—can also be politicians.

Thank you for your continued leadership and for your attention to this—for us—deeply personal and—for all Europeans—structural and important issue.

With kind regards,

Delara Burkhardt

Sigrid Friis

Maria Ohisalo

Irena Joveva

Lubica Karvašová

Martin Hojsík

Matthias Ecke

Thijs Reuten

Kai Tegethoff

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