

These notes refer to the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (c.27) which received Royal Assent on 12 May 2022

Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

3. The Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act proposes to introduce a statutory provision of at least 10 days paid leave in each leave year for workers/employees that are victims/survivors of domestic abuse. In recognition of its importance, the Act makes this a ‘day one’ right, preventing any qualifying period of employment being allowed under the regulations required to be made by the Department for the Economy.
4. Domestic abuse is a workplace issue. The Member notes research continually highlights the impact of abuse on workers/employees, who face a range of practical concerns when attempting to seek help and support. From the perspective of employers, these difficulties then result in lost output, additional costs, and the need for additional resources. Many victims/survivors of domestic abuse do not have any leave from work available to them, or flexible working within their contracts, when they need it. They may also have to contend with working patterns that cannot be altered. The threat of losing their job, or losing vital income, are significant barriers that victims/survivors face when they attempt to seek help and support.
5. Safe Leave is paid leave from work that can be used by a worker/employee who is a victim/survivor of domestic abuse. Providing a statutory entitlement to Safe Leave will address the inequality between workers/employees who have access to a form of special paid leave to help them deal with issues related to domestic abuse, and those who do not. Safe Leave can help mitigate some of the barriers that victims/survivors face when attempting to seek help and support. It can also help address some of the costs of domestic abuse for employers.
6. The Member is aware that other jurisdictions around the world, including Italy, Canada and New Zealand, have now introduced statutory provision for Safe Leave. In the UK, some private sector companies, such as Vodafone and Danske Bank, have introduced policies that include paid leave for employees affected by abuse; and two local authorities, South Ayrshire Council in Scotland, and Neath Port Talbot Council in Wales, have introduced Safe Leave. In the Republic of Ireland, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in a written answer on 6 July 2021 stated ‘The

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issue of domestic violence leave is currently being studied by officials in my Department, including the examination of domestic violence leave at international level, the identification of best practice and the development of a suitable model for rollout in Ireland’.

7. The Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act has a single policy objective:
 - a. To introduce a statutory provision requiring the Department for the Economy to make regulations specifying at least 10 days paid leave for workers/employees that are victims/survivors of domestic abuse in each leave year.