



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by:

The Hon. Jason P. Hayward, JP, MP

Minister for the Ministry of Economy and Labour

Tabling of the Employment Amendment Act 2026

Friday, 27 February 2026

Good morning, Mr. Speaker,

Honourable colleagues, I am pleased to table in this Honourable House the *Employment Amendment Act 2026*, a Bill that recognises an important truth: parenthood does not begin only at birth.

This legislation introduces parental leave for employees who welcome a child into their household through adoption or legal guardianship, where that child is under the age of twenty-four months.

Mr. Speaker,

The Employment Act 2000 already provides for maternity and paternity leave, and rightly so. But the Government of Bermuda also understands that families are formed in many ways. There are parents who open their hearts and homes through adoption or guardianship, often after long, uncertain journeys. These parents shoulder the same responsibilities,

make the same sacrifices, and offer the same unconditional love as any other parent—and they deserve the same protections and support.

Mr. Speaker,

In the 2025 Throne Speech, this Government made a clear commitment to strengthen our leave framework so that it better reflects the realities of modern families. This Bill honours that commitment. It ensures that adoptive parents and legal guardians are given the flexibility and support they need during one of the most important periods in a child's life.

The first two years of a child's life are foundational. Science tells us that this is when brains develop quickly, bonds are formed, and a sense of safety and belonging takes root. What matters most is not biology, but the steady presence of a caring adult; someone who is there day after day to nurture, protect, and love.

Mr. Speaker,

Adoption and guardianship processes can be complex, long, and unpredictable. A twenty-four-month window for parental leave recognises these realities. It is compassionate, practical, and responsive to the lived experiences of families who are simply trying to do what is best for their children.

This Bill also provides something every working family needs: security. Eligible adoptive parents and legal guardians will benefit from job protection and financial support. This allows them to focus on settling their child into a stable and loving home without fear or uncertainty.

At its heart, **Mr. Speaker**, this legislation is grounded in fairness, child welfare, and respect for family life. It strengthens employee protections,

promotes healthy family units, and ensures that adoptive parents and legal guardians are treated equitably when it comes to leave entitlements.

Mr. Speaker,

The Bill mirrors the existing provisions in the Principal Act. Mothers will be entitled to thirteen weeks of leave – paid where they have been employed for more than one year at the time of placement, and unpaid otherwise. Fathers will be entitled to five consecutive days of leave, paid or unpaid on the same basis. In doing so, we are extending existing rights in a way that is balanced, consistent, and just.

Mr. Speaker,

Parental leave is not simply a workplace benefit. It is a statement about the kind of society we want to be. And we are a society that values families, supports caregivers, and puts the well-being of children at the centre of our decisions. By investing in families today, we are investing in stronger communities and a more resilient Bermuda tomorrow.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**