

Child-care bill could be enacted in July

Kyodo News

A government-sponsored bill mandating shorter working hours for employees with children under the age of 3 cleared the Lower House on Tuesday, making it highly likely it will be enacted into law by next month.

The revision to the Law for Childcare Leave aims to make it easier to raise children and counter the falling birthrate.

The bill, sent immediately to the Upper House, won unanimous approval in the Lower House after the ruling and opposition blocs agreed to amend the original draft to prevent unfair layoffs of workers with children, especially during the recession.

The Upper House is expected to approve the bill before the Diet closes July 28, lawmakers said.

Companies would be required to allow employees with children under 3 to work as few as six hours a day and exempt them from overtime if they so desire.

The current law gives companies the choice of picking from several options, including shorter work hours, overtime exemptions or installation of a nursery.

The bill would allow both parents to take child-care leave until the child turns 14 months old, instead of 12 months now. It would also set up a nursing leave system giving employees five to 10 days a year to take care of family members in need of nursing care.

Companies that violate the law would be issued instructions or warnings by their prefectural labor bureaus and could be named in public.

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