**Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review**

Submissions from women and men who have experienced discrimination at work while pregnant, or while on or on return to work after taking parental leave

**Submission Number: 177**

**Part C Submission Response**

I started a new job [and] was working full time at a Coordinator level on a 3 year contract. I am in a same-sex relationship and my partner and I were trying to get me pregnant before I even started the job. We continued trying when I accepted the position. I became pregnant two months into the position - my first pregnancy, our first child. When I was three months pregnant (five months into the job), I told my manager and he was very supportive of me during my pregnancy.

It was HR who were not very supportive. I wrote an email to HR requesting to meet to discuss this. I acknowledged that I knew that I would be ineligible for maternity leave as I had not been there for very long and their policy, which I had read, said you must be there for 1 year to be eligible for paid leave. I wanted to request this meeting though to discuss if I would be able to return to my job.

There was very little in the way of 'congratulations, let's think about how we can make this work.' Instead I was met with serious tones, uncordial attitudes, shortness and procedure. I remember feeling like I was in trouble, like I did something wrong and now I needed to face the consequences. They told me that I hadn't been here long enough and would not be eligible for any money. They told me that they don't even have to give me my job back, but that they will be willing to seek permission from the CEO to hold the job for me while I go on unpaid leave. This is the result that I was hoping for in the discussion, but it felt awful the way they were telling me. They made it seem like I needed to be grateful to them, like they were doing me this tremendous favour so I should watch what I say. It was such an assertion of power.

Then one of the HR staff told me that I would not even be eligible for Centrelink government paid parental leave because I had not been there long enough (this was untrue!). I was devastated to hear this, I felt certain that I would be eligible for the government leave scheme since I had been working fulltime before I took the job.

I suddenly was rushed with fear about how to support myself and my child, how to keep our house, how to make this work. And the HR woman had told me in such an unkind way. It was awful. I started crying, I was so distressed.

I later received an apology from the head of HR, but the damage had been done. She also told me during that apology that she didn't know the Centrelink rules very well and she would look into it. A simple google search when I got home confirmed for me that I would be eligible for the Centrelink benefits - I'm unclear how HR staff were unclear about that or felt it was their place to inform me about Centrelink benefits.

I am in the union so I decided to contact our rep and tell him what was going on just in case I needed any further support. He was very supportive. He agreed to come along to meetings with me in the future if I needed to.

Later, when the head of HR wanted to meet with me again, I replied to her email that I would be happy to meet and that I would like for the [union] rep to come along as well. She did not respond to my email. But later that week I was washing my hands in the bathroom when she walked in. We were alone. She was trying to have a conversation with me about my work situation while I was just trying to wash my hands. I just said to her that I think we should talk about it later and I left as quickly as I could. She had cornered me and made me feel like I did something wrong for wanting an [union] rep with me.

We ended up not meeting up face-to-face again. I just received a letter saying that my leave without pay had been approved.

I went on leave, taking a year off. They filled my position while I was away. I caught up with my manager a couple times during that leave to check in about work and the project. We discussed me returning to work part-time to do a job-share so that I could spend time home. He said he thought this sounded like a great idea. We talked about some people who might be interested in applying to do a job-share with me.

But when the time came to notify work that I wanted to return, I put in the request as discussed with my manager to return part-time and undertake a job share. It was rejected right away. The person who had filled my position that past year was not able to job share and my manager decided it would be too hard to recruit someone to jobshare with me. He reminded me that they were not required to even give me my job back because I had not been there a year when I went on leave. I was forced to resign.

I have since taken up a 2 day a week position on a 9 month contract. When looking for jobs, I found it impossible to find a part time role at the same Coordinator level I was at before... therefore I have had to go back to being a project worker. I have skills that could be better utilised, but there are not part time Coordinator jobs to support this.

After my 9 month job is completed, my partner is most likely going to go down to part time at her job because she wants to stay home with our daughter. It will be my turn to go to work more full time so hopefully I can go back to finding a Coordinator or more senior role. Neither my partner nor I like that this system we live in requires their to be a 'primary' parent. We are both primary, we are equally important parents, we both need to spend quality time with our daughter, we both have interesting and rewarding careers, we both need to make money. How can we expect parenting and working to be more equitable when workplaces and Centrelink insist their must be a 'primary' parent?

Recommendations that I would like to see:

 I would like to see recommendations in the National Review that reflect the need to do away with the language of a 'primary parent' or 'primary carer' as it seems to let the 'secondary carer' off the hook from their responsibilities.

I would like to see recommendations about workplace policies which encourage men to not just take parental leave, but which enables men and ENCOURAGES men to negotiate to work more flexible hours or to negotiate working decreased days until children are school age (after all, how can women return to the workforce if men are not being supported to stay home?)

I would like more protections for women who are not on permanent contracts or who have not been working somewhere for a year.

Thank you.