**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 297**

**Part C Submission Response**

Having worked at a state government department for over nine years in a permanent position, my commitment and contributions to the workplace were highly valued as indicated by annual performance reviews and two promotions. Following the birth of my first child I returned after one year of maternity leave to my substantive role but in a three day per week capacity. My line manager was terrific in resourcing for the additional work required during my previous full-time role.

During another one year of maternity leave following the birth of my second child, the department underwent a major restructure that required staff reduction by 400.

Despite the ‘return to work guarantee’ for employees on parental leave (... On ending unpaid parental leave, the employee is entitled to return to an available position for which the employee is qualified and suited nearest in status and pay to the pre-parental leave position), I was advised by my line manager that I was not guaranteed a job and should apply for positions.

The restructure saw my division demolished and my specialised and mandatory role gone … despite the fact that two contractors were employed to complete my job while I was on maternity leave.

During the restructure, many of my colleagues and my line manager accepted voluntary redundancies and this impacted on the level of support I subsequently received.

For the last four months of my maternity leave, I applied for ten ongoing positions, none of which were successful. I applied for these jobs while being the sole carer of two children and with limited access to a computer. Ensuring my applications were relevant and professional was extremely difficult, my mind had not been in ‘work mode’ for over eight months and I was not fully aware of the organisational environment, priorities and direction. It was only during the last four applications that a temporary line manager provided support via telephone to review my applications.

The restructure achieved its goal of reducing 400 staff through voluntary redundancies. Those without positions were labeled as ‘unplaced’. I returned to work three days per week, with no specific role and no clear indication of future job security. I endured this for three months whilst my level of stress and anxiety increased. Being a ‘non-entity’ was de-humanising for me and awkward for my colleagues.

I applied for another two positions and was offered a six-month or 12-month contract. There was no explanation regarding my pre-parental leave permanent position and if I would be required to give this up. I did not accept either position because of the job insecurity and the unanswered questions as to why two contractors were continuing to undertake the mandatory work that was my responsibility pre-parental leave. It was at this time my physical and mental health seriously declined.

I wrote to the head of the department to advise him of my situation and ask for his help in resolving it. One year later, I have not had a reply.

The lack of alternative avenues of support for employees on parental leave was made apparent in a number of ways:

• Career support seminars were made available to all staff to attend. At no stage were alternate arrangements, such as ‘mums and bubs’ sessions, or online videos or 1:1 sessions offered to employees on any long-term leave and I was unable to attend.

• I rang and spoke with the advertised ‘expert’ HR representative and explained my situation, including having no access to a computer and limited access to child minding that made applying for positions very difficult. The advice I received was that I should get access to a computer and should attend a career seminar. I was told that there were another ten employees currently on parental leave who were in my situation.

• I scheduled a telephone call with a senior manager to discuss my unsuccessful applications and how I could improve them. He was unavailable when I rang at the appointed time.

 I am still devastated that I was not able to fully enjoy the once in a lifetime opportunity I had to share in the first twelve months of my newborn son’s life. In addition to the anxiety most mothers experience on returning to work following parental leave, I had the added fear of returning to the workplace with no job to go to and where it seemed I was neither wanted nor needed.

At the end of the process I was physically and emotionally exhausted and ended-up taking 3 weeks sick leave, suffering anxiety and having to take medication to address this. I was then fortunate to obtain a job at another organisation that recognised my skills, accommodated my needs to work three days per week and has extremely family-friendly work practices.

I am super conscious of the discrimination I experienced, the lack of accountability of my former employer and the potential for this sort of situation to recur. I would hope that the outcomes and recommendations from this National Review are widely distributed, presentations are given to major organisations with real-life examples provided to prove the massive impacts employers have on individuals, their family’s lives and their subsequent career choices. Organisations who are un-enlightened about the value of part-time employees are failing themselves, the community, but most importantly their employees and the families who have to watch their loved ones suffer this sort of appalling treatment.