**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 304**

**Part C Submission Response**

My pregnancy cost me my job. I had been working in Government Departments on contracts for eight years and the contract was always extended with no questions asked. At the time that I fell pregnant I was working as a senior advisor in a department that had won many equal opportunity awards and called itself an ‘Employer of Choice for Women’. It turned out that only applies to permanent employees.

My manager and I wrote endless submissions to HR about the benefits of extending my contract to cover a short period of unpaid maternity leave, thus preserving corporate knowledge and reducing time required to recruit a replacement staff member and induct them into the business. I offered to be flexible about my return date to allow flexibility with the business. But ultimately the director decided to allow my contract to lapse. He probably got a bonus for reducing FTE even though they then advertised the position externally. The total cost of extending me would have been only approximately 4 weeks pay, which was less than the payout that I received for unused long service and annual leave anyway. I was only notified of the decision not to extend me on the day before the end of my contract, although I know the decision was made many weeks earlier as the secretary felt it was rude that I hadn’t been told and ‘secretly’ told me one day in the tea room.

The stress of starting my motherhood journey with no job to return to placed me and my husband under enormous stress and I suffered debilitating PND. It was really difficult for us to enjoy our first weeks with our son while we had that stress hanging over our heads. We had to struggle with decisions such as where to put him in childcare given that we didn’t know where I would be working, and when to start him – if we started him in childcare early and I didn’t yet have a job then the financial consideration would be huge, but if we didn’t start him and I got a job that required immediate start then we would not have any care in place. And what if I got a job that demanded I work Tues, Wed, Thur for example but we could only get childcare on a Monday and Friday. This would all have been different if I had been able to negotiate such details before leaving work, i.e. if I had an actual job to go back to. All of the policies and literature about maternity leave suggest doing this to reduce stress, but how is an employee supposed to do this if she doesn’t have a job to return to?

I have really struggled to find meaningful work since my son was born. I have a masters degree and extensive industry and government experience but I want to work part time until my son starts school. My understanding of the laws is that an employee has the right to do this – but again it seems to only apply to existing/permanent employees. New applicants are not afforded these rights. I have applied for many jobs and in almost all cases I have been told that the job must be full time and they cannot accept a part time applicant – yet friends who work at those very same departments in almost identical roles report that permanent employees are entitled to work flexibly around their family’s needs. I would be more than willing to job share or work part time around another employee. I am currently working on a 2 month contract as a front desk receptionist in a small family business. This lack of security and lower income has resulted in my husband and I being unable to borrow money to renovate our house or replace our car. We can’t even qualify for a credit card that had been pre approved before I lost my job.

I realise that many of the points I raise are probably beyond the scope of this enquiry. However I feel they are relevant in the discourse around pregnancy discrimination. Pregnancy is the start of a parenting journey, not just a medical condition that lasts for nine months and then the world returns to normal. Discussion of flexible work options and security of tenure are integral to this journey. I understand that there are many people out there who can do a job, but the corporate knowledge that an employee develops during their work life and the skills that they develop are not disposable. There is no way all of this can be captured in records or handover notes. I still get phone calls from my old employer asking me to cast my mind back to a certain design from 2005 and asking can I remember why that design was chosen rather than another one.

From this review I would like to see changes to laws and policies so that the protections afforded to pregnant permanent employees are extended to all pregnant employees.