**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 308**

**Part C Submission Response**

As soon as I fell pregnant I made it known that I was intending to come back to work in Term 4 on a part time basis, which was within the current EBA and then full time again for the 2014 school year. My Principal told me that would be OK and he was intending for me to come back into my current role in a part time capacity as it was in the best interests of the school. He was to retire at the end of the year, but told me that he would be in charge of all work force planning for the 2013 year. He reminded me I had to let him know by 1st November of my intentions, in writing.

On the morning of 30th October, I visited the school and handed in a letter with my request to return part time. The Principal wasn’t available so I left the letter with the business manager. She asked me when my leading teacher contract finished, as the Principal did not know. I told her I thought it was for 5 years, so in 2 more years. She checked and told me that it was in fact for 3 years and was to finish on 26th January 2013. I told her that Departmental guidelines say that I need to have at least 3 months’ notice if my contract was not to be renewed. She checked this on the web site and agreed. She asked me what would be happening and I told her of the conversations I had been having all year with the Principal about returning in my current capacity and in my current role on a part time basis.

On 31st October, I received a letter in the mail with a postmark from 30th October, dated 27th October, which was a Saturday. The letter told me that my leading teacher contract would not be renewed. I emailed the Principal asking why my contract would not be renewed and why departmental policy was not followed. I received another letter in the mail that did not explain the reasons why.

My baby was five weeks old when this happened and obviously added a lot of extra stress to myself and my new family. It created tension between my husband and I and he was also very angry with the way I had been treated and the fact that he was powerless to do anything.

I consulted the teachers’ union and was told that I could appeal of course, but with a five week old baby, that didn’t seem like an option I felt I could take.

I have since asked the current Principal, who was the assistant Principal when I went on leave, why my contract wasn’t rolled over as per the Departmental Guidelines and have received no definitive answer. I asked if it was an issue with my performance and was told no, even though I did not have a review in the 3 years I was at the school. I asked her if I didn’t fall pregnant if it would have been rolled over and was told ‘I don’t know.’ I would have assumed the answer should have been ‘no’ if it had nothing to do with me taking leave.

The year before I fell pregnant I was involved in a state-wide mentoring and shadowing program for women who are identified, through an application and interview process within each region, as having high potential for excellence as a principal within the next three years. Only 30 applicants from across the state are selected. My application was encouraged and endorsed by my Principal and Regional Network Leader. I was committed to my career and was looking forward to taking the next step and looking for Assistant Principal positions within the next year. After my experience at my current school, I have decided to stay on as part time and devote my time to my family instead, as I feel that I am now at a significant disadvantage if I were to apply for Assistant Principal positions, as I am an Expert Teacher, rather than Leading Teacher now. What took me ten years of hard work to build, has been taken away in an instant because I decided to have a family. Teaching, particularly Primary, is a female dominated profession and programs such as [the abovementioned] were there to encourage women to take on Principal Class positions, as they tend to be dominated by males.

Since returning to my school, I have fortunately been able to continue working 2 days, job sharing with another woman. I requested particular days to fit in with childcare arrangements, but that could not be accommodated when I first returned to work, which I understand as it was during the school year. When it was time to renegotiate days, I again requested the same days I asked for 6 months earlier. I was told by my Principal I had to negotiate directly with the person I would be sharing with for this year. She had been through a difficult time and was unable to talk to me, so I had to talk with her husband. When I let the Principal know that we couldn’t come to an agreement on the days that would suit us, I was told that it was up to me to negotiate. When I questioned this, I was told that it was definitely up to me to negotiate directly. Again, I found this to be incredibly stressful. I was physically sick and needed my husband to get up with my daughter that night because I was feeling so unwell. Eventually on the last day of the school year, I was told things would remain as they were the previous year.

I am lucky that as a teacher, we are able to work part time until our children are of school age and knowing that was a huge relief from the time I fell pregnant. The Australian Education Union has been of some help in advising me of my rights, although at times I received conflicting information.