**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 316**

**Part C Submission Response**

I work in a large Australian Government Department, that by nature of its portfolio should theoretically be supporting of family and working arrangements. Given this, I was surprised by a number of reactions when I became pregnant.

• A senior female employee said that it was good that I was not yet at the Senior Executive Service level as “women cannot manage being mothers of young children and the work required at that level.” She named other women in the Department at that level whom she said “managed neither role well.” These sentiments were repeated to me on multiple occasions.

• I had previously been told that the Department would make available to me an opportunity to act at the higher level (Senior Executive Level 1). When I became pregnant I was told that this was no longer necessary as I was pregnant.

While I could have reported these comments, I felt this would have been labelled within the Department as being a troublemaker, would go against future promotion opportunities, and would cause significant levels of unnecessary stress while pregnant.

When I applied for a permanent position at the Senior Executive level while my baby was less than one year old, and I was unsuccessful, I felt that being on maternity leave was a contributing factor, and the fact that I had been denied an opportunity to be an Acting Branch Manager while pregnant.

I was told by the recruitment panel that “it was essential to be visible to get promoted to that level, and it would be difficult if I returned part-time.” While seeking feedback from the panel and members of the executive of my Department I was repeatedly told “but surely your priorities are elsewhere now.” There was clearly an automatic assumption that because I was a young mother that my career aspirations had been somewhat diminished and that it would no longer be a priority for me.

I note that none of these attitudes have been mentioned to my husband who is at a similar level in another agency, or to young men in my organisation who also have small children.

Even though the public service is considered to be ‘family friendly’, within the Department there are many implicit and explicit examples of discrimination towards young women who are pregnant or who have children. I have since returned to work part-time, and there are clearly expressed attitudes that part-time workers are not as committed to work, and less opportunities are made available. During a recent restructure experience I was told by many Branch Managers that having a part-time employee at my level would not be ideal, and they thought that it would be very difficult to make it work.