



The Pennsylvania Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PPWFA)

Women make up about half of the workforce, and working women are the primary or sole breadwinners in 40% of American families. Yet women still face obstacles in the workplace that compromise their ability to provide for their families. One of the barriers they face is pregnancy discrimination, including an employer's refusal to grant an employee's reasonable request for a temporary, minor accommodation related to her pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition.

Refusal to Provide an Accommodation Harms Women and Babies

Not every pregnant woman will need an accommodation in the workplace. The most common accommodations doctors recommend for some pregnant workers include access to drinking water in the workplace, assistance lifting heavy objects, a chair to sit in periodically, restroom breaks, and less bending.

An employer's refusal to grant a reasonable accommodation forces pregnant workers to choose between earning a paycheck and maintaining a healthy pregnancy. Some women continue to work under conditions that are hazardous to their health. Others use up all their leave time before childbirth, or leave their jobs entirely. Some employers will not allow a woman to work once her medical provider has indicated that she needs an accommodation in the workplace.

Current Law Fails to Adequately Protect Pregnant Workers

Some pregnant workers have legal protections if their employer refuses to grant their request for an accommodation, but far too many women fall through the gaps in the laws.

The federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA) of Title VII and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (PHRA) prohibit employers from discriminating against workers on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition. However:

- The PDA only applies to employers with 15 or more employees;
- The PHRA only applies to employers with 4 or more employees; and
- Under both laws, women have to provide a specific type of evidence of discrimination — that is, a similarly situated, non-pregnant employee with virtually the same job and limitations who received better treatment from the employer— that is very difficult to find.

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) may also provide protections. However, pregnancy itself is not a disability, and it is unclear how the ADA applies to pregnant women who only need minor accommodations in the workplace, like access to water.

Pennsylvania is Falling Behind

Many other states have passed laws to protect pregnant workers who need reasonable accommodations in the workplace. These states include the majority of Pennsylvania's neighbors, including New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia.

Currently, some workers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have more rights than workers living elsewhere in Pennsylvania, because Philadelphia's Fair Practice Ordinance requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant employees, and Pittsburgh's law requires reasonable accommodations for employees who work for the city or through city contracts.

The proposed PPWFA includes business protections to ensure employers only have to comply as long as the requested accommodation does not impose an undue hardship.

Protecting Pregnant Workers is Essential for Workplace Equality

Despite holding public hearings in October of 2015 exploring the importance of workplace accommodations for pregnant workers, the Pennsylvania Legislature has failed to pass the PPWFA. Meanwhile, the Legislature has also refused to move bills that would address pay discrimination, raise the minimum wage, and support nursing workers.

The Pennsylvania Legislature's refusal to support working women harms Pennsylvania's children and their families.

The Pennsylvania Pregnant Workers Fairness Act is supported by the Pennsylvania Campaign for Women's Health, a group of more than 55 state, local and national organizations working together to improve the health and economic security of women and girls in Pennsylvania.

For More Information

For more information about the PPWFA or the Pennsylvania Campaign for Women's Health, contact Tara Murtha of the Women's Law Project at tmurtha@womenslawproject.org and 215.928.5762.