

## Pregnant women and new mums targeted for redundancy

Monday 8th June 2009

Devious employers are using the recession as an excuse to break the law on discrimination by making increasing numbers of pregnant women and new mothers redundant.

That is the alarming verdict of the Alliance Against Pregnancy Discrimination in the Workplace, formed by a group of agencies to monitor the situation, provide advice and to campaign.

The Alliance - set up by Citizens Advice Bureau, the Fawcett Society, single-parent families charity Gingerbread, Leigh Day and Co, Maternity Action and Working Families - said the economic downturn had brought a rise in the number of calls to their organisations from women facing maternity or pregnancy discrimination.

It claimed it had examples of pregnant women being singled out for redundancy and of women returning from maternity leave to find their jobs had gone.

Even before the recession, the Equal Opportunities Commission had already estimated that 30,000 women lost their jobs each year as a result of being pregnant, and this figure looked set to rise.

The Alliance said that this shocking impact of the recession was not only morally wrong and deeply damaging to workplace gender equality - it was illegal.

The law is clear: it is unlawful discrimination to dismiss or otherwise disadvantage an employee for a reason related to her pregnancy or maternity leave.

This protection still applies in the months after a woman has returned from maternity leave if it can be shown that her pregnancy or leave contributed to, for example, her selection for redundancy.

The Alliance said the Government was failing to collect information on whether there was an increase in pregnancy-related redundancies, and there was little attempt to ensure that employers complied with the law.

It wants the Government to send a strong message to business that it is illegal to discriminate against a woman at work because she is pregnant or on maternity leave, and that recession and redundancies are not an excuse to break the law.

And the Alliance has called on the Business Secretary to do the following:

- \* Publically endorse the message that making a woman redundant because she is pregnant or a new mother is unlawful;
- \* Actively publicise legal obligations on pregnancy discrimination to employers (and refer them to resources such as the EHRC pregnancy tool kit);
- \* Actively publicise to pregnant employees their rights if facing redundancy;
- \* Provide information to public bodies on their legal responsibilities in relation to pregnancy discrimination and ensure that their performance in this area is included when reporting on their compliance with the gender equity duty;
- \* Monitor the incidence of discrimination against pregnant women, women on maternity leave, and women back at work for less than three months to ensure that the law is being complied with.

**Posted By** Nicholas Lakeland - Silverman Sherliker LLP on Monday 8th June 2009 11:18:35

I find it incredible that any employer is willing to take the risk. It is usually fairly easy to prove what has been going on and

**Posted By** Bruce Leigh on Monday 8th June 2009 11:12:21

I agree with Mr Speaker - but at the same time lots of women taking maternity leave can only be a good thing for recruiters

**Posted By** Elaine on Monday 8th June 2009 11:11:10

Attitudes like yours Mr Speaker not only do women a disservice but are also offensive and illegal when put into practice. Yc