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## Employers need to support women returning to work after pregnancy

The response from employers to a new claim for award agreements that will help women return to work part time or on reduced hours after parental leave is out of touch with modern Australia.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the ACTU claim is reasonable and does not dictate terms to business.

“Under the Fair Work Act, employees currently have the right to request flexible work arrangements but an employer does not have to attempt to accommodate that request – they can simply say no without even considering if it’s possible - and many do,” said Ms Kearney.

The 2014 Human Rights Commission review into pregnancy discrimination in Australia found that around one quarter of women and men resigned from their jobs after being discriminated against when returning to work from parental leave.

“The ACTU claim recognises that all workplaces are different and doesn’t mandate anything beyond ensuring the conversation takes place – it puts in place a process.

“Our return to work clause simply requires that employers genuinely consider requests for part time or reduced hours when an employee returns to work – it starts the conversation.

“If the employer can’t reasonably accommodate the request, they can still say no, but these are the conversations that we need to have happening in workplaces if we are serious about increasing women’s participation in the workforce and ending pregnancy discrimination.”

“Under the entire Fair Work Act, there are only two refusals of a request that an employee does not have the right to appeal – requests for family friendly work arrangement and extensions to unpaid parental leave.

“Both of these requests have a significant impact on women in the workforce – yet an employer can simply say no to the request and women have no right to appeal the decision with the Fair Work Commission.

“If we are serious about increasing women’s participation in the workforce, then this needs to change.

“Most modern families now have both parents in paid work and rely on two incomes, but workplace practices and laws are not keeping pace with the needs of modern working families.

“More than four million workers are covered by award agreements, so our clause to give them more rights when requesting family friendly hours is a big step in the right direction.

“Unions urge employers to support the claim and help end discrimination against women in the workforce,” said Ms Kearney.

**Media contact: Kara Douglas, 0418 793 885 or Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575**