

Wednesday, 6 November 2013

## Workers urged to speak up as pregnancy discrimination overtakes disability for the top complaint in workplaces

Workers who have experienced discrimination while pregnant or when they have returned to work after having a baby are being urged to tell their stories to a national inquiry.

This comes as the Fair Work Ombudsman reveals 28% of complaints it received were from women who were treated poorly by employers because of pregnancy in 2012-13; this overtook the prior top complaint of discrimination because of physical or mental disability.

Australian Unions have set up a special hotline and an online service to assist people to make submissions to the inquiry by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Cases of discrimination already documented include including being fired, demoted, forced into insecure jobs and having their role changed without consultation.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said discrimination was a major factor in one-in-three women leaving the workforce while pregnant or after having a child.

“Despite laws and policies in Australia protecting employees against discrimination while pregnant, seeking parental leave or returning to work after parental leave, many people are often demoted, forced to resign, made redundant or receive unfavourable treatment during this time,” Ms Kearney said.

“Unions can and do help in all of these situations, but they shouldn’t happen in the first place.

“Unions hear these stories all the time, but we need to let decision-makers in government know about them too through the inquiry being conducted by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner.”

The ACTU and affiliated unions will be making submissions to the inquiry, but individual workers are also encouraged to tell their stories. Ms Kearney said the ACTU had set up a hotline and an simple online service to make this process easier.

“Many women feel alone and unsure about how to respond when the culture in their workplace is one that tolerates discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy. We know this culture is so strong that many women quit just to avoid the expected outcome.

“This hotline gives women advice about their rights and the steps they can take to protect themselves, report the discrimination and try to get a fair go.

“We will forward all the stories we collect onto the inquiry, and also use them as case studies in our submission.

“But most importantly, if we receive information of discrimination, unions will follow up immediately to ensure justice for the victims.”

**Australian Unions pregnancy hotline: 1300 364 024**

**Make your submission online:**

[http://www.australianunions.org.au/pregnancy\\_and\\_care\\_discrimination\\_hotline](http://www.australianunions.org.au/pregnancy_and_care_discrimination_hotline)

**Media contact: Eleni Hale 0418 793 885 or Ben Ruse 0409 510 879**