

ABILENE WOMEN FIND EMPLOYERS TREAT PREGNANCIES WITH SUPPORT



Pregnancy-based discrimination was outlawed back in 1978 by the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. Prior to the enactment of the law, employers would fire women employees who became pregnant or force them to take unpaid leave, according to the National Partnership for Woman & Families. Malcolm Coco, a professor of human resource management at Abilene Christian University, said that the majority of companies are working to accommodate women in the final months of their pregnancy nowadays. Coco said that should a doctor recommend that a woman not perform any heavy lifting will now be followed by companies. "Most companies would be very agreeable to making those accommodations," Coco said. Abilene treats pregnancy similar to any other medical condition. "We just would treat it as a qualifying medical situation and work with the employee to determine if there are any needs or limitations associated with the pregnancy," said Ronnie Kidd, the city's managing director for administration. The National Partnership for Woman & Families' director for workplace fairness, Sarah Crawford, said that the current law is very clear when it comes to the treatment of pregnant workers. "To the extent that employers provide light duty to similarly based workers, then that similar light duty should be offered to pregnant workers," Crawford said. Still, there are pregnant workers who complain about being treated unfairly. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for the fiscal year 2011 received 5,797 complaints claiming pregnancy discrimination. "It's a lot beyond just firing a worker who is pregnant. Discrimination can take a more hidden form. A lot of women are not hired, particularly when they are noticeably pregnant," Crawford said. Crawford also said that some employers that are considering a new hire "make assumptions about a worker who is pregnant and whether she will be a good worker or whether she may have a need for leave, which may or may not be the case. One thing that probably needs to change is the perception that pregnancy will always limit a woman's ability to do her job." An assistant professor of education at Hardin-Simmons University, Emily Dean, said that she did not encounter any problems with her employer while maintaining her regularly assigned teaching requirements. She described her supervisor as "really understanding for doctors' appointments and those kinds of situations." Dean's son Hayes was born five weeks early last year but that did not cause any problems with her employer even though she was unable to proctor final exams. "I think if you're in a more male dominated profession, it may not be as easy to navigate that situation," Dean said. The president of the local chapter of the American Postal Workers Union, Judy Glossup, claims that pregnant employees tend to work well into their pregnancies. "Most of them worked pretty much as close to their due date as they can, and then most of them come back to work around six weeks after the birth," Glossup said.

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