



Commonwealth of Kentucky

## Kentucky Commission on Human Rights

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Press Release

Date: May 14, 2017

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### **Working women who are pregnant need more civil rights to help them stay in the workforce**

On this Mother's Day, let's celebrate and honor our working mothers by taking steps to ensure that when they go to work each day, they will be free from discrimination and treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Expecting mothers need the right to ask for reasonable accommodations from their employers so they may continue to work while pregnant.

Women make up almost half the U.S. workforce, and women are the primary or co-breadwinners in almost two-thirds of families in the U.S. Three-quarters of women entering the workforce in our country will be pregnant and employed at some point in their lives. From housekeepers to CEOs, working mothers are a vital part of our economy.

Why should mothers leave the economy while they are pregnant?

Too often, pregnant workers are pushed out of their jobs, whether because of assumptions about safety or their dependability, or because the pregnant worker needs some reasonable adjustment to the way she does her work.

At the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, we see this happen with the most vulnerable of our community's mothers—those who are working the lowest-paying jobs and who need to keep their income the most. These new mothers then have to re-enter the job hunt and start fresh somewhere new. If they struggle to find new work, they may rely on government benefits to keep their families clothed and fed, or go without.

We already have some legal protections for pregnant workers. The federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act and The Kentucky Civil Rights Act make it unlawful for employers to refuse to hire or fire a worker because she's pregnant, or to treat her differently than other workers, and the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights enforces these laws.

Currently, the civil rights laws require employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees who have disabilities and who may need to do the work in a slightly different manner than normal, or who may need a special piece of equipment to help them do their work.

These laws work to protect persons with disabilities from being excluded from the workforce. Women who are pregnant with a child should also have these rights to reasonable accommodations in employment so that they are not excluded from the workforce when, with a little help, they can be productive workers.

A pregnant worker may find she needs more frequent, or longer, breaks than are normally given. A pregnant worker who stands at a cash register may find she needs a stool to let her get off her feet. She may need to modify her work schedule to accommodate medical appointments or childbirth. She may need temporary relief from heavy lifting. After giving birth, she may need a private space where she can express breast milk.

The expectation of expanding reasonable accommodations rights to working pregnant women is that an employer and employee will engage in an interactive process, working together and communicating to arrive at a situation that accommodates the pregnant worker's needs, while ensuring that the work still gets done.

At the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, we receive complaints from working mothers who feel they were wrongly terminated, or not hired, because they were pregnant, and many of them would have benefited from reasonable accommodations.

Keeping workers on the job helps Kentucky employers, Kentucky's economy, and Kentucky's working mothers. Urge your state representatives to support this kind of legislation, and tell a working mother you know, Happy Mother's Day!

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act and federal civil rights laws, all of which make discrimination illegal.