

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1796

As of March 8, 2017

Title: An act relating to providing reasonable accommodations in the workplace for pregnant women.

Brief Description: Providing reasonable accommodations in the workplace for pregnant women.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Farrell, Kilduff, Doglio, Robinson, Stanford, Hudgins, McBride, Macri, Ormsby, Frame, Slatter, Jinkins and Pollet).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/01/17, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Commerce, Labor & Sports: 3/09/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation in employment for pregnancy unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the employer's business.
- Creates the Healthy Pregnancy Advisory Committee to develop a strategy to improve health outcomes for mothers and infants.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, LABOR & SPORTS

Staff: Jarrett Sacks (786-7448)

Background: Washington State Law Against Discrimination (WLAD). Under the WLAD, a person has the right to be free from discrimination related to a protected status, such as race, national origin, sex, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, and disability. An employer may not discriminate against a person because of one's protected status. The WLAD applies to employers that employ eight or more employees, but does not apply to any religious or sectarian organization not organized for private profit.

Discrimination Based on Pregnancy. Under Washington law, pregnancy itself is not considered a disability. However, if a pregnancy-related medical condition results in an employee becoming temporarily disabled, the laws prohibiting discrimination because of a

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disability apply. Under the WLAD, an employer must provide reasonable accommodation to a disabled worker unless the employer can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship.

As it applies to sex discrimination, an employer may not refuse to hire, demote, or impose different conditions of employment on a person because they are pregnant. In general, if an employer provides reasonable accommodations to other employees that are impaired from doing their jobs, the employer would have to provide reasonable accommodation to a pregnant employee.

Other Laws Regarding Pregnancy and Childbirth. There are federal laws that prohibit sex discrimination and require that employees affected by pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions must be treated the same as other employees who have similar ability or inability to work. Federal law also requires employers to provide reasonable break time for an employee to express milk for nursing for one year after the child's birth. Employers must provide a place, other than a bathroom, for this purpose. Employers with fewer than 50 employees are not subject to these requirements if compliance imposes an undue hardship.

Summary of Bill: Reasonable Accommodation for Pregnancy. It is an unfair practice for any employer to:

- fail or refuse to make reasonable accommodation for an employee for pregnancy, unless the employer can demonstrate that doing so would impose an undue hardship—undue hardship means an action requiring significant difficulty or expense;
- take adverse action against an employee who requests, declines, or uses an accommodation; and
- deny employment opportunities to an otherwise qualified employee if the denial is based on the employer's need to make reasonable accommodation;

Reasonable accommodation means:

- providing more frequent, longer, or flexible restroom breaks;
- modifying a no food or drink policy;
- job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, or acquiring or modifying equipment, devices, or an employee's work station;
- providing seating or allowing the employee to sit more frequently if the job requires standing;
- providing a temporary transfer to a less strenuous or hazardous position;
- providing assistance with manual labor and limits on lifting;
- scheduling flexibility for prenatal visits; and
- any further accommodation an employee may request, and to which an employer must give reasonable consideration to in consultation with information provided by the Department of Labor and Industries or the attending health care provider.

An employer may not claim undue hardship or require written certification from an employee for:

- providing more frequent, longer, or flexible restroom breaks;
- modifying a no food or drink policy; or

- providing seating or allowing the employee to sit more frequently if the job requires standing.

Employer has the same meaning as it does under the WLAD, which includes any person acting in the interest of an employer, directly or indirectly, who employs eight or more persons, and does not include any religious or sectarian organizations that are not organized for private profit. For the purposes of this act, however, it only applies to employers with 15 or more employees.

The Department of Labor and Industries is required to provide online education materials explaining the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees with regard to reasonable accommodation of pregnancy.

The Attorney General investigates complaints and enforces the reasonable accommodation requirements, including by conference and conciliation. In addition, a civil cause of action is created to enjoin further violations, recover actual damages, and recover reasonable attorneys' fees.

Healthy Pregnancy Advisory Committee. The Healthy Pregnancy Advisory Committee (Committee) is established to develop a strategy for improving maternal and infant health outcomes. The Committee is comprised of 20 members from the Department of Health (DOH) and the health industry, including medical experts, hospitals that provide birthing services, health care providers involved in the care of pregnant women, and representatives of low-income women, women of color, and immigrant communities. The members are appointed by the Secretary of Health. Administration of the Committee is done by DOH and must be done within existing resources.

The Committee meets quarterly and must consider best practices that agencies may integrate into their programs to improve birth outcomes, reduce maternal mortality and morbidity, and reduce infant mortality. The Committee must submit its strategy to the Legislature and the Governor's Council for the Healthiest Next Generation by October 15, 2018.

Null and Void Clause. If specific funding for the purposes of this act are not provided by June 30, 2017, in the Omnibus Appropriations Act, the act is null and void.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.