



## Proposals to prohibit making employees redundant during pregnancy or maternity leave

30 June 2019

A bill was introduced to Parliament on 21 May 2019 seeking to extend protections to women who are pregnant or on maternity leave in the case of redundancy. The Pregnancy and Maternity (Redundancy Protection) Bill, submitted by the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee Maria Miller, proposes that employers cannot make a woman redundant from the point that she notifies them that she is pregnant until six months after the end of her maternity leave.

There will be an exception where the employer ceases to carry on business where the pregnant woman or new mother is employed. Women who experience a stillbirth or miscarriage would similarly be protected for up to six months from the end of their pregnancy or any leave that they were entitled to.

The law currently provides that women on maternity leave who are subject to possible redundancy must be offered any suitable alternative roles. But Mrs Miller doesn't feel this is enough and she wants Parliament to adopt similar protections as apply in Germany (as well as in other European Countries such as France and Italy). She cited research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission that found one in twenty women are made redundant while pregnant or on maternity leave. Overall, the research found that pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination remains high and it resulted in more than 50,000 pregnant women feeling that they had no alternative but to leave their job when they were pregnant.

Support in Parliament for these proposals is strong and the same amongst campaign groups. However, there are some who feel that, as well intentioned as these proposals are in protecting women who are pregnant or on maternity leave, without easier access to justice the extended protections will mean little. It is estimated that only 1% of women who have lost their job as a result of pregnancy or maternity-related discrimination actually pursue a claim to the Employment Tribunal. Therefore, the argument is that until a better process exists for women to have access to justice, these extended protections will have little impact.

This Bill is in its early stages and we await the next step in the Parliamentary process. One to keep an eye on.

