

September 11, 2020

Re: Support the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the March of Dimes, one of the leading non-profit organization fighting for the health of all moms and babies and promotes the health of women, children and families across the life course, we enthusiastically support the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (H.R. 2694). Modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, the bill would require employers to provide reasonable, temporary workplace accommodations to pregnant workers as long as the accommodation does not impose an undue hardship on the employer. This bill is critically important because no one should have to choose between having a healthy pregnancy and a paycheck.

Three-quarters of women will be pregnant and employed at some point in their lives. Most pregnant workers can expect a normal pregnancy and healthy birth. However, healthcare providers have consistently recommended that some pregnant women make adjustments in their work activities to sustain a healthy pregnancy and prevent adverse pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth or miscarriage. Workplace accommodations are medically necessary and can include allowing additional bathroom breaks, opportunities to stay hydrated, lifting restrictions, or access to a chair or stool to decrease time spent standing.

Unfortunately, too many pregnant workers, particularly pregnant women of color, face barriers to incorporating even these small changes to their workdays. Workplace accommodations help safeguard a healthy pregnancy or prevent harm to a higher-risk pregnancy. Across the country, pregnant workers continue to be denied simple, no-cost or low-cost, temporary adjustments in their work settings or activities and instead risk being fired or forced to take unpaid leave to preserve the health of their pregnancy. Low-wage pregnant workers in physically demanding jobs, which are disproportionately occupied by people of color, feel the impact most acutely. This impossible choice forces many pregnant workers to continue working without accommodations, putting both mother and baby at risk of long-lasting and severe health consequences.

One of the main predictors of a healthy pregnancy is early and consistent prenatal care. Getting early and regular prenatal care can help ensure a healthy, full-term pregnancy. The costs of a healthy birth tend to be around \$5,000, whereas the costs associated with a premature or complicated birth range closer to \$76,000. Prenatal checkups are crucial and necessary, so that providers can answer any questions, check on the overall health of mom and baby, and spot complications early when there is a greater chance to prevent them. If there is a possibility of a loss of employment, it would impact family resources and threaten the ability to afford vital prenatal care and healthcare costs when most needed.

Pregnancy affects every system of the body, so pregnant workers may need workplace accommodations to mitigate complications before they arise. During the second and third trimester, additional stress requires that the lungs work harder to provide oxygen as the heart supplies blood throughout the body and for the fetus. Some pregnant people have chronic health diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and need to take extra precautions to manage the condition. Moreover, additional stress during pregnancy may be caused by physical discomfort and other changes in daily life. Some of this stress may cause serious health problems, like high blood pressure, which could lead to problems like preeclampsia and premature birth, conditions that impact Black women at far higher rates

than white women and contribute to this country's Black maternal health crisis. Therefore, it is imperative that pregnant workers are protected and provided the necessary and reasonable accommodations, to ensure that they are able to continue working and maintain healthy pregnancies.

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act is a measured approach to a serious problem. March of Dimes understands the importance of reasonable workplace accommodations to ensure that women can continue to provide for their families and have safe and healthy pregnancies. We urge swift passage of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.

Sincerely,

Ariel González, ESQ., MA
Senior Vice President, Public Policy & Government Affairs
March of Dimes