

MotherWoman Statement on the MA Senate Passage of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (S.2093)

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(BOSTON) MotherWoman and the coalition supporting the Massachusetts Pregnant Workers Fairness Act applaud the Massachusetts Senate for passage of the legislation today. Passage moves Massachusetts a step closer to joining the 21 other states and the District of Columbia that guarantee protections for pregnant employees.

The measure e bill, passed unanimously by the House last month, sets forth clear guidelines with respect to an employer's obligation to provide a reasonable accommodation for pregnancy and lactation, and ensures that pregnant women are treated fairly in the workplace. The legislation also would prohibit an employer from discriminating against a worker because of pregnancy or the need for accommodation.

"When we started this journey two years ago, MotherWoman and her allies knew that too many pregnant women were struggling without reasonable accommodations commonly given to other workers," said Linda O'Connell, acting executive director of the Holyoke-based advocacy group MotherWoman.

"Massachusetts legislators on both sides of the aisle heard us. The business community heard us, also. We are lucky to live in a state that can solve genuine problems for its people."

MotherWoman firmly believes that no woman should have to choose between earning money to support her family and a healthy pregnancy. Because more than half of all pregnant women and new mothers in Massachusetts also participate in the labor force, the PWFA safeguards

not only the health and job security of pregnant workers but also the economic security of families, and the Commonwealth's entire economy.

"I especially want to acknowledge the Massachusetts women who came forward to tell the stories of their struggles with lack of workplace accommodation and workplace discrimination," said O'Connell.

"Speaking the truth about the demands of pregnancy can be a courageous act. Women like Alejandra Duarte, who lost her baby while working at a strenuous job, stepped up to make the case that pregnant women are not asking for privilege, they are just want common-sense accommodations so they can stay on the job and thrive."

Duarte, who was in the Senate Gallery for the passage of the bill said, "I am relieved and happy that, with all the pain I had, some good can come from it."

MotherWoman is incredibly grateful to Senate President Stan Rosenberg, the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, and lead sponsor Senator Joan Lovely for their commitment to this legislation and the women it protects.

We also thank the broader coalition of organizations and advocates, who have come together over the past two sessions to advance this bill – most notably the Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), Rebecca Pontikes of Pontikes Law and Dina Bakst of Washington-based A Better Balance – who worked together with us to craft this final version of the legislation.

Pontikes, a member of the Massachusetts Employment Lawyers' Association and the Women's Bar Association, emphasized, "This is a workplace equality issue—women cannot be equal participants in the workplace if the reproductive process is grounds for an employer to push women out them out of their jobs."

"There is a groundswell of momentum for ensuring the health, safety, and equal workplace opportunity for pregnant women across the country," said Bakst, co-founder and co-president of A Better Balance. "We are proud to have worked with Massachusetts advocates, the business community, legislative champions, and women who experienced pregnancy discrimination firsthand to push this bipartisan legislation across the finish line."

THE PWFA COALITION AND SUPPORTERS INCLUDE: MotherWoman (lead), ACLU of Massachusetts, AFL-CIO of Massachusetts, Alliance for Business Leadership, MassCOSH, Mass. Caucus of Women Legislators, Mass. Commission on the Status of Women, Mass. Alliance for Teen Pregnancy, Mass. Employment Lawyers Assoc., Mass. Women's Bar Assoc., NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts, Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts, UNITE HERE! Local 26, and the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts.