

A bill to help pregnant and breastfeeding women

By Dennis Romboy, Deseret News

Tuesday, Jan. 26 2016 5:40 p.m. MST

Link: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865646243/A-bill-to-help-pregnant-and-breastfeeding-women.html>

SALT LAKE CITY — When DelAnne Jessop-Haslam was five months pregnant, her boss wouldn't let her work two hours of her eight-hour day at home.

He told her that if he allowed her to work from home, he'd have to let everyone work from home, she said.

Jessop-Haslam, 37, said she ended up getting sicker and took a monthlong leave to deal with it. She said she was fired 20 days before giving birth to her now 20-month-old daughter, Preslee.

"I was begging for my job," she told the Senate Business and Labor Committee on Tuesday.

State lawmakers last year made it illegal to discriminate against pregnant and breastfeeding women in the workplace. This year, Sen. Todd Weiler, R-Woods Cross, is looking to take that a step further.

His bill, [SB59](#), calls for employers of 15 or more people to provide "reasonable accommodations" for workers related to pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and related conditions unless it creates an undue hardship on the business. Employers could ask workers to provide an explanation of their needs from a doctor.

Neither federal nor state law protects pregnant women and nursing mothers on the job, Weiler said.

"The word reasonable means reasonable, and that's all this is asking for," Weiler said. "If a pregnant or breastfeeding woman asks for an accommodation that would require a significant difficulty or expense, the company doesn't have to do it."

The bill drew favorable comments from several organizations including the ACLU of Utah, Voices for Utah Children, the Utah Women's Coalition and the Utah Academy of Family Physicians. The committee unanimously passed it to the Senate floor.

Accommodations could include reduced work hours, more breaks for using the bathroom and expressing milk, or providing a stool for women who work on their feet all day, proponents said.

"No Utah woman should be forced to choose between having a job and having a family," said Marina Lowe, ACLU legislative and policy counsel.

The law would provide clarity to pregnant and nursing women and employers, many of whom already provide accommodations, she said.

Stephanie Pitcher of the Utah Women's Coalition, said 61 percent of Utah women work, slightly higher than the 59 percent national average. She said 16 states have already passed similar laws.

Dorothy Bradford, who described herself as mother and grandmother, said she opposes the bill because it would open the door to others wanting accommodations. No one is entitled to a job and companies need to be productive to stay in business, she said.

"Employers aren't enemies," Bradford told the committee. "They have to make their business run."

Sen. Deidre Henderson, R-Spanish Fork, said there should be balance between the needs of employers and pregnant and breastfeeding women, but doesn't think the bill would put an undue burden on businesses.

"I was pregnant and worked," she said. "I've had to feed my baby and pump milk sitting on the toilet in a public bathroom stall. None of that is pleasant or sanitary."

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