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NEW LAW TO PROTECT CALIFORNIA'S PREGNANT WORKERS SIGNED

New common-sense law protects women from losing health care coverage during pregnancy disability leave

SAN FRANCISCO—California Governor Jerry Brown signed a new law today that benefits pregnant women, new mothers and their newborns by ensuring continued health care coverage for workers on pregnancy or childbirth-related leave. Senate Bill 299, authored by Senator Noreen Evans, requires employers to continue to provide health coverage for women on maternity leave, closing a gap in the law that put pregnant women and new mothers at risk of losing insurance coverage at the time they need it most.

Equal Rights Advocates (ERA) and California Commission on the Status of Women were bill sponsors and joined the California Work & Family Coalition in advocating for this legislation. The law, which will take effect in 2012, has far-reaching benefits, as an estimated 50 percent of California's workforce does not have guaranteed health care coverage when on leave.

"The passage of this bill is tremendously important for pregnant workers who can now be assured that they will have continued health care while they are on pregnancy disability leave. I thank Senator Evans, ERA and all those who ultimately supported the bill's passage," says Julia Flood, a working mother in San Francisco who has a personal understanding of the importance of this legislation. Flood approached ERA for assistance because her employer denied her health care coverage when she took maternity leave just prior to the birth of her second child.

Equal Rights Advocates' Managing Attorney Noreen Farrell celebrated the passage of the bill with her client: "It is a great day for women workers. SB 299 ensures that pregnant workers do not have to choose between medical leaves and health care benefits."

Senator Noreen Evans applauds the passage of SB 299. She explains, "Meaningful access to leave, including the maintenance of health insurance coverage, is essential to the health and economic security of working women and their families."

The California Work & Family Coalition led the effort to pass SB 299 over many months. The Coalition notes that:

- Women make up nearly half of the American workforce.
- Three in four women entering today's workforce will become pregnant at least once while employed and they generally stay in the workforce.

- When forced to pay out-of-pocket costs for health coverage, many women delay or cut short their leave. Indeed, almost four in five workers report being unable to take leave because they could not afford it.
- Approximately 20 percent of pregnant women spend a minimum of one week on bed rest during the course of their pregnancy.

Beth McGovern, Legislative Director of the California Commission on the Status of Women applauds Governor Brown’s signature. “Pregnancy and childbirth can be the most vulnerable time of a woman’s life and the risk of complications during pregnancy or childbirth is a very real one. Women need to be able to take time off before and after birth without fear of losing their health insurance coverage. We thank Governor Brown for taking an important step to address this problem.”



Equal Rights Advocates is a national civil rights organization dedicated to protecting and expanding economic and educational access and opportunities for women and girls. For more information, see <http://www.equalrights.org>



The California Commission on the Status of Women, a non-partisan state agency, works in a culturally inclusive manner to promote equality and justice for all women and girls. For more information, see <http://women.ca.gov>



The California Work & Family Coalition is a collaborative of unions and community groups protecting every Californian’s right to a job and a life. For more information, see <http://www.workfamilyCA.org>