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Response to Maternity Discrimination & Claim Time Limit (#givemesix petition) – March 2017

Thank you for contacting me about maternity discrimination.

The fact that women face discrimination in the workplace as a result of pregnancy or for taking maternity leave is wholly unacceptable and unlawful. It is shocking that some employers still behave in this way and I know the Government is committed to taking action to tackle this problem.

I am aware that the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was commissioned to shine a light on some of the treatment that women face in the workplace, and the Government is making good progress towards strengthening existing protections in those areas highlighted. This includes improving access to information and advice to ensure that women and employers understand their rights and obligations, and by taking coordinated action with the EHRC and businesses through the Working Forward initiative.

Ultimately, it is vital that pregnant women and new mothers have access to justice where they have suffered discrimination. As the petition states, however, the EHRC's evidence does not suggest that the three-month time limit for bringing a claim to an Employment Tribunal is a barrier. The research found that only 4 per cent of mothers had considered bringing a claim but had not done so, and in those cases that decision was not related to the three-month time limit.

That said, I do appreciate that concerns are still being raised about the time-limit. It is important to note that tribunals already have a broad range of power to extend the time in which a case can be heard. However, I understand that the Government is considering what further guidance can be provided to parties about the existing flexibilities in order to clarify the position, and to respond to these concerns.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP