



**Senate Committee on Community Affairs
Inquiry into the
Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010**

Australian Council of Trade Unions

Supplementary Submission

**Witness Statement of:
Ilana Crawford**

21 May 2010

D No. 16/2010

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In November 2007 I changed jobs, having been with my previous employer for over three years. I did not resign from my job until I had arranged another job to go to.

On Christmas Eve 2007 I found out that I was pregnant. A wonderful Christmas present, but very unexpected all the same. By this stage I was still on probation with my employer. I knew I would not be entitled to any form of maternity leave as I had been with the company for such a short time.

I went directly to my manager and told him of the pregnancy very early on, before January 2008. I was aware that by telling him I could be let go, due to the terms of the probation any reason from either party would have been acceptable for termination. My manager said that he was impressed with my work and that he wanted to keep me.

I had an extremely difficult pregnancy, with morning sickness for the entire 40 weeks. I stopped working 4 weeks before my due date on 28/7/08. I had no entitlements, nor any leave owing as I had used all of them with time off for morning sickness, which in my case was all day, all night sickness.

After having an emergency c-section, Samuel was born on 24 August 2008. Over the next three months I had two infections in the wound and consequently I had issues with producing enough breast milk. I ended up in hospital when Sam was just 5 weeks old due to complications. This period was extremely difficult for me, Sam was unsettled as I was not producing enough milk and I was very uncomfortable due to the reoccurring infected wound.

By the time that Sam was three months old I was feeling very pressured to go back to work, both from my employer, and for financial reasons. I was a long way from being ready to go back to work, however I felt that I had no choice. I felt that I would lose my job if I did not go back to work. I was not entitled to any form of leave after having Sam so my employer had all of the cards as such.

I went back to working 1 day a week 29 November 2008, only three months after Sam was born. I went back so that I wouldn't lose my product knowledge and my connection with the workplace. I was not ready to back to work, but I agreed with my employer that if I lost my product knowledge my abilities at work would suffer. So I went back without complaint.

In mid January my employer came to me for a meeting where it was discussed that I would need to make myself available to work 3 days a week ASAP, and could I get back to them in writing as to what my plans were. By this stage Sam was 4 ½ months old. I notified them in writing that I would be available as of the 16th February 2009 to work three days a week, as that was when a childcare spot would become available.

On the 14th February I was contacted by my employer that they would now like me to make myself available full time ASAP. I was told that I would not be needed part time and could I once again get back to them in writing with a date.

After having a family discussion we agreed that I would really have to make myself available, as we could not afford to have me out of work and still pay the mortgage. Once again I was not ready to work full time, but I strongly felt that if I did not agree I would have found myself unemployed.

I responded to my employer, after arranging care that I would be available to start on Monday 9th March.

On Saturday 7th March I was told that I would not be starting back full time on the 9th but could I report for my next scheduled shift at another location, Crows Nest, which is approximately 16km from my original store at Brookvale and 13km from home but 57mins away by public transport. I worked my next shift at the Crows Nest store. When I turned up at Crows Nest I was told by new manager that I would not be needed full time yet, I would be starting full time on 6th April. I was sick the following weekend and my next shift was 28th March. This was the week that my husband lost his job. On Monday the 30th March my manager at the Crows nest store called me and told me that my store was changing again and I would be due to report for full time duties at the Redfern store on Monday 20th April.

I live in Frenchs Forest on Sydney's Northern Beaches the trip to Redfern is about an hour each way on a good day plus tolls. My original store was Brookvale, which is about a 5minute drive on a good day. Redfern is 30kms from my original store. My public transport options would mean a trip of a minimum of 1 hour 15 mins.

Once again I felt like I was not being given a choice, turn up or no job. So I did as requested and spent 9 weeks full time at Redfern.

During my first full week at the Redfern store I was issued with a new work contract, which included a new probationary period. I returned the unsigned contract to them and was not pressed on the matter. I did not sign the contract as I had never resigned nor been fired, I had all my leave approved by my direct manager at the Brookvale store. I did not feel I needed to sign a second contract as I had already signed the original contract in 2007 and I believed that the initial contract was still valid.

On the 25th June I was told to report back to the Brookvale store on Monday 29th June. Consequently I went back to the Brookvale store, having had 3 changes in store location in under 5 months.

On the 24th August 2009 on Samuels first birthday my husband started working again having been out of work and looking since March.

On the 23rd of October I informed my employer that I would be taking stress leave. I had written medical certificates from my doctor. I was not coping with working full time looking after Samuel who was constantly getting sick and my husband was now working shift work 6 days a week. Two weeks into my allocated 5-week stress leave my employer contacted me to come in for a meeting.

Mid November I had a meeting and was told that my position was being kept open for me however I was being transferred once again, back to the Redfern store. Sam was by this stage 15 months old and had just started day care near our home. It was impossible for me to drop Sam off in the morning when they opened and still get to work on time, it was also impossible for me to get back to the day care centre before they closed after working a full day at Redfern. When I pointed this out to my employer, it made no difference to them. They pointed out that they were keeping a position open for me within the company, which was all that they were required to do. An offer was made to me at this meeting in exchange for my resignation. No agreement was made at this meeting.

Late November I was called for a second meeting. I was made a further offer, which I accepted and walked away.

Early December I was approached by my previous employer, The Good Guys Chatswood and offered work. My previous employer knew that I was looking for work, as he was one of my employer references on my resume. Not only was I offered work; I was offered family friendly hours. The Good Guys Chatswood really is a good guy, they consider the needs of not only new parents but realise that what we can contribute to a work place is just as valuable as anyone else.

Had Paid Parental Leave been around when I had Sam I would have known that I could have afforded to have at least 18 weeks to get to know my son, to create a

unique bond with him that is extremely important to both mother and child. I would not have felt the extreme pressure to go back to work so early or risk losing employment.

The reality for myself and lots of other women is that when we change jobs we lose all of the security that we previously had knowing that if we accidentally fell pregnant that we would be entitled to have our jobs held open for us, and unpaid leave.

The PPL scheme allows women not fear going for a new job, it allows women to better their positions work wise and financially whilst knowing that their entitlements in relation to having children would not change. I feel that the PPL should also take the fear away from employers not wanting to hire women of child bearing ages due to the associated costs.

I believe that the PPL will help create a more even platform for both men and women in the workplace.

Ilana Crawford