

**\*\*PRESS COMMUNIQUÉ\*\***

**Equal Opportunities Commission**

The Equal Opportunities Commission ("the Commission") is deeply concerned by public statements and commentary following the Budget announcement relating to maternity leave.

While recognising that public debate on economic and labour policy is both legitimate and necessary, the Commission is alarmed by suggestions that women should be viewed as less desirable employees because they may become pregnant, take maternity leave, or exercise rights afforded to them by law.

The Commission wishes to state unequivocally that disadvantaging women in employment because of pregnancy, maternity, or the possibility of future pregnancy is contrary to the principles of equality and may constitute a breach of the Equal Opportunities Act.

Employers are reminded that decisions relating to recruitment, promotion, training, remuneration or termination of employment must not be influenced by assumptions about pregnancy, maternity leave, or family responsibilities. Any refusal to hire, promote, retain, or otherwise treat a woman unfavourably on these grounds amounts to discrimination.

The Commission is particularly concerned by narratives portraying maternity leave as a barrier to employment. Such rhetoric normalises discriminatory attitudes and practices that undermine women's equal participation in the workforce and equal opportunities.

The Commission also wishes to address women directly: any person who believes she has been treated unfavourably because of pregnancy, maternity, or related assumptions is encouraged to seek advice and, where appropriate, bring the matter to the attention of the Commission.

The Commission will continue to monitor developments closely and will not hesitate to exercise its statutory mandate where evidence of discrimination comes to its attention. The Commission calls upon employers, public officials, commentators, and members of the public to reject discriminatory stereotypes and uphold the principles of equality, dignity, and fairness.

**Equal Opportunities Commission**

**24 June 2026**