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Family Responsibility Discrimination Claims Up by 400%

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The Center for Worklife Law recently commissioned a study concerning discrimination against workers who have family responsibilities. The report contains some shocking revelations about one of the newest recognized causes of actions to be filed under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The study reports three trends in types of discrimination that fit this description: New supervisor syndrome; second-child bias; and the elder-care effect.

The study also suggests that too few employers understand the legal risks of failing to prevent discrimination and would do well to educate themselves about family responsibility discrimination and training their supervisors on best practices.

New supervisor syndrome

This occurs when employees with family responsibilities have been performing well and balancing competing obligations until they have a change in supervisors. For whatever reason, the new supervisor rejects flexible work schedules, changing shifts or imposing new productivity requirements.

The new supervisor comes into the workplace with a bias against workers with families, often mothers with small children, and fails to recognize the success of the employee despite the circumstances.

Second-child bias

In this situation, mothers who experience no hardship in the workplace report a significant difference in treatment once their second child is born. Sometimes a mother may make a “preemptive” personnel decision, based on the assumption that the employee will no longer be committed to work because of her additional family responsibilities.

The elder-care effect

Given the changing demographics of today’s workforce, more and more employers are facing the possibility of caring for aging parents. As in the case of second-child bias, supervisors often act on stereotypes that their employee’s commitment to home will affect productivity or performance at work and will act preemptively to “protect” the work environment.

According to the authors of this study, litigation risks and costs are rising as a result of family responsibility claims. Further workplace structures and expectations may be unrealistic in light of the changing circumstances of the workforce.

Family responsibility discrimination may occur when a mother is passed over for a promotion because her supervisor thinks she won’t want to work additional hours or travel because she has children at home. Or a father may be told it would be career suicide if he takes time off to stay at home with his sick children.

Sometimes this discrimination is subtle, and sometimes it is overt. Either way, it is illegal.

The report reviewed 2,100 recent cases involving family responsibility discrimination. Since 1999, the number of all employment discrimination claims has declined.

In contrast, during that same time period, family responsibilities discrimination claims have increased nearly 440%.

And unlike most employment discrimination claims, in which the employer is overwhelmingly successful (usually 70 percent or more), in family responsibilities cases, plaintiffs tend to win about 50 percent of the claims.

networking opportunities

Bluffton ribbon cutting scheduled

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce has slated a ribbon cutting at Simply Southern Homebuilder LLC, Inc. The company is located in Magnolia Place in Bluffton. Where: 4:30 p.m. May 5 Information: Contact the chamber at 843-785-3673 or go to hiltonheadchamber.org.

Tourism council hosts Cinco de Mayo social

The Tourism Leadership Council will hold its Cinco de Mayo social at the Savannah Sand Gnats game Thursday. The event kicks off the council’s spring and summer networking opportunities. Where: 10:30 a.m. registration and noon shotgun start. Where: Johnson Square, Bull and Congress streets Cost: $30 for members, and $50 for nonmembers Information: www.tourismleadershipcouncil.com.

SCAD holds furniture design department’s first university-sponsored furniture industry conference — “Furniture Design Summit 2011: Re-Defining American Design.” The American Society of Furniture Designers and Metropolis magazine will partner with SCAD for the summit. Metropolis editor-in-chief Susan Stenley will moderate panels during the summit. Where: May 9-10 Where: SCAD’s River Club, 3 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Information: scad.edu/furniture-design. TEDxCreativeCoast May 13 at Jepson Center

TEDxCreativeCoast presents speakers with forward-thinking ideas who discuss the passions, visions and ideas for Savannah and the world. In the spirit of ideas worth spreading, TEDx is a program of local, self-organized events that bring people together to share a TED-like experience. When: 9 a.m.—4 p.m. May 13 Where: Jepson Center for the Arts, 207 W. York St. Information: www.tedxcreativecoastcom or www.facebook.com/tedxcreativecoast. Project Management courses offered

Beginning and advanced project management courses will be offered at the Coastal Georgia Center in downtown Savannah. Together, the 12-hour beginning course and 24-hour advanced project management course will result in the 35-hour course requirement for the Project Management Institute’s Professional Management Professional certification application. Where: May 9, 10 10 a.m.—1:30 p.m. registration and noon shotgun start. Where: Johnson Square, Bull and Congress streets Cost: $10 for Chamber members; $25 for member guests Information: Susan Smith at 912-644-6434 or SSmath@SavannahChamber.com.

Hilton Head-Bluffton Business After Hours

May’s Business After Hours presented by the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce is an opportunity for networking with business colleagues in a casual setting. When: 5:30-7 p.m. May 19 Where: Lawton Station Cost: $10 for members, and $20 for nonmembers Information: hiltonheadchamber.org or call 843-785-3673.

Savannah CFO Council breakfast meeting

The Savannah CFO Council’s breakfast meeting will feature guest speaker Sandy Richtermeyer, the chair of the National Institute of Management Accountants. She will speak on the “Preparation Gap of Accounting Students vs. Work Requirements.” This meeting will be sponsored by Savannah Bank and Minis & Company. When: May 24, with coffee at 7 a.m., meet in parking lot at 7:20 a.m. and meeting at 7:45 a.m. Where: Savannah Golf Club, 1661 E. President St. Information: Contact Roy Austin at roy.austin@rockwellbusinesssolutions.com or 843-597-4826.