



WorkLife Law Annual Report

July 2023- June 2024





Message From the Directors

Greetings from Jessica Lee and Liz Morris, the new Co-Directors of the Center for WorkLife Law at UC Law SF. As WorkLife Law embarks on an exciting next chapter under our leadership, we're thrilled to share with you this year's highlights from our work advancing legal rights for family caregivers and pregnant people in the workplace and education.

Over the last decade, we have been proud to play central roles in WorkLife Law's growth into a national leader in the fight for economic security, racial justice, and health equity for workers, students, and the families they care for. This year, the Center's impact grew substantially, as we undertook a major expansion in services and people helped on our free legal helplines, changed public policy across the country with our model laws and cutting-edge research, and forged deep connections with government agencies, health care providers, and grassroots advocates.



Liz Morris and Jessica Lee

Top highlights from this past year include:

- Attending the White House's celebration of the passage of two new historic federal civil rights laws: The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the PUMP Act, groundbreaking legislation that grew out of WorkLife Law research and reports.
- Seeing our legal theories and ideas adopted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Education and quoted in federal regulations.
- Educating tens of thousands of key stakeholders – ranging from attorneys and healthcare providers to academic institutions and employers – to create practical and policy changes that have benefited millions of workers and students.
- Breaking our legal helpline records yet again, providing free services to twice the number of callers than in the previous year, and securing hundreds of thousands of dollars in wrongfully denied benefits for the most vulnerable workers.
- Publishing dozens of new and updated resources on our informational websites Pregnant at Work and The Pregnant Scholar. Our single most frequently viewed page was our Abortion FAQ, highlighting the unmet need WorkLife Law is serving in the post-Roe landscape by educating abortion seekers on their rights at work and school.

We envision—and are making strides toward—a future where all people have the freedom to care for their loved ones and center their own health without jeopardizing their economic security. We're grateful for your support and excited to keep building this bright new future with you.

Our Mission

The Center for WorkLife Law is a national advocacy and research organization that advances gender and racial equity by strengthening legal rights for pregnant people and family caregivers. Our work seeks to ensure all people have the freedom to build and maintain economic security through employment and educational opportunities, without having to sacrifice their health or their loved ones' care.

Our Model of Change

As an advocacy and research center affiliated with the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco, WorkLife Law uses three strategies to advance its mission: 1) promoting structural policy change at the state and national levels through innovative research, thought leadership, and grassroots partnerships; 2) offering direct assistance to workers and students facing discrimination; and 3) providing technical support to litigators and public agencies to expand legal rights for pregnant, postpartum, and caregiving students and workers.

Our Team



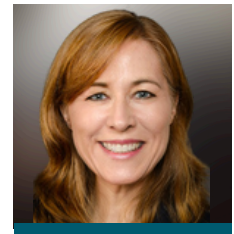
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Pregnant & Postpartum Workers



After years of WorkLife Law’s research and advocacy to advance legal protections for pregnant and lactating workers, the Pregnant Worker Fairness Act (PWFA) and The Providing Urgent Maternal Protections Act (PUMP Act) were signed into law by President Biden, ensuring that workers nationwide have rights to receive workplace accommodations for pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions. Our priority over the last year has been advocating for robust interpretation and equitable implementation of the new legal rights, as well as on educating key stakeholders – ranging from litigators and government officials, to workers, students, and their medical care providers – about the new laws.

At the same time as the implementation of the new laws has been underway, challenges to their validity have been filed by attorneys general in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and elsewhere. The challenges to the PWFA and PUMP Act are politically motivated attacks stemming from PWFA’s protections for workers who have had or are seeking an abortion. WorkLife Law attorneys are serving as key players in the coordinated efforts to defend against these threats to not only these critical new legal rights, but also to our democratic institutions and norms.

Shaping Legal Rights

As we defend against these unprincipled political attacks, WorkLife Law remains committed to ensuring the strongest interpretation of the new laws to protect the most vulnerable workers who need accommodations during and following pregnancy for their health and the health of their children. WorkLife Law’s comments on the EEOC’s proposed PWFA regulations were deeply informed by the real-world experiences of the callers to our free legal helpline, as well as our unique expertise in this complicated area of law. WorkLife Law experts also drafted template comments that were adopted by scores of other advocacy, medical, and community groups. In April 2024, the EEOC implemented strong regulations, adopting dozens of our suggestions. We are proud that our thought leadership led the EEOC to modify its approach in several areas important to protecting pregnant and postpartum workers, even quoting WorkLife Law in the regulations.

Our work shaping the meaning of these brand new laws is far from done: WorkLife Law is educating the plaintiffs employment bar to win favorable case outcomes, not only for current clients, but for future pregnant and lactating workers whose fate will turn on the legal precedent being set today. Through our webinar series in partnership with the ACLU and the National Employment Lawyers Association (NELA) we’ve trained over 1,000 attorneys to date. We’ve also provided hands-on technical litigation support in a handful of the earliest cases.

“After the gut-punch of reading the Republican AGs’ complaint, this work you’re doing feels like a bit of an antidote. You all are doing so much good to get vital tools in the hands of those who need them.
-Senior Government Official”

Educating Key Stakeholders

New legal rights matter only if people understand them and are able to access them. WorkLife Law launched an intensive education campaign this year to ensure that workers, their employers, and their healthcare providers are aware of and equipped to use the new laws. Highlights include:

- Training thousands of healthcare providers, public health workers, and abortion practical support providers, including a presentation in partnership with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Nurse-Midwives, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Our free tools, such as Guidelines for Drafting Work Accommodation Notes and our model Medical Certification Form, have been widely adopted.
- Educating employers through webinars, practical tools, and publications. For example, we trained 800+ human resources professionals on the PUMP Act during a single presentation with lactation pod company Mamava, provided technical assistance to revise the policies of several major U.S. health systems, and published The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act: What U.S. Employers Need to Know in the Harvard Business Review.
- Providing accessible information to workers and their advocates via conference presentations, webinars, publications, and social media live streams. Our online worker resources were accessed over 70,000 times this year alone.

“Your ability to articulate the nuances of the act and its impact on pregnant individuals in the workplace was both informative and empowering. Your commitment to advocacy and social justice is making a meaningful difference...”
-Webinar Attendee

Building Protections for Farmworkers

WorkLife Law’s Dar a Luz initiative advances the legal rights of California farmworkers so they can access paid time off work during pregnancy to avoid the devastating health risks of prenatal pesticide exposure. A collaboration with the grassroots group Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), Dar a Luz has built a coalition of farmworkers, community advocates, attorneys, and health care experts to topple legal and bureaucratic barriers and build community knowledge. Through partnerships with members of our Healthcare Provider Advisory Committee and the California Employment Development Department (EDD) our team has educated hundreds of doctors, public health and community health workers in agricultural communities.





We're particularly proud of our community health worker training pilot program, established in partnership with the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network, WIC, and the UC Global Health Institute, which UC researchers found should be replicated statewide for long-lasting change. Finally, WorkLife Law attorneys, offering free services in Spanish and indigenous languages, have assisted dozens of pregnant and postpartum farmworker women to recover hundreds of thousands of dollars in wrongfully denied paid leave benefits.

“After attending the training, promotores reported increased confidence in sharing messages on maternal health and rights -- and they have already made over a thousand contacts in the farmworker community.
-Lead Researcher, UCLA Fielding School of Public Health”

Pregnant & Parenting Students

Advancing Title IX Legal Protections

Economic security begins with education. WorkLife Law's Pregnant Scholar initiative advances the rights of the millions of pregnant and parenting students in higher education, the majority of whom are people of color and women. This year, our team celebrated another groundbreaking win as the U.S. Department of Education formally adopted long-anticipated regulations implementing new Title IX protections for pregnant and postpartum students, including a right to accommodations for pregnancy-related conditions, lactation breaks, and new accountability and transparency measures. The Department accepted recommendations proposed by the Pregnant Scholar in the regulatory comments we submitted and co-authored.

Now we have a strong interpretation that both protects millions of pregnant and parenting students and provides detailed guidance for educational institutions. Unfortunately, the new regulations are facing legal challenges based on their inclusion of protections for LGBTQI+ people and abortion seekers. WorkLife Law is proud to be a leader in the coalition of organizations dedicated to upholding the strongest interpretation possible and defending these new protections from baseless attacks.

Providing Training and Technical Assistance

WorkLife Law attorneys are seizing this moment to educate the public about students' new legal rights and to assist educational institutions in meeting their new obligations. Highlights include:

- Training over 1,000 academic administrators, students, and policymakers within the first weeks following publication of the new Title IX regulations.
- Providing technical assistance to reproductive justice advocates and training national leaders on the legal rights of college students post-*Dobbs*.

- Providing technical assistance to dozens of institutions and university systems—benefitting millions of students.
- Publishing a dozen new guides for students and administrators in our [Title IX Toolkit](#), which has already been accessed over 2,000 times in the weeks since the new regulations were released.



Securing Equity in STEMM

The Pregnant Scholar was commissioned this year by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to produce a study on the best practices for recruiting, retaining, and advancing family caregivers in STEMM. Our [report](#) catalogs the challenges faced by pregnant, parenting, and caregiving students and faculty and offers best practice examples for how to better support them. The Commissioned Paper will be a pivotal tool for dismantling bias against caregivers to achieve racial and gender equity in STEMM.

Family Caregivers

[Employment discrimination against family caregivers](#) is remarkably common in the United States and has devastating economic and health consequences for families. Discrimination against mothers is the strongest form of workplace bias against women and is largely responsible for the gender wage gap. Yet, as WorkLife Law researchers recently found, [only 30%](#) of U.S. workers are protected by a state or local caregiver anti-discrimination law. WorkLife Law is creatively using existing law to build protections for family caregivers, as well as producing [innovative research](#) that will support the creation of new laws around the country.

WorkLife Law experts were called to testify this year on the [California Family Caregiver Anti-Discrimination Act](#)—which passed out of both legislative houses. California was incredibly close to protecting nearly 20 million workers, but Governor Newsom failed to sign this important legislation into law. Our research also created change this year in Illinois, where the state legislature passed a bill to amend the Illinois Human Rights Act, expected to be signed into law by Governor Pritzker this summer. Lawmakers and advocates for the Illinois bill relied heavily on WorkLife Law models and research, as cited, for example, during the [floor debate \(at 1:50\)](#). When signed, the Illinois bill will become the country’s strongest state-level caregiver anti-discrimination law. We look forward to this remarkable win influencing lawmakers across the country to sponsor similar bills in their states.



Our Helplines

WorkLife Law is incredibly proud to offer direct and free support to workers and students through our legal helplines. Our attorneys give callers information about their legal rights and provide assistance with securing leave and accommodations, as well as offer support responding to discrimination. WorkLife Law lawyers intervene early on behalf of workers and students with their employers and academic institutions to prevent harm to their economic security and health, and hopefully to avoid escalation. We also assist callers in filing charges with government agencies and connect them with attorneys in their states when legal action becomes necessary.

This past year, we served callers from 39 states and DC. The number of students served increased by 30%, while calls from workers more than doubled, a remarkable increase following the 400% jump we saw in 2023. In addition to offering life-changing assistance to the individuals we help, our interactions with helpline callers afford us insights, resonant stories, and a real-world understanding that informs and strengthens WorkLife Law’s broader policy advocacy changing the lives of millions.

ARE YOU PREGNANT OR LACTATING?
HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR WORKPLACE RIGHTS?

Contact our free legal helpline for support!

hotline@worklifelaw.org
(415) 703-8276

www.PregnantAtWork.org @WorkLifeLawCtr

“ I cannot thank you enough for helping me find the words and the courage to fight for myself, my family, and hopefully other women at my workplace. It felt very daunting and vulnerable to be forced into this situation, and I am just so grateful to have had your knowledge, expertise, and kindness. ”



Our attorneys assist hundreds of workers each year, like Rocío Garcia-Rodriguez, a strawberry picker who was able to access paid leave during pregnancy and postpartum with the support of WorkLife Law's free helpline services.

Thanks to Our Supporters

Many thanks to the WorkLife Law Advisory Board and to the leadership and staff of the University of California, College of the Law, San Francisco. We are also grateful to our many supporters without whom this work would not be possible, with special thanks to the following:

Bigglesworth Family Foundation
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Support Our Work

Your donations make all of this essential work possible. Thank you for investing in our team.

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