



Starbucks Failed to Accommodate Breast Feeding Barista

Investigation Reveals Likely Violation of New Jersey Law Against Discrimination

STATE INVESTIGATORS FOUND probable cause that Starbucks violated the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD) by failing to accommodate a breast-feeding employee at its Sicklerville location. The finding stems from a complaint filed by the barista who said she was denied a private space to pump breast milk during her shift after returning from parental leave.

Instead of providing a suitable location, the store manager set up a cloth trifold privacy screen in a busy back room used by other employees. When the employee expressed concerns about privacy and stability of the screen, management said she could either use the provided screen or extend her leave of absence. Unable to secure suitable accommodations, she took unpaid leave for almost two additional months beyond what she had planned.

New Jersey's Workplace Protections

Following its investigation, the Division on Civil Rights (DCR) determined there was sufficient evidence to suspect the company violated the LAD in two ways: by failing to provide a private and adequate space for lactation and by not engaging in a good-faith dialogue with the employee to find reasonable alternatives.

State officials stressed that New Jersey has some of the strongest workplace protections in the country for pregnant and breastfeeding employees. These protections are intended to ensure that workers do not have to choose between caring for their child and maintaining employment. Authorities also warned that failing to comply with the law not only creates personal and financial hardship but can also unlawfully drive new mothers out of the workforce.

The LAD Requirements

The LAD, as amended by the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions, including lactation. Specifically, the law mandates reasonable break time each day for expressing milk as well as a private, suitable space close to the employee's work area to do so. Furthermore, employers are obligated to engage in an "interactive process" with employees requesting accommodations. This means working collaboratively to find practical solutions that respect both the employee's needs and the employer's business operations.

The Broader Civil Rights Initiative

This enforcement action reflects a broader initiative by New Jersey civil rights authorities to combat gender and pregnancy-related discrimination in workplaces across the state. Employers are reminded that providing meaningful accommodations for pregnancy, lactation and related issues is not an option, it's the law. ■

If you have questions about the pregnancy or lactation accommodations, contact the NIEDWESKE LAW FIRM, LLC at 908-738-8500 and one of our highly skilled employment attorneys will assist you.