

## **Preventing FRD**

Family responsibility discrimination is a hotbed for litigation and every indication is that this trend will continue. Accordingly, it is critical that employers recognize the potential for liability and take necessary steps to avoid being the next defendant.

An employer can minimize its risk by including parental and caregiver status in internal anti-discrimination policies. Also, training is imperative. Managers may understand that it is unlawful to discriminate against an employee or applicant because she is a woman. But, managers may not understand that discriminating against an employee or an applicant because she is a mother may also lead to liability for gender discrimination. Therefore, supervisors should be trained to spot and prevent family responsibilities discrimination, and employers should be proactive when problems or complaints of family responsibilities discrimination occur.

It is also important to examine hiring, attendance and promotion policies to make sure that they are free from biased standards. Think flexibly about how job duties can be accomplished and make personnel decisions based on legitimate business needs rather than on assumptions about commitment and productivity.

Successful employers know that attracting and retaining excellent employees is a key business objective. Studies show that employees who feel supported by their supervisors and who are not distracted by unnecessary conflicts between work and personal lives are more loyal and more productive. This applies to male employees, who are increasingly interested in having lives outside the office and in participating more fully in their family lives, as well as to female employees. It also applies to non-parents and parents whose children are grown, both of whom can face elder care responsibilities or health problems of a spouse or partner.

In short, employers can protect themselves both by eliminating stereotypes about caregivers from personnel decisions and by proactively creating personnel programs to give all employees support for their caregiving needs.