

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester , and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

In 2018, a dear friend of mine named Lauren, who had until that point received generous praise about her job performance at Target, was called into her manager's office and informed that her "seasonal employment" had ended, and she was fired. She had never agreed to any sort of seasonal contract. Target is not a seasonal business. The difference between her and her coworkers? She was eight-months pregnant.

Since 1978, it has been illegal to discriminate against pregnant women in the workplace. But because Lauren signed a forced arbitration agreement as part of her employment paperwork, she could be forced into unemployment with no path to fight it.

Forced arbitration agreements stipulate that if a dispute arises, it must be settled through arbitration. This gives the employer an enormous advantage in the result of the dispute. On average, in arbitration, settlements favor the employer 80% of the time.

With LD1711, we have a chance to bolster the rights of the working people of Maine. Protecting whistleblowers from retaliation, and mitigating the power of forced arbitration clauses, are two essential avenues toward empowering working class Mainers. Not only will LD1711 give workers more rights, but it will also provide a financial avenue to re-fund the sorrowfully underfunded Department of Labor, thereby creating a positive feedback loop that reinforces good practices and empowered employees.

LD1711 is an essential bill to give workers like Lauren the proper workplace protections. I urge our lawmakers to pass this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

Eliza Burke of South Portland, Maine