



Matt Wrack General Secretary
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE
fbu.org.uk | @fbunational
020 8541 1765 | office@fbu.org.uk

Circular: 2024HOC0180MW

Date: **18/04/2024**

To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

An attack on the maternity rights of women FBU members

On 5 April, a large number of FBU officials received a WhatsApp message with an attachment of a bulletin titled Trade union activity whilst on maternity leave. Whilst the bulletin itself is anonymous, it was circulated to officials by a retired, former FBU official. He did not seek approval from the Executive Council prior to circulating the bulletin. The bulletin does not therefore represent the position of the FBU. This circular sets out why the content of the bulletin is incorrect and should not be followed.

The argument which is being made in the anonymous bulletin is that women FBU members who are on maternity leave and who undertake activities for the FBU face a threat to their maternity pay.

To be clear, it has never been reported through FBU structures that any such threat has ever been made by any employer in the fire and rescue service. Nor is it likely that any employer would attempt this, especially considering the significant levels of criticism already directed at the fire and rescue service in relation to bullying, harassment and discrimination suffered by women and other under-represented groups in the workforce. It is therefore extremely surprising and disappointing that a former official of our union would circulate a document which seeks to create arguments for employers to potentially use against women employees.

The arguments made in the anonymous bulletin:

- are wrong in terms of the position of the FBU – which is to support the rights of women as far as possible to make their own choices about their maternity leave.
- are wrong in terms of law. For example, they misinterpret what is meant by ‘work’ under the relevant regulations.

To be clear, any fire service employer who is foolish enough to make such an attack on any woman FBU member in such circumstances can expect to face legal action from our union; can expect to lose such legal action; and can expect to pay the appropriate compensation for their unlawful discrimination as a result.

Women trade union members who are on maternity leave in the fire service and in other industries often continue to be active in their trade unions. The FBU is not aware of any case where an attempt to victimise a woman in such circumstances has taken place. If there were such an attack, the appropriate trade union response would be to defend the woman member and to successfully challenge the employer.

Advice to brigade officials

All FBU Brigade officials should support and assist women FBU members wishing to undertake trade union activity whilst on maternity leave. If any brigade official becomes aware of any situation where local managers do raise concerns about the trade union activities of women FBU members who are on maternity leave, they should report the issue to the Regional Secretary and Executive Council member immediately. The matter will be raised with Full Time Officials at head office who will advise what, if any, steps need to be taken.

The FBU position is to support women members exercising their maternity rights and to win improvements in those rights; that is why we collectively launched our campaign *Fight for 52*. We support the right of women FBU members to fully participate in the union without interference and without unfair and unwarranted obstacles being placed in their way. We will only be able to face the battles ahead on pay, jobs and investment if we stand together as a union and do not tolerate attempts to sow division.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary