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## **FLEXIBILITY, INNOVATION, AND VISION: A CALL FOR WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY POLICIES THAT SUPPORT PREGNANT WORKERS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS**

The Twiga Foundation (Twiga) is committed to the health and well-being of the heart of American society: our families. Strong workforces and strong communities are created when the structures, needs, and dynamics of the family are considered. More proactive than reactive, this type of family consciousness brings awareness that we can maximize our lives and find life in our work when we are conscious of our families – including care giving, individual and family health, community health and safety, education, transportation, environmental concerns, housing, career development, mobility, civic responsibility and many other areas that intersect our lives. One of the primary ways Twiga aims to promote family consciousness is by using workplace flexibility as a tool to bring this consciousness to American workplaces and communities.

Twiga's conception of workplace flexibility aims to bring to light an understanding of workplace flexibility as a good business strategy that also helps ensure a strong workforce for the future through healthy families and communities. We believe that workplace flexibility is a dynamic relationship between employer and employee that shapes how work is performed and how careers are structured. This relationship is vital for individuals at all stages in life; and a family conscious workplace is one that is willing to engage with a range of employees about their needs, whether it is mature workers who need to work differently than they used to, workers with disabilities, military families, or working women with family care giving responsibilities.

Today, women comprise half of the U.S. workforce,\* and more women are working while pregnant. Between 2006 and 2008, two-thirds of first-time mothers worked during their pregnancies, with 88% working through the last trimester.\* Many women continue working while pregnant without needing to adapt their jobs. Other pregnant workers, however, may need modifications to continue working safely, particularly if it is a physically demanding job that requires standing, bending, or lifting.

Pregnant women – like many other groups of workers – sometimes have unique needs, but research shows that small modifications to work duties or sites may have a strong return on investment. These modifications may be as simple as allowing pregnant workers to take bathroom breaks, relaxing a no-food-and-drink policy, or providing a stool on which pregnant workers may sit while working. Other modifications, such as relieving pregnant women of heavy-lifting duties, may allow women to have healthy pregnancies and continue as successful employees. The innovative, dynamic relationships that result from robust workplace flexibility policies create more efficient workplaces and engender employee engagement and loyalty.

Twiga applauds employers who already engage in an interactive process with employees to best support worker health and address their other needs through the use of workplace flexibility. We encourage additional businesses and policy stakeholders to support family consciousness at work by participating in the ongoing dialogue and exploration of community health and the business case support on this issue. Doing so will contribute to a vision for American society composed of healthy babies, strong families, dynamic communities, and productive businesses.

\* U.S. Census Bureau, *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers 1961-2009*, 4, 6 (Oct. 2011).