

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 26, 2002

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EEOC AND VERIZON SETTLE PREGNANCY BIAS SUIT; THOUSANDS OF WOMEN TO RECEIVE BENEFITS

NEW YORK -- The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today announced the settlement of a major class action lawsuit alleging pregnancy discrimination against Verizon predecessor companies NYNEX and Bell Atlantic. Under the settlement, thousands of current and former female employees in 13 states and the District of Columbia will receive benefits estimated in the millions of dollars that were previously not made available to them for discriminatory reasons related to pregnancy or maternity leave. The size of the class and estimated value of monetary benefits make this one of the largest EEOC settlements of its kind involving pregnancy-related service credit adjustments.

The settlement, in the form of a Consent Decree, covers all women employed at any time since January 8, 1994, by any former Bell Atlantic or NYNEX (now Verizon) company located in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, DC, and/or West Virginia, and who took a pregnancy or maternity-related leave of absence between July 2, 1965, and April 28, 1979, and/or a leave of absence for the care of a newborn child (CNC) between July 2, 1965, and December 31, 1983.

"We are pleased that Verizon worked so cooperatively with the Commission's New York District Office to resolve these lawsuits," said EEOC Chair Cari M. Dominguez. "In the months and years ahead, this agency will continue to work in partnership with our nation's employers to identify employment policies and practices that prevent women from competing in the workplace on a fair and level playing field. Further, we applaud Verizon's decision to take an aggressive, proactive role in promoting workplace policies that maximize success and advancement for all employees."

According to the settlement, which received preliminary approval yesterday by U.S. District Court Judge Denny Chin, thousands of class members will be given between two and seven weeks of additional service credit per pregnancy depending on when the leave was taken. Some class members who missed out on early retirement incentive opportunities may receive between four and 12 weeks of enhanced service credit adjustments depending on the type of leave taken and the time period in which the leave was taken.

The Decree resolves lawsuits filed by EEOC's New York office in 1997 and 1999 against Bell Atlantic and NYNEX (now Verizon) and their predecessor companies and related subsidiaries. The suits, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, alleged that the companies violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991, by denying female employees service credit related to pregnancy and maternity leaves of absence taken between July 2, 1965 and April 28, 1979, and CNC leaves of absence taken between July 2, 1965 and December 31, 1983.

EEOC New York Regional Attorney Katherine E. Bissell said: "It is important for employers to

understand that newly announced retirement programs that fail to give service credit to women for pre-1979 maternity leaves may, under certain circumstances, constitute a new act of sex discrimination."

The preliminary settlement package is subject to final court approval following a Fairness Hearing which is scheduled for September 13, 2002, at 9:30 a.m. in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Therefore, precise figures on the size of the class and total monetary benefits will not be known until after the completion of a multi-step implementation process. Potential class members will be notified via mail within the next 60 days about the settlement and informed that a Fairness Hearing will be held. They will be asked to complete and submit a claim form and certification in order to receive an adjusted service credit. The settlement will be carried out through a process monitored by the EEOC. A toll-free hotline has been established for potential class members to call if they have any questions. That number is 866-312-9320.

Under the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, which amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, employment discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions constitutes unlawful sex discrimination. In addition to prohibiting sex-based discrimination, Title VII prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin. EEOC also enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; the Equal Pay Act; Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments; prohibitions against discrimination affecting individuals with disabilities in the federal government; and sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Further information about the EEOC, including new contact information for the New York District Office, is available online at www.eeoc.gov.

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