

multiple witnesses who say, 'I was pregnant and told I couldn't be promoted.' ”

Gather evidence

If you hear or see something that suggests bias, make a note of it. You cannot take documents, such as payroll records, that belong to your employer. But if you see one lying around, you can write down what you saw so your attorney can demand a copy. In California, you cannot record a conversation with someone without that person's knowledge.

Often, it's best to work things out with your employer, so before considering legal action, talk to your human resources department.

If you think you have been fired, denied a promotion or harassed in violation of the law, file a complaint within one year with the California Department of Fair Housing and Employment (www.dfeh.ca.gov).

Once a complaint is accepted, the department will investigate and try

to resolve it. If it finds evidence of discrimination and it hasn't been resolved, it can file a lawsuit on your behalf, but only after you and your employer have participated in mandatory dispute resolution.

There is no fee and even if the department finds no evidence of discrimination, you can still file a lawsuit on your own.

Alternatively, you could file a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which has a work-sharing agreement with California regulators to prevent duplicated efforts (www.eeoc.gov/employees/howtofile.cfm).

Or you could hire a lawyer, although you must first obtain a "right to sue" from the department.

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