The Young vs. UPS decision: What you need to know

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A decision was issued yesterday in *Young vs. United Parcel Service*, a Supreme Court case that examines the scope of the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA). Hundreds of articles have been written about the decision since yesterday, but this post will help you quickly digest the most important aspects.

The facts: Peggy Young was working for UPS as a parcel sorter when she became pregnant and was ordered by her doctor not to lift anything weighing more than 20 lbs, which she sometimes had to do. Young asked UPS for a light-duty assignment for the duration of her pregnancy, but UPS refused and instead required Young to take unpaid leave.

Why the case is notable: First, it has aligned advocacy groups from across the ideological spectrum, including workers' rights groups, women's rights groups and pro-life groups, who all say that a woman shouldn't have to choose between keeping her job and raising a family.

Additionally, this was the first time since 1991 that the Supreme Court has weighed in on employers' duties toward their pregnant workers.

Finally, women now make up nearly half of the American workforce, so it's an important issue for both female workers and their employers.

The issue: Did UPS discriminate against Young by forcing her to take unpaid leave instead of granting her light duty accommodations that were provided to other categories of workers, including those who had been injured on the job, had a condition covered by the Americans with Disabilities

Act or lost their license to drive a commercial vehicle?

The ruling: In a 6-3 ruling authored by Justice Stephen Breyer, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Young's case has merit and should be allowed to proceed. The Court held that before throwing out Young's claim, the lower courts should have looked more closely at UPS's reasoning for accommodating other workers but not Young.

The new standard: The Court rejected the tests proposed by both sides and put forth a "middle ground" framework, which requires a plaintiff alleging pregnancy discrimination to show that she sought an accommodation, her employer refused to grant the accommodation and then the employer granted accommodations to other employees with similar restrictions.

As a defense, the employer must show that it had a legitimate reason to deny the pregnant worker light duty accommodations that were granted to other workers, and being more expensive or less convenient do not count as legitimate.

What it means: Pregnant workers have the right to ask for light duty accommodations that are granted to many other workers who face similar restrictions. It potentially gives pregnant workers an easier route to prove that pregnancy discrimination has occurred.

Up next: The case is back in the lower courts for further review in light of the new standard. Young hasn't won her case yet; she was merely given the green light to try to show that UPS discriminated against her.

The reactions: Peggy Young, who learned of the ruling at work, said she was "ecstatic" over the win and said though the case is far from over, the ruling is "very positive not just for me, but for all women."

Sam Bagenstos, the law professor and former Justice Department civil rights official who argued Young's case before the Supreme Court, called the

decision a "big victory," especially since all of the lower courts ruled in favor of UPS.

UPS said it was "pleased" with the ruling because the Court did not find its policy to be inherently discriminatory and is "confident" that the lower courts will rule in its favor after considering the case under the new standard.

A National Women's Law Center spokeswoman told USA TODAY that the decision "put[s] employers on notice: pregnancy is not a reason to discriminate."

Significance of the case: Although the decision feels like a win for pregnant working women, it might not actually pack much legal relevance for the future.

For one, UPS has since changed its policy and now allows light duty accommodations for pregnant workers. Many other large employers have also followed suit after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued enforcement guidance last year stating that under the PDA, employers are required to offer pregnant women light duty if they do so for other employees.

Additionally, as Bloomberg View columnist Noah Feldman pointed out, the Americans with Disabilities Act was amended in 2008 (after Young's case was filed) to include impairment that substantially limits a worker's ability to lift, stand or bend, which could mean that pregnant women who cannot lift heavy objects are now protected under the ADA.

Bottom line: Employers will need to take a careful look at the way they treat workers who ask for light duty assignments to make sure that pregnant workers are treated the same as other large numbers of workers with similar restrictions.