Working Women and the Wage Gap

APRIL 2012

Nationally, the median pay for a woman working full time, year round is $36,931 per year, while the median yearly pay for a man is $47,715. This means that, overall, women are paid 77 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to a yearly gap of $10,784 between full-time working men and women.¹

The size of the wage gap between men and women varies by state. In Wyoming, for example, women are paid just 64 cents for every dollar paid to men in the state.² By contrast, women in the District of Columbia are paid 91 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.³

What Does the Wage Gap Mean for America’s Women?

If the wage gap were eliminated, a woman working full time, year round would have enough money for approximately:

- 92 more weeks of food (1.8 years’ worth);⁴
- Seven more months of mortgage and utilities payments;⁵
- 13 more months of rent;⁶
- 35 more months of family health insurance premiums (2.9 years’ worth);⁷ or
- 2,751 additional gallons of gas.⁸

Women & Families Cannot Afford Discrimination and Lower Wages

Women are increasingly responsible for the economic security of their families.
14,998,476 households in the United States are headed by women. 29.4 percent, or 4,409,552 of those households, live below the poverty level. Eliminating the wage gap would provide much-needed income to women whose salaries are of critical importance.

The Wage Gap is Not a Matter of Personal Choice

- The wage gap remains even when accounting for personal choices – such as work patterns and education – according to a Government Accountability Office study. Working mothers pay a “penalty” for having children while fathers get a bonus. Nationally, women with children are paid 2.5 percent less than women without children, while men with children experience a boost of 2.1 percent over men without children.

- The wage gap persists regardless of industry. In the industries with the most employees – education and health services, wholesale and retail trade, financial activities, and professional and business services – women are consistently paid less than men. In the financial industry, women are paid just 71 cents for every dollar paid to men. In manufacturing, just 74 cents. In education and health services, 77 cents. And in public administration, women are paid 79 cents for every dollar paid to men. Across industries, women are paid disproportionately lower salaries than their male counterparts.

- The wage gap exists regardless of education level. Despite women’s increasing presence in higher education, education does not reduce the wage gap. Women with professional degrees are paid just 67 cents for every dollar paid to men with professional degrees. Further, women with doctoral degrees are paid less than men with master’s degrees, and women with master’s degrees are paid less than men with bachelor’s degrees.

Congress Must Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act

Women and families’ economic security is put at risk when women are paid less than men for performing the same jobs. The Paycheck Fairness Act would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and help women fight wage discrimination. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives in the 110th and 111th Congresses, but it fell two votes short in a procedural Senate vote during the 111th Congress. It has been reintroduced in the current Congress. The Paycheck Fairness Act would:

- Prohibit employers from retaliating against workers who discuss salaries with colleagues;
- Put gender-based discrimination on equal footing with other forms of wage discrimination – such as race or national origin – and allow women to take legal action for damages;
- Require employers to prove that pay differences exist for legitimate, job-related reasons;
- Create a negotiation skills training program for women and girls;
- Recognize employers for excellence in their pay practices;
- Provide businesses, especially small ones, assistance with equal pay practices; and
- Enhance the Department of Labor’s and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s abilities to investigate and enforce pay discrimination laws.
There is Overwhelming Support for Paycheck Fairness

- **Voters overwhelmingly support a new equal pay law.** In a nationwide poll of registered voters, 84 percent said they support “a new law that would provide women more tools to get fair pay in the workplace” and 72 percent of respondents strongly support such a law.¹⁴

- **Both men and women support equal pay laws.** Eighty-one percent of men and 87 percent of women support a new law. Sixty-nine percent of men and 74 percent of women expressed strong support.¹⁵

- **Members of all political parties strongly support improving equal pay laws.** Ninety-one percent of Democrats, 77 percent of Republicans and 87 percent of Independents support a new law. Eighty-three percent of Democrats, 61 percent of Republicans and 70 percent of Independents strongly support a new law.¹⁶

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  3 Ibid.
  14 The poll was conducted from May 21-24, 2010, by Lake Research Partners. A nationwide sample of 932 registered voters was asked the following question: Congress is considering a new law that would provide women more tools to get fair pay in the workplace. The law will also make it harder for employers to justify paying different wages for the same work and ensure that businesses that break the law compensate women fairly. Would you support or oppose such a law? For full results and methodology, see: http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/5-2010_Poll_Data_One_Pager_LL_2.pdf?DocID=6681
  15 Ibid.
  16 Ibid.