



The Equal Pay Act

HB 850, HB 166, HB 170, SB 38, SB 504

While gender wage gaps persist across the country, Pennsylvania women are worse off than the national average. Without simple corrective policies that close gaps in current equal pay law, American women, on average, will not achieve equal pay until 2058. Pennsylvania women, on average, are not on track to earn equal pay until the year 2068.

Wage gaps are worse for women of color than white women. In Pennsylvania, women on average typically make only 78 percent of the median annual wages made by men working full time, year round. African American women and Latinas typically make only 68 percent and 57 percent, respectively, of the wages white, non-Hispanic men typically make for full-time, year-round work.

Women are still paid less than men in nearly every occupation. Even controlling for race, region, unionization status, education, experience, occupation, and industry, as much as 38 percent of the pay gap remains unexplained. Men even earn more in predominantly female occupations.

Current Law Fails to Adequately Address Pay Discrimination

Pennsylvania adopted the Equal Pay Act in 1959. The current law has not been updated since 1967, when it was amended to reduce the number of Pennsylvanians to whom it applied. Our equal pay law allows employers to rely on sex-based factors to set pay.

Pay discrimination is difficult to detect while it is happening, and difficult to legally prove once detected. About 60 percent of workers in the private sector nationally are either contractually forbidden or strongly discouraged from discussing their pay with their colleagues.

The Pennsylvania Equal Pay Act must be strengthened to address these obstacles to equal pay. Legislation must expand the population protected by the law, clarify and limit the reasons employers can use to justify any pay disparity between male and female employees performing similar work, prohibit wage secrecy, and improve remedies.

Equal Pay is Essential for Economic Security

Women are the primary or sole breadwinners in 40% of households in the United States, yet our state policies enable workplace sex discrimination. When the Pennsylvania Legislature fails to support working women by taking simple steps to address discrimination, they are failing Pennsylvania families.

Equal pay is not just an issue of equality, it is an issue of quality of life. The wage gap typically translates into \$11,000 less in median annual earnings for women, depriving an average American family of four of approximately one year of groceries.

Over the course of her career or a 40-year period, a woman working full-time, year round typically loses \$430,480 due to the wage gap. Equal pay would reduce poverty by half for all families with a working woman as well as working single mothers.

Pennsylvania & Employers Also Benefit from Equal Pay

Policy reforms that promote and protect equal pay make good economic sense. Equal pay will put more money in the pockets of working women to purchase goods and services to drive the economy. Since the state must sometimes compensate for lost wages, equal pay would save Pennsylvania some of the cost of public programs. Equal pay also improves worker morale and increases worker retention rates, saving employers turnover costs.

Pennsylvania lawmakers have heard abundant evidence of the need to fix the antiquated, ineffective state equal pay law. It is time to put commonsense equal pay policy proposals to a vote.

Citizens Support Equal Pay Policy

Equal pay for working women is a top concern for citizens. In Pennsylvania, 81% of surveyed voters said they believe employers should pay men and women the same salary for the same job. In a survey of working women, only 28% said they believed they were paid the same as men doing the same work.

For More Information

For more information about equal pay policy in Pennsylvania, contact Tara Murtha of the Women's Law Project at tmurtha@womenslawproject.org and 215.928.5766.

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