

Pay Equity and Workplace Opportunity

AAUW continues to believe that pay equity and equal opportunity are a simple matter of justice. AAUW has long fought to end wage discrimination and open doors for women in the workplace. As early as 1922, AAUW's legislative program called for a reclassification of the U.S. Civil Service and for a repeal of salary restrictions in the Women's Bureau. Despite civil rights laws and many improvements in women's economic status, workplace discrimination still persists. AAUW's report, *Behind the Pay Gap*, found that women earn less than men just one year after college graduation, even in the same major and field.¹ As the recession continues, women are increasingly becoming the sole breadwinners of their families—making pay equity not just a matter of fairness, but the key to families making ends meet. To help advance the cause of pay equity and workplace opportunity, AAUW recommends the following actions:

- **Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act:** It is critical that stronger laws that more thoroughly address the wage gap be enacted. President Obama took a critical first step when he signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which rights the wrongs of the Supreme Court, regaining lost ground and ensuring victims of discrimination can seek justice. The Paycheck Fairness Act (S.182/H.R.12) would build on the Ledbetter bill by creating stronger incentives for employers to follow the law as well as strengthening penalties for violations; strengthening federal outreach, education and enforcement efforts; and prohibiting retaliation against workers who ask about employers' wage practices. These actions will help create a climate that does not tolerate pay discrimination, and give the new Administration the enforcement tools it needs to make real progress on pay equity.
- **Advance Pay Equity within the Federal Government:** AAUW strongly urges the federal government to lead the way as a model employer. This can start with a Labor Department pay equity analysis of all federal jobs, department by department, to identify areas where women or people of color are underpaid for work that requires similar education, experience and skills. The administration should also reinstate the "Equal Pay Matters" initiative, an effort launched in 1999 to provide additional funds to agencies to improve enforcement of pay discrimination laws and educate employers on the importance of equal pay for equal work.
- **Improve and Advance Equal Opportunity:** There is still critical work to be done to create an equal footing for women in the workplace. This can occur through a number of administrative avenues including:
 - Issuing guidance on the permissibility of gender-based affirmative action.
 - Rescinding the recent Small Business Administration regulations that negatively impacted the Women's Procurement Program.
 - Reinstating the Equal Opportunity Survey, to enable targeting of the Labor Department's enforcement efforts by requiring all federal contractors to submit data on their employment practices such as hiring, promotions, terminations and pay.
 - Ensuring adequate enforcement of all civil rights laws through sufficient funding and staffing of the EEOC, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, and the various civil rights divisions. Going forward special attention in these entities needs to be given to strengthening enforcement of laws prohibiting wage discrimination, as well as pregnancy and caregiving discrimination—two areas where claims are on the rise.
 - Creating an interagency civil rights task force to leverage resources, establish priorities, and ensure a coordinated approach for the federal government's equal opportunity efforts—both as an employer and a contract administrator.
 - Convening an advisory group to help reinvigorate the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, the only federal agency devoted to the concerns of women in the workplace. Critical steps include reviving the regional office structure, and reconsidering the staff outsourcing plan initiated in 2006.

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¹ AAUW Educational Foundation. (2007). *Behind the Pay Gap*, 11.