Job creation and economic opportunity are critical issues for women, many of whom continue to struggle with economic insecurity and wage discrimination.

Despite civil rights laws and advancements in women’s economic status, workplace discrimination still persists. On average, women who work full time take home about 80 cents for every dollar a full-time male worker earns. Over a lifetime (47 years), the total estimated loss of earnings of women compared with men are $700,000 for a high school graduate, $1.2 million for a college graduate, and $2 million for a professional school graduate.

AAUW’s report Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation found an unexplainable 7 percent difference in the earnings of male and female college graduates one year after graduation, even after accounting for many factors, including college major, occupation, economic sector, hours worked, months unemployed since graduation, GPA, type of undergraduate institution, institution selectivity, age, geographical region, and marital status. Clearly, the wage gap exists.

The wage gap persists across all racial and ethnic groups, and it is found in every state. The most recent edition of AAUW’s The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap found that among full-time workers in 2015, Hispanic, American Indian, African American, and Native Hawaiian women had lower median annual earnings compared with non-Hispanic white and Asian American women. The pay gap was largest for Hispanic and Latina women, who were paid only 54 percent of what white men were paid in 2015.

Real Consequences
Pay inequality isn’t just a women’s issue; it is a family issue. Recent research has found that 50 percent of households with children include a mother who is either the sole or primary earner for her family. Pay equity is not just a matter of fairness but the key to families making ends meet. Wage discrimination also limits women’s choices and has real consequences. It impairs their ability to buy homes and pay for a college education and limits their total lifetime earnings, thereby reducing their retirement savings and benefits.

Closing the Gap
Since 2014, President Barack Obama and his administration have taken action to provide new tools to fight the pay gap. Because of these actions, federal contractors are now prohibited from retaliating against employees who talk about their salary with their coworkers, and prospective federal contractors must disclose labor-law violations. Employers are also required to collect compensation data about their employees, including gender, race, and ethnicity, and midlevel salaried employees will now receive overtime pay. All of these changes add up to more transparency and more protections for workers.

Increasingly the business community is demonstrating that they are committed to eliminating the gender pay gap. Many employers want to do the right thing; they just need a little help. Highfliers such as Salesforce, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the Gap are all taking steps to shine a light on the issue and reduce the impact of discrimination. In 2016, the White House launched the Equal Pay Pledge to encourage businesses to take action to advance equal pay by conducting audits, reviewing processes, and embedding equal pay efforts into other initiatives. In less than six months, nearly 100 companies signed the pledge.
the American working population, and many protections are not yet codified in law. Moreover, there are numerous other reasons for discrimination and pay disparity that must be addressed. That’s why we still need congressional action on the following legislation.

**Paycheck Fairness Act:** The Paycheck Fairness Act would expand the scope of the Equal Pay Act with incentives for employers to follow the law, strengthen penalties for violations, enhance federal efforts, and prohibit retaliation against workers asking about wage practices.

**Fair Pay Act:** The Fair Pay Act would require employers to provide equal pay for work of equal value, whether or not the jobs are the same. This legislation addresses equal pay for women working in female-dominated jobs equivalent to jobs traditionally dominated by men. The legislation would ban retaliation, require employers to file wage information with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, eliminate the “gag rule” on wage disclosure, and prohibit employers from reducing wages to comply with pay-equity requirements.

There are additional remedies that can come from the executive branch. These include
- Issuing guidance on the permissibility of gender-based affirmative action
- Ensuring adequate enforcement of all civil rights laws through sufficient funding and staffing of civil rights enforcement agencies. Special attention should be given to pregnancy and caregiving discrimination—areas where claims are on the rise.

Furthermore, states can mirror or exceed federal efforts through their own legislative and executive action. In

You provide the voice; we’ll provide the megaphone. Sign up to take action for women and girls today: [bit.ly/AAUWActionNetwork](bit.ly/AAUWActionNetwork).

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