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. Typically, women who work full time take home about 80 cents for every dollar a full-time male worker earns.\(^1\) Over a career (47 years), women’s total estimated earnings loss compared with men is \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.\(^2\)

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, industry, sector, hours worked, workplace flexibility, experience, educational attainment, enrollment status, GPA, college selectivity, age, race/ethnicity, region, marital status, and motherhood.\(^3\) The wage gap exists and starts right away even when controlling for all of this factors. It then compounds and widens over time.

The wage gap persists across all racial and ethnic groups, and it is found in every state and virtually every occupation. The most recent edition of AAUW’s *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap* found that among full-time workers in 2016, Hispanic, American Indian, African American, and Native Hawaiian women had lower median annual earnings compared with non-Hispanic white and Asian American women.\(^4\) The pay gap was largest for Latina women, who were paid only 54 percent of what white men were paid in 2016.

**Real Consequences**

Pay inequality isn’t just a women’s issue; it is a family issue. Recent research has found that 42 percent of mothers with children under the age of 18 are their families’ primary or sole breadwinners.\(^5\) 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**

Between 2014 and 2016, the executive branch took action to provide new tools to fight the pay gap.\(^6\) Because of these actions, federal contractors are now prohibited from retaliating against employees who talk about their salary with their coworkers. But other protections for workers, like a federal pay data collection designed to identify trends in wage discrimination based on gender, race, and ethnicity, have been paused or ended by the current administration.\(^7\) To continue to close the gender pay gap, protections must be advanced, not stopped, and the executive branch should take additional action to ensure adequate enforcement of all civil rights laws through sufficient funding and staffing of civil rights enforcement agencies.

In order to ensure these types of protections, and others, reach the entire workforce and are codified into law, Congress must take action.

**Paycheck Fairness Act:** This important bill updates and strengthens the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to ensure that it will provide effective protection against sex-based pay discrimination in a 21st century workplace. The Paycheck Fairness Act bars retaliation against workers
who voluntarily discuss or disclose their wages. It closes loopholes that have allowed employers to pay women less than men for the same work without a business necessity that is related to the job. It also ensures women can receive the same robust remedies for sex-based pay discrimination that are currently available to those subjected to discrimination based on race and ethnicity. This bill prohibits employers from relying on salary history in determining future pay, so that pay discrimination doesn’t follow workers from job to job. And it also provides much needed training and technical assistance as well as wage data collection and research.

**Pay Equity for All Act**: This legislation provides important solutions to address prior discrimination in wages that might be carried forward from one job to another. The bill would protect job seekers from having to disclose their salary history in order to be interviewed, to be considered for a job offer, or as a condition of employment, and from being retaliated against for refusing to disclose their prior salary. In turn, the bill encourages employers to pay employees based on job requirements and prior experience, rather than arbitrary prior wages.

**Fair Pay Act**: This bill offers an additional set of solutions aimed at curbing the financial impact of occupational segregation for women and workers of color. This legislation would ban paying workers less based on their sex or race than they do workers in equivalent jobs that are predominately filled by workers of a different sex or race. The legislation would also ban discrimination for bringing or participating in a claim, require employers to file wage information with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, prohibit discrimination for discussing or disclosing wages, and stop employers from reducing the wages of higher earners (typically men) to comply with pay equity requirements.

States can also provide additional equal pay protections through their own legislative and executive action. While 48 states and the District of Columbia have some form of an equal pay law, they differ significantly in their scope and strength. Currently, Alabama and Mississippi are the only two states in the country without any equal pay protections.

Over the last few years, red, blue, and purple state legislatures all took action to pass important bills seeking to shrink the gender pay gap. In 2016, six states passed pay equity laws (California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Utah), and in 2017, five states and Puerto Rico passed laws (California, Colorado, Delaware, Nevada, and Oregon).

AAUW continues to advocate for strong pay equity legislation, executive action, and full enforcement of our current laws to protect employees and assist employers. AAUW also educates the public about this persistent problem and its effect on working families. We also are committing to empower women to negotiate their own financial futures by training 10 million women through our Work Smart salary negotiation programs by 2022. The trainings help women identify their market value and give them the tools to advocate for higher wages. All of these efforts are critical elements as we work to close the gender pay gap.

Additional Resources
- *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap*
- [AAUW](www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/)
- “The Gender Pay Gap by State and Congressional District”
- [AAUW](www.aauw.org/resource/gender-pay-gap-by-state-and-congressional-district/)
- “AAUW Policy Guide to Equal Pay in the States”
- [AAUW](www.aauw.org/resource/state-equal-pay-laws)

**Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation**

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