WOMEN EARN UNEQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

Fifty years after the Equal Pay Act was signed into law in 1963, women make up nearly half the workforce but their paychecks still lag far behind men’s. This year in the United States, for every dollar a man earns women will earn, on average, just 77 cents. This means they are shortchanged about $11,000 in lost wages every year.¹ The consequences for women and their families’ short- and long-term economic security are significant—and affect all Oregonians.

We believe there are state-level policy solutions to this wage gap that can appropriately value women’s work and help Oregon women be more economically secure.

UNDERSTANDING THE WAGE GAP

The 23% wage gap for women occurs across all industries and at all ages for working women. It starts right when women enter the labor force and worsens as they age. The gap is more pronounced for mothers and women of color: African American women are paid 64 cents and Latinas are paid just 55 cents for every dollar a white man earns.² Mothers experience a “motherhood penalty” of three to seven percent per child³ and earn far less on the male dollar than women without children: a mere 60 cents for every dollar earned by a father.⁴

In Oregon the picture is ever so slightly better: women are paid 78 cents for every dollar paid to men. That’s hardly a cause for celebration, however, when Oregon women and the families they support are being shortchanged on average $9,949 each year. Nationally, women lose an average of $434,000 in income over their lifetime, which reduces their ability to save for retirement, provide for their families, and be economically secure today.⁵

WHY IS THERE A WAGE GAP?

The research indicates there are a variety of reasons women are paid less for equal work, these include: gender discrimination, occupational segregation by gender, and motherhood penalties.
that between men and women.11
women with and without children than it wider than
men’s—just because they are women.
and undercompensated in the marketplace relative to
women’s skills and experience are being undervalued
primary breadwinners for their families and just under
who depend on them: 41% of working mothers are the
The gender wage gap affects mothers’ economic stability
ADDITIONAL MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES
The gender wage gap affects mothers’ economic stability
disproportionately, which can be seen by comparing
occupations.7 Historically, the only jobs available to
“pink collar” jobs—like childcare, home health care,
teaching, nursing, and service work.
This trend continues today. When occupational choice
is limited (as it still is for many women), and women stay
in these lower-paying positions, the wage gap persists.
Data shows that the higher the percentage of female
workers in any one occupation (the more “pink” it is, in
other words), the lower the average earnings tend to be.
That said, gender wage discrimination is severe enough
to exist in all fields, regardless of the gender make-up.8

25% are “co-breadwinners” who provide at least a
quarter of their families’ income.12, 13

HOW CAN WE SOLVE THE WAGE GAP?
If we do nothing, the gap will continue to narrow at the
same slow rate it has since 1963—and take until 2056
(45 years!) for women to reach pay parity with men—for
doing the same job with the same experience and
education.14 For mothers and women of color, the gap
will persist for even longer.

Women, mothers, and the families who depend on them
can’t—and shouldn’t have to—wait 45 years for income
parity, so we must act now. That’s why Family Forward
Oregon is supporting Senate Bill 744, which would
require the Oregon Council on Civil Rights to conduct
a study on wage equality in Oregon. The resulting report
would provide a clear understanding of the barriers
to wage equality in our state and include concrete, state-
specific recommendations for improvements. With that
information, we can identify a path forward toward
wage equality in Oregon—long before 2056!

ENDNOTES
7 The definition of traditional/non-traditional occupations as having at least 75 percent of the workers of one gender is provided in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 S.250-6. Data are for full-time
workers only. If full-time and part-time workers are included, 40.4 percent of women, and 44.1 percent of men work in traditional occupations for their sex. 5.7 percent of women work in non-traditional occupations, and 4.7 percent of men (IWPR compilation of data based on US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table T1. Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Annual Average 2010. http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf).
8 WPPR, The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation. April, 2011.