

# Advocacy Update

Sent April 7, 2016

On April 12, people all across the United States will observe Equal Pay Day, which is the day each year that symbolizes on average how far into the year women must work to earn what their male counterparts earned in the previous year.

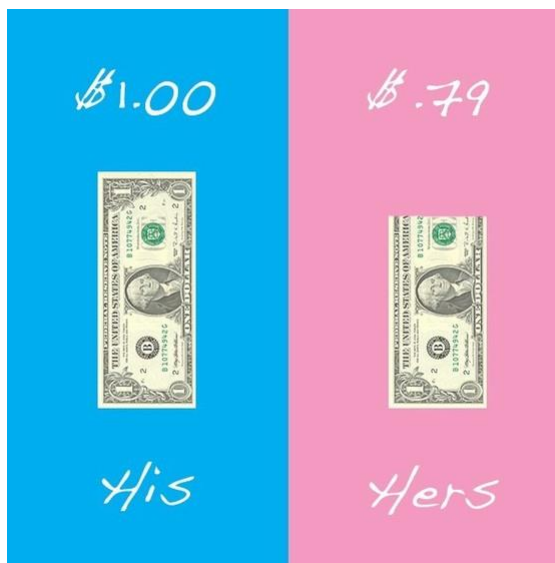
## Be a Part of the Photo Campaign

On April 12, Women of Reform Judaism and the Religious Action Center are participating in a photo campaign on social media with dozens of other organizations. Between now and Tuesday, print out the poster linked to below, fill it out with a message in support of equal pay, and take a picture with it. On April 12, share the picture with us on social media using the hashtag #EqualPayDay. Be sure to tag us or tweet at us ([@WRJ1913](#) and [@theRAC](#)). Women and our allies across North America will be joining in this effort on Twitter from 2-3 p.m. ET, but feel free to post pictures throughout the day! This is also a great project to share with your sisterhood, friends, and family!

[Print the Poster](#)

## What's the Problem?

The gender wage gap has been a problem in North America for years, but it has only recently become part of our national conversation. Last fall, [new data was released by the U.S. Census Bureau announcing women are on average paid 79 cents to every dollar paid to men](#). At the current rate of change, women will not reach full pay equity until the year 2059. Based on today's wage gap, women on average lose \$430,480 over the course of a 40-year career. This number is even worse for women of color: African American women are paid only 60 cents and Latinas are paid a mere 55 cents for every dollar paid to white men. Pay equity also varies by state, ranging from 65 cents to every dollar in Louisiana to 90 cents for every dollar in Washington, D.C. [See the gender wage gap in your state.](#)



Equal pay impacts not only women, but the entire family. When a woman loses income her economic security diminishes, along with that of her family. Two-thirds of all households with children under 18 are headed by women who are either the primary or co-breadwinners. Around 30 percent of these households have incomes that fall below the poverty line. Decreasing the wage gap and achieving pay equity for women would mean that fewer families would live their lives in poverty, and would ensure a better future for millions of children. For example, [research shows that if unmarried women with children made as much as men in comparable positions, the very high poverty rate for families headed by working single mothers would fall by nearly half.](#)

## United States Legislative Update

Some states have already enacted equal pay bills that have started to reduce the overall gender wage gap. However, to ensure that no woman has to face the realities of the gender wage gap, it is necessary to pass federal legislation that would ensure paycheck fairness. Right now, there are several bills in Congress that seek to address the issue of equal pay, although several are not being supported by pay equity advocates, as outlined below.

**The Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 1619/S. 862)** is the only piece of legislation that would truly protect women from pay discrimination. The bill would strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and would allow women to receive the same remedies in court for pay discrimination as those subjected to discrimination based on race or national origin. In addition, it would make it harder for employers to hide wage discrimination, reward employers that have good pay practices, and help train women and girls in salary negotiation. The Paycheck Fairness Act offers the strongest and most effective protections for working women by taking comprehensive action in these four categories:

1. Establishing wage transparency to help reduce the pay gap;
2. Narrowing employer defenses to ensure that pay disparities exist only in appropriate situations;
3. Establishing strong legal procedures and remedies to incentivize employers to pay an equal wage to begin with in order to avoid litigation; and
4. Keeping records, provide training, conduct studies and provide information to reduce the pay gap and help employers meet their obligations.

[Support the Paycheck Fairness Act](#)

[The Workplace Advancement Act \(S. 2200\)](#) would recommit Congress to existing federal protections against wage discrimination. However, [these protections are not strong enough to effectively address the current wage gap.](#) Unlike the Paycheck Fairness Act, the Workplace Advancement Act would not create new protections against wage discrimination, and its narrow and misleading rules would potentially cause harm to women by creating a false sense of security in the workplace. For example, The Workplace Advancement Act [would allow an employer to retaliate against an employee for having a conversation about raises or wages if these](#)

[conversations are not motivated by a desire to root out pay discrimination](#). It is most often these types of informal conversations that lead to the discovery of unlawful pay discrepancies. The Workplace Advancement Act does not do enough for women and their families who are losing critical income due to pay inequality.

[The Gender Advancement in Pay \(GAP\) Act \(S. 2070\)](#), similar to the Workplace Advancement Act, is a missed opportunity to make critical improvements to our existing equal pay laws. Unlike the Paycheck Fairness Act, [the GAP Act would not protect women from being retaliated against if they talk about their pay](#). Instead, it would allow employers to require their employees to sign away their ability to do so as a condition of their employment. How can someone fight pay discrimination if they do not know it is occurring? Further, unlike the Paycheck Fairness Act, the GAP Act offers few repercussions for employers who practice pay discrimination. With fines as low as \$2,500 for employers who pay women less for doing the same work, the GAP Act does not provide adequate incentives to employers to pay women and men equally.

American women need effective legislation to combat the wage gap, not “faux” fair pay proposals such as the Workplace Advancement Act and the Gender Advancement in Pay Act. **Only the Paycheck Fairness Act offers the solutions that women and their families need to be economically secure.** In light of Equal Pay Day, [urge your Members of Congress to support the Paycheck Fairness Act](#).

### Canadian Legislative Update

Pay equity is also a Canadian social justice issue. Even though women now account for roughly half of the Canadian workforce, [the gender pay gap in Ontario is 31.5%](#), which is one of the largest reported gaps in the world. Of the ten provinces, six have pay equity laws: Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Each law is slightly different and applies to different categories of people. For example, Manitoba’s law applies only to public employees, as does New Brunswick’s law and Prince Edward Island’s law. Quebec’s law covers public and private employees, and Nova Scotia’s covers all public and some workers employed by corporations. Although specific legislation exists to combat wage discrimination, the persistent gap between men’s and women’s salaries in Canada indicates that action is still needed.

The [Pay Equity Task Force Recommendations Act \(C-389\)](#) would require the Canadian government to implement the recommendations of the task force report “[Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right](#),” which was issued in May 2004. Recommendations include: creation of a new Canadian Pay Equity Commission, a Canadian Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal, a pay equity adjudication system, advocacy services, and a deeper commitment to research.

[Learn about the Canadian Equal Pay Coalition](#)

### What Else Can My Sisterhood Do?

There are many additional ways that your sisterhood can get involved in the fight to end gender wage discrimination throughout the year! Here are a few ideas:

- **Plan an educational workshop for your sisterhood or congregation on the issue of women's pay equity.** Because pay equity impacts the entire family and not just women, consider partnering with your congregation's brotherhood, preschool families, or others. At the workshop, you can [show this video of Lilly Ledbetter](#), winner of the WRJ Jane Evans "Pursuit of Justice" Award, speaking at the WRJ Assembly 2015. You can also have a discussion using [WRJ's living Talmud on pay equity](#), which explores Jewish values related to women's equality and wage discrimination.
- **Mentor female colleagues.** By mentoring women entering the workforce, we can share our experiences to help them strengthen key skills and expand their professional networks. Mentorships can benefit women of all ages, helping them to improve negotiating skills and to [learn ways to navigate biases against women who negotiate](#).
- If your sisterhood has a book club, **read Lilly Ledbetter's book *Grace and Grit*.** Ledbetter's story has become one of the most important and prominent narratives in the current fight for paycheck fairness. Use [WRJ's discussion guide](#) to help initiate your group's conversation about the book.
- **Research your congregation's policies on employee compensation.** WRJ women can take the lead in their communities by ensuring their congregations examine their own paycheck fairness, and they can extend that investigation into other, local Jewish institutions. Develop a plan to investigate your congregational practices and address any inequities you uncover.
- **Advocate for the Paycheck Fairness Act.** You can do this by [sending emails to your Members of Congress](#), and encouraging your sisterhood and congregation to do the same. You can also lobby for the Paycheck Fairness Act by visiting a congressional office in person. Members of Congress have several local offices, so there should be one near your synagogue! Use the talking points found in this year's [Programming and Advocacy Guide](#) to help you have a successful meeting.

To learn more about pay equity, [visit WRJ's webpage](#). May this year bring progress in the fight for pay equity for working women and families and in the narrowing of the gender pay gap!