

# eliminating racism empowering women

ywca

## Equal Pay

The Equal Pay Act was created over forty years ago and stronger legislation is needed to address wage discrimination. Today, women are still earning less than their male counterparts, wage discrimination laws are poorly enforced and wage discrimination cases are extremely difficult to prove and win. For example, in 2008, the year for most recent data, women earned only 77 cents for every dollar men received; and in 2007, in a 5-4 decision, United States Supreme Court agreed in the case of [Ledbetter vs. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.](#) to limit the ability of employees to bring wage discrimination claims against employers.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act protect workers against wage discrimination. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits unequal pay to men and women who perform the same job. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits wage discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion or national origin. In 1981, the Supreme Court made it clear that Title VII is broader than the Equal Pay Act, and prohibits wage discrimination even when the jobs are not identical.

### **VIEW POINTS**

Advocates for equal pay argue that this is an important economic security issue for women and their families. They believe that with a greater percentage of women in the labor force since the 1970's and a greater share of the total household income earned by women, equal pay is directly linked to family well-being. Pay inequity leaves women with less income to pay for items their families need such as health care, housing, child care, groceries and tuition; and it also results in lower Social Security benefits for women when they retire.

Opponents of equal pay argue that the pay differential between men and women is not the result of discrimination against women, but a result of a number of factors that are in women's control. These factors include 1) women and men tend to pursue different educational and career opportunities which result in different earnings and 2) women choose to stay home and care for children, or work less hours while employed so they able to care for their families, both of which result in a loss of employment earnings and career advancement opportunities which can increase pay.

### **YWCA POSITION**

The YWCA supports initiatives to increase the income of women, including policies that raise the minimum wage, protect overtime, strengthen equal pay, maintain the earned income tax credit, oppose the privatization of Social Security, and expand non-traditional training for women from all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

### **FACTS**

- In 2008, women earned 77 cents for every dollar men received, similar to the amount they received in 2004. That's \$23 less to spend on groceries, housing, child care and all other expenses for every \$100 worth of work done.<sup>1</sup>

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- The wage gap between women and men cuts across a wide spectrum of occupations. Women earn less than men in occupations ranging from physicians, to computer and mathematical occupations, to jobs in the construction industry to jobs in the sales and sales-related occupations.<sup>ii</sup>
- Although young women between the ages of 25-34 start out on a level playing field as their male counterparts they can expect to earn less over the course of their lifetime. Over a lifetime, or 47 years of full-time work, it is estimated that this gap amounts to a loss in wages for a woman of \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.<sup>iii</sup>
- The wage gap harms most women of color. African American women earn 68 cents and Latinas earn 58 cents for every dollar white men earn, while Asian American and Pacific Islander women earn 91 cents.<sup>iv</sup>
- The median annual earnings of women vary widely by race, ethnicity, and geographic location. National data show that in 2008, the median annual earnings of Asian American women were \$42,215, African American women were \$31,489, and Latina women were \$26,846.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> National Committee on Pay Equity. <http://www.pay-equity.org/index.html>

<sup>ii</sup> National Women's Law Center (2005). *The Paycheck Fairness Act: Helping To Close The Wage Gap For Women*.

<sup>iii</sup> National Committee on Pay Equity. <http://www.pay-equity.org/info.html>

<sup>iv</sup> National Committee on Pay Equity. <http://www.pay-equity.org/info.html>

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.