



Women Deserve a Big Pay Day

By Sonia Ossorio

Though many New Yorkers will have their eyes on the Pennsylvania primary today, an issue that shouldn't get missed in the increasing back and forth jabs between candidates is equal pay. April 22nd is Equal Pay Day, named because it is the day when women finally "catch up" to men's earnings for the previous year. And this week, the Senate will take up the Fair Pay Restoration Act, a bill that would protect the rights of individuals to challenge discriminatory pay, a right that was severely restricted by the Lilly Ledbetter case was a clear example of this. Ms. Ledbetter worked for 19 years at Goodyear, but did not receive raises on par with her male colleagues, resulting in her being paid up to 25 percent! less than her colleagues, some of which had less experience.

As the number of women within an occupation increases, the wages decrease. Across industries, similar work that is dominated by women is being undervalued. For example, most New York school districts pay cleaners, an occupation dominated by men, more than the women-dominated jobs of teacher assistant or secretary. Over the course of a lifetime, this type of discrimination adds up: women stand to lose anywhere from \$700,000 to \$2 million, depending on their level of education. While it might be hard to digest the lifetime numbers, an online wage gap calculator based on national and state-by-state research demonstrates a stark yearly earnings loss; a woman with a bachelor's degree between the ages of 35-44 earns almost \$20,000 less per year than her male counterpart.

Here in New York State advocates have been working with legislators to pass balanced, well- thought out legislation that will address the pay gap. The New York State Fair Pay Act, sponsored by State Senator Craig Johnson, would ensure equal pay for equal and comparable work and would protect workers when they seek salary information in the workplace, critical to uncovering pay inequity. The City Council has put forth two referendums in support of the bill, and similar legislation has passed in the Assembly every year since 2002, but the Senate has failed to act. Instead, Senate republicans hastily pushed through a new bill that lacks the teeth of the legislation advocates have been working for, and calls for further studies of the wage gap.

The numbers are already out there. We don't need another study that says the wage gap exists because of the choices women make – like making sure our civilization continues. Lilly Ledbetter certainly didn't choose to be overlooked for pay raises and make less money for the same exact work as her male colleagues.

Instead, we need real action to address it. That's leadership from our elected representatives and the candidates running to lead our nation should have to create a larger dialogue on issues like pay equity for women and childcare if they want our votes. Equal pay is not only a woman's issue but a family issue that impacts everyone.

Sonia Ossorio is the President of the New York City Chapter of the National Organization for Women.