

The Wage Gap Is the Result of Discrimination

Are Women Paid Fairly?, 2013

Mashaun D. Simon is a writer for *Black Enterprise*.

The following viewpoint discusses a bill to end gender pay discrimination that was still pending Senate approval in 2008. At the time of this article's publication, statistics claimed that on average, [women](#) earned only 77 percent of the amount men earned. The Payness Fairness Act would put gender-based wage discrimination on equal footing with other discriminations by allowing women to sue for punitive damages.

Women across America are claiming a small victory thanks to the passage of a bill designed to end gender-based pay discrimination. H.R. 1338, the Paycheck Fairness Act, still pending Senate approval, could make it easier for women to sue employers for wage bias.

The Paycheck Fairness Act takes immediate steps to close the [wage gap](#) for women by amending and strengthening the [Equal Pay Act of 1963](#), according to Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), a cosponsor of the bill who spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives. "Although the wage gap between men and women has narrowed since the passage of the EPA, gender-based wage discrimination remains a problem for women in the U.S. workforce," Lee said in a statement.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women still earn on average only 77% of what men earn. The situation is far worse for women of color. For every dollar men earned in 2006, African American women were paid just 64 cents; Hispanic women earned 52 cents.

"The wage disparity between men and women costs women anywhere from \$400,000 to \$2 million over a lifetime—keenly impacting the economic security of single women who are heads of [households](#) and those women in retirement," adds Lee.

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Not even a college degree is much help, says Lisa M. Maatz, director of Public Policy and Government Relations at the American Association of University Women. Based on AAUW research, just one year after college graduation, women earn only 80% of what their male counterparts earn. As they move further up in their careers, women fall further behind, earning about 69% of what men earn 10 years after having graduated college.

Maatz says the Paycheck Fairness Act takes some basic yet meaningful steps. While it strengthens some of the loopholes of the EPA, it also puts some enforcement efforts into place. Most importantly, she says, it prohibits retaliation by employers against employees who speak out or even discuss their pay with colleagues. Moreover, it puts gender-based discrimination sanctions on equal footing with other forms of discrimination—such as discrimination based on race, disability, or age—by allowing women to sue for compensatory and punitive damages. The Paycheck Fairness Act would also increase the available penalties of companies found in violation of the law and provide additional

training opportunities for Equal [Employment](#) Opportunity Commission staff to better identify and handle wage disputes.

It might have taken more than a decade, says Maatz, but a message has been sent by the House: "Gender-based pay discrimination will not be tolerated." Maatz hopes that, as law, the Paycheck Fairness Act will deter employers from unequal pay practices and encourage them to self-police.

But not all women see the necessity in H.R. 1338. "I am really scratching my head over why the Paycheck Fairness Act is a priority," says Deborah Stallings, president and CEO of HR ANEW, a minority- and woman-owned agency specializing in human resources management, compensation and benefits design and administration, employment law, management, recruitment, and hiring. "This problem [of gender-based pay discrimination] has improved greatly since the passage of the EPA."

As an HR consultant, Stallings says she's opposed to HR 1338 as it is currently written. However, "paying women and all people fairly is a marketplace issue, and I'm not opposed to an agenda that ensures that all people are paid fairly and equally based upon knowledge, skills, abilities, education, and other demographics such as geographical location, industry, etc."

Maatz says she urges the Senate to pass HR 1338. "Equal pay for equal work is a serious issue, and women are paying more attention in this election season."

Further Readings

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