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SOUTH CAROLINA STATE EQUAL PAY FACT SHEET

The Importance Of Fair Pay For South Carolina Women

April 2012

At the time of the Equal Pay Act's passage in 1963, women working full time, year round were paid merely 59 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.[1] Enforcement of the Equal Pay Act and related civil rights laws has helped to narrow the wage gap, but significant disparities remain and must be addressed.

Women have struggled to regain jobs in the recovery and continue to face high levels of long-term unemployment,[2] even as their families rely on them more heavily for financial support.[3] Wages overall are stagnating[4] and the wage gap has barely budged over the last ten years.[5] The gap particularly harms women in these economically difficult times, when women and families are especially financially vulnerable. Although Congress has taken initial steps to improve the laws that govern pay discrimination by passing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009,[6] there is more that must be done to realize the decades-old promise of fair pay for equal work.

The Gender Wage Gap Persists in South Carolina

Although the gap between men's and women's wages has narrowed over the past five decades, the typical woman continues to be paid substantially less than the typical man.

- In 2010, the typical woman in South Carolina working full time, year round was paid only 76 cents to every dollar paid to a man working full time, year round[7] – 1 cent wider than the nationwide wage gap of 77 cents.[8]
- The wage gap is even more substantial for African-American and Hispanic women. White, non-Hispanic women working full time, year round in South Carolina were paid only 76 cents to every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men working full time, year round. However, African-American women working full time, year round in South Carolina were paid only 58 cents and Hispanic women only 48 cents, to every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men who worked full time, year round.[9]
- The wage gap persists at all levels of education. In 2010, women in South Carolina with a high school diploma were paid only 67 cents to every dollar paid to men with a high school diploma. Comparing women and men in South Carolina with a bachelor's degree the figure was 65 cents. In fact, the typical South Carolina woman who has received a bachelor's degree still isn't paid as much as the typical South Carolina man who has completed some college or attained an associate's degree.[10]
- The wage gap exists across occupations. For example, South Carolina women working full time, year round in 2010 in management, business, and financial occupations were paid only 72 cents to every dollar paid to men in the same occupations, and South Carolina women working full time, year round in sales and related occupations were paid only 58 cents to every dollar paid to men in the same occupations.[11]

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Fair Pay Is More Important to South Carolina Women Than Ever in This Struggling Economy

In the current economic crisis, many people are facing financial problems, stagnant wages, and unemployment. Women in South Carolina already have higher rates of economic insecurity than do men in South Carolina: in 2010, women working full time, year round typically had lower earnings than men ($31,518 compared to $41,381)[12] and were more likely to live in poverty (17.6 percent of South Carolina women compared to 13.6 percent of men).[13] As a result, women are particularly vulnerable to economic hardship in today's struggling economy, when every dollar counts. For example:

- High unemployment rates for men have fallen since the end of the recession, but two-and-a-half years into the recovery, women's unemployment nationwide remained above its level at the end of the recession.[14] The unemployment rate for women in South Carolina in 2011 was 9.9 percent, a 3.9 percentage point increase since the recession began in December 2007,[15] and 49.9 percent of jobless women workers in South Carolina had been looking for work for 27 weeks or more.[16] Women's lower earnings contribute to the fact that women frequently have fewer savings to fall back on if they lose their jobs.[17] Nationally, the average weekly unemployment insurance benefit paid to women was $259, while the average benefit for men was about $310.[18] Worse yet, women who lose their jobs are also less likely than men to receive unemployment insurance benefits at all.[19]

- The economic crisis has affected all Americans, but has been particularly hard for women – who are already in a more precarious economic position than men because of lower earnings and higher poverty rates. Women are more likely to rely on public benefits like Medicaid, food stamps (SNAP), and housing assistance,[20] services which many states have cut during the crisis.[21] About 12 percent of non-elderly adult South Carolina women and 38 percent of South Carolina children relied on Medicaid in 2010.[22] In December 2011, the most recent month for which data are available, South Carolina provided food stamp benefits to more than 869,000 children and adults, an increase of nearly 27,900 from the previous year.[23] For many low-wage workers, these programs provide crucial support to meet basic needs when wages aren't enough. For example, for a full-time year-round worker at South Carolina's minimum wage, the annual pay is less than the poverty line for a family of three.[24]

- Recent tightening of state budgets has caused many states to cut back on necessary services. In South Carolina, enacted cuts to health care[25] disproportionately affect women and will create further hardship for South Carolina women and their families.

- In 2011, women made up about two-thirds of all workers that were paid minimum wage or less, totaling almost 2.4 million women 16 and older.[26] In South Carolina, the minimum wage was $7.25 per hour, equivalent to only about $14,500 a year for those working full time year round. Moreover, the minimum cash wage for tipped employees in South Carolina was just $2.13 per hour, equivalent to an annual base pay of only about $4,260 for those working full time, year round.[27] Nationally, women make up almost two-thirds (64.0 percent) of workers in tipped occupations.[28] Raising the minimum wage would help close the wage gap for South Carolina women.

Fair pay would help close the wage gap and increase women's economic security.

1 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Historical Income Tables – People, Table P-40: Women's Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Earnings by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1960 to 2010, *available at* http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/people/index.html (last visited Oct. 4, 2011).

2 See NWLC's "Modest Recovery Beginning for Women" (March 9, 2012) *available at* http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/marchmodestrecoveryfactsheet.pdf.

3 Heather Boushey, Center for American Progress, "Not Working: Unemployment Among Married Couples" (May 6, 2011), *available at* http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/05/pdf/maritalunemployment.pdf.

4 Heidi Shierholz and Lawrence Mishel, Economic Policy Institute, "The sad but true story of wages in America" (March 15, 2011), *available at* http://www.epi.org/publication/the_sad_but_true_story_of_wages_in_america/.

5 Between 2001 and 2011 the wage gap closed by less than one cent. The wage gap in 2001 was 76.3 cents compared to 77.4 cents in 2011. See U.S. Census Bureau, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010 – Report and Detailed Tables [hereinafter Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage], Table A-5: Number and Real Median Earnings of Total Workers and Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Sex and Female to Male Earnings Ratio: 1960 to 2010 (2011) *available at* http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html (last visited Sept. 28, 2011).

6 Pub. L. No. 111-2, 123 Stat. 5 (2009).
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12 *Supra* note 7.
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14 *Supra* note 2.
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