

EMPLOYMENT

Public Sector Unions Promote Economic Security and Equality for Women

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Public sector unions are crucial to the economic security and equality of working women, who make up a majority of the public sector workforce and of union-represented public sector workers. Women represented by public sector unions enjoy greater economic stability from higher wages and increased participation in employer-based health insurance plans compared to public sector workers not represented by unions, which means increased economic security for their families. They also experience greater equality in wages and health benefits with their male counterparts, compared to public sector workers not represented by unions. These advantages accrue to women represented by public sector unions whether they are themselves union members or not.

Key Facts

- Women are a majority—55 percent—of union-represented public sector workers.
- Women represented by public sector unions are paid 24 percent more than their public sector counterparts who are not represented by unions.
- The gender wage gap among union-represented public sector workers is about half that among their public sector counterparts who are not represented by unions.
- Women represented by public sector unions are more likely to have employer-based health insurance coverage than their public sector counterparts who are not represented by unions (78 percent v. 62 percent).
- The gender gap in employer-based health insurance is one-third smaller among union-represented public sector workers than among their public sector counterparts who are not represented by unions.
- Wages and participation in employer-based health insurance are higher for both union members and non-members whom unions represent, compared to their public sector counterparts who are not represented by unions.

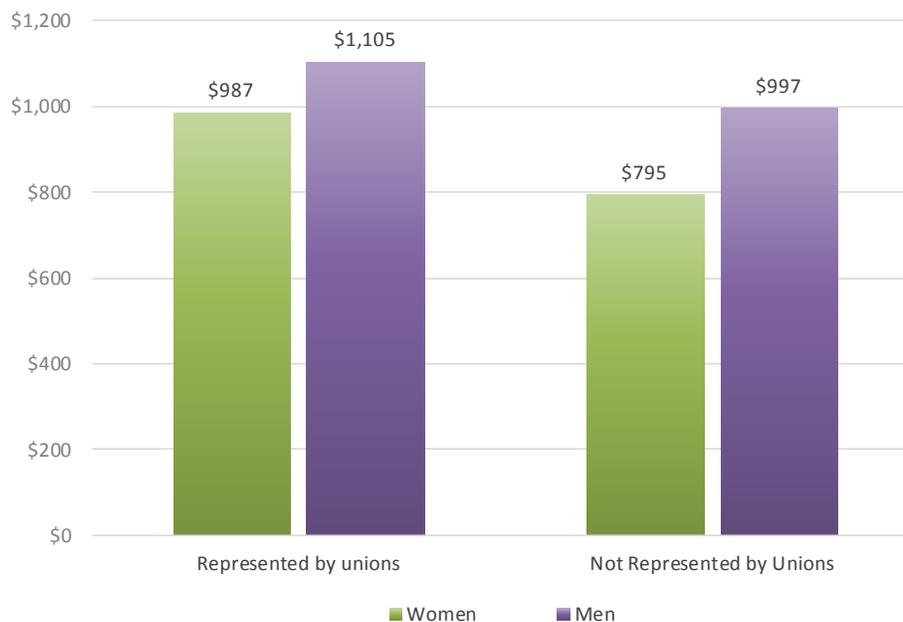
Public sector unions are important for women, including women of color.

- Women represent the majority of union-represented public sector workers (55.1 percent), though they are a minority of union-represented workers overall (46.2 percent).
- Women of color also represent the majority of union-represented public sector workers of color (53.4 percent), though they are less than half of union-represented workers of color overall (48.7 percent).
- The figures are even higher for African American women, who are 57.4 percent of union-represented African American public sector workers, compared to 53.3 percent of union-represented African American workers overall.

What's at Stake: Public Sector Unions & the Courts

The ability of public sector unions to promote equality and economic security for women union members and nonmembers alike is presently at stake in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, a case that will be heard by the Supreme Court this term. The case seeks to overturn a nearly 40-year-old Supreme Court precedent, *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, which held that public sector collective bargaining agreements may include “fair share” provisions. Everyone can choose whether or not to join a union at work, but when the majority of people in a workplace vote to form a union, the union is required by law to represent everyone in a workplace, whether that employee is a union member or not. Fair share provisions require employees who are represented by a union, but choose not to become union members, to contribute to the cost of securing the benefits and protections the union provides: collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance processes. In the absence of such provisions, many individuals would decline to pay union dues while still seeking to take advantage of union services, thus weakening the ability of public sector unions to represent everyone in the workplace. To promote workplace equality and economic security for working women, the health of public sector unions must be protected.

Median Weekly Earnings of Public Sector Workers, by Gender and Union Status



Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2010-2014 data using IPUMS-CPS. The “represented by unions” category includes individuals who are members and those who are represented but not members. Figures are median weekly earnings for full-time, year-round workers.

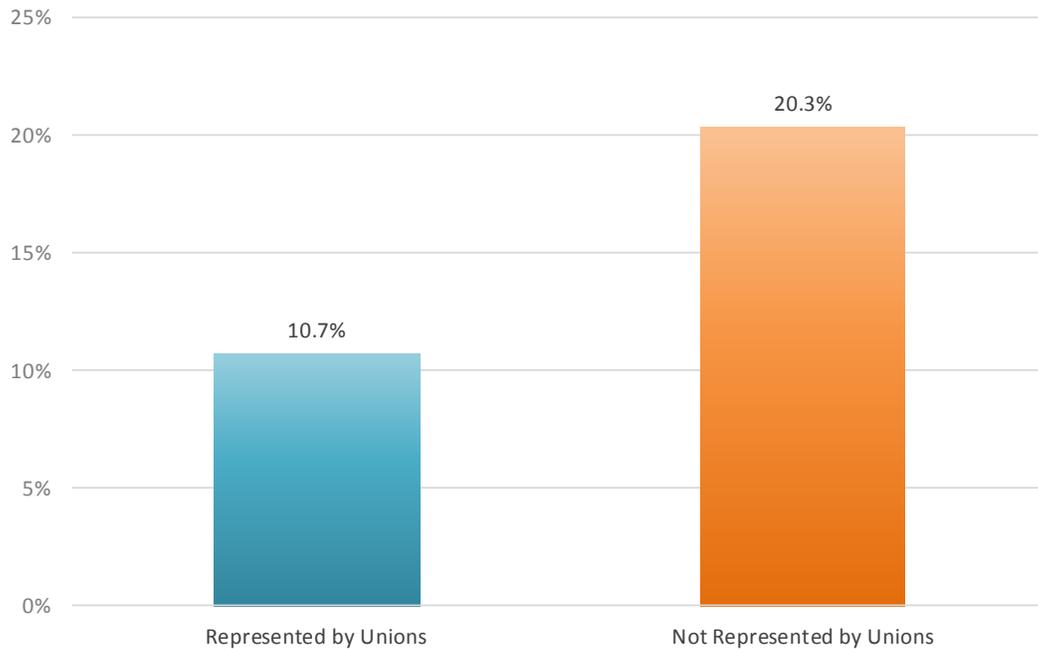
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Women in public sector unions have more equal pay.

Women in public sector unions have higher wages.

- Women public sector workers who are represented by unions make 24 percent more—\$192 more per week—than women public sector workers who are not represented by unions (\$987 v. \$795).
- Public sector unions also raise men’s wages, but the union advantage is not as large. Men public sector workers who are represented by unions make 11 percent more—\$108 more per week—than men public sector workers who are not represented by unions (\$1,105 v. \$997).

The Gender Wage Gap Among Union-Represented Public Sector Workers Is Half the Size of the Gap Among Non-Union-Represented Public Sector Workers



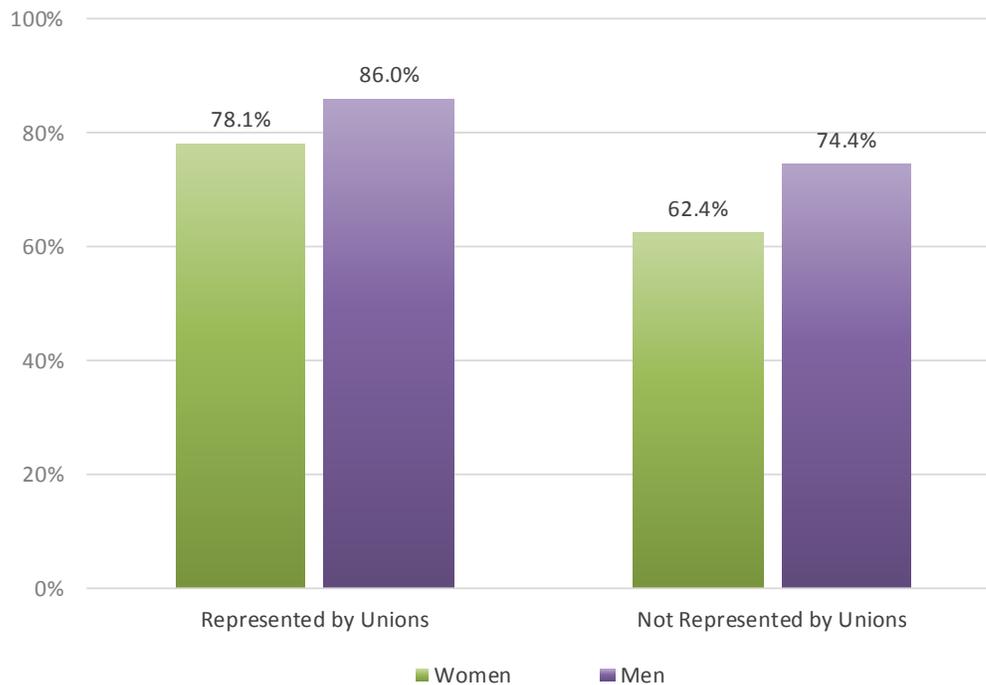
Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2010-2014 data using IPUMS-CPS. Figures are based on women's & men's median weekly earnings for full-time, year-round workers. The "represented by unions" category includes both members and those who are represented but not members.

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The gender wage gap among union-represented public sector workers is about half that among their non-union-represented counterparts and among workers overall.

- Women represented by unions who work full time, year round in the public sector typically make 89.3 percent of what their male counterparts make, leaving a wage gap of 10.7 cents on the dollar.
- This is about half the size of the gender wage gap among non-union-represented public sector workers. Non-union-represented women who work full time, year round in the public sector typically make 79.7 percent of what their male counterparts make per week, leaving a wage gap of 20.3 cents on the dollar.
- This is also about half the size of the gender wage gap among all workers. Overall, women who work full time, year round typically make 79.8 percent of what their male counterparts make per week, leaving a wage gap of 20.2 cents on the dollar.¹

Public Sector Workers with Employment-Based Health Insurance, by Gender and Union Status



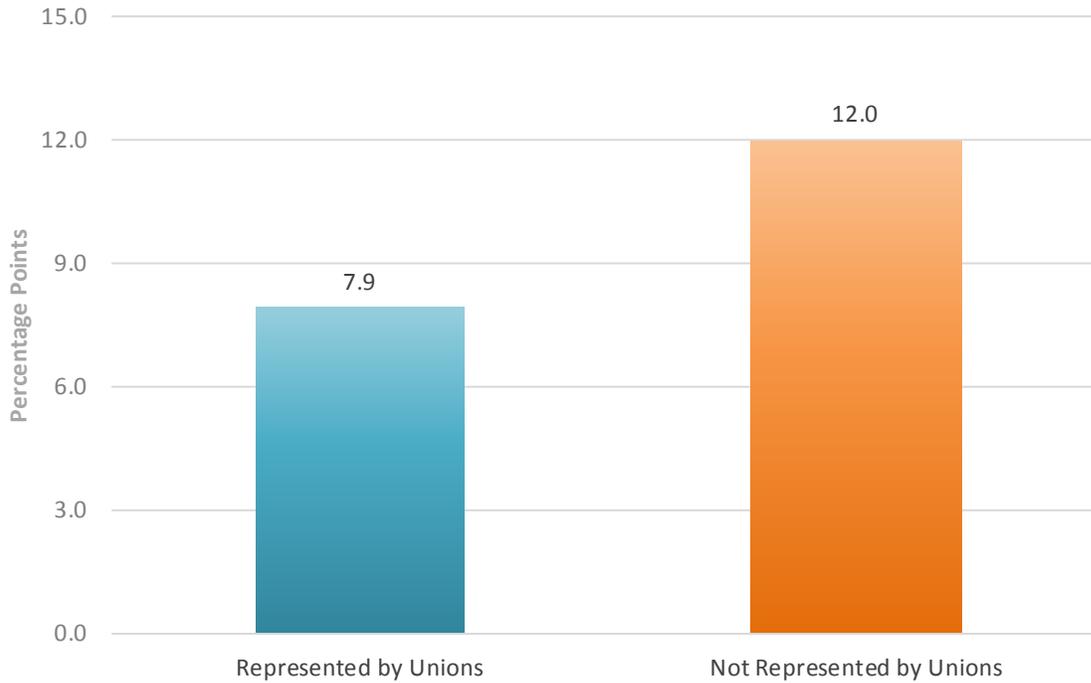
Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2010-2014 data using IPUMS-CPS. Includes workers where the individual is a policyholder for employment-based insurance. The “represented by unions” category includes both members and those who are represented but not members.

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Public sector workers represented by unions are more likely to have health insurance than their non-union-represented counterparts—this is especially true for women.

- More than three-quarters (78.1 percent) of women public sector workers who are represented by unions are policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan, compared to 62.4 percent of their non-union-represented counterparts, a difference of 15.7 percentage points.
- Men represented by unions also have increased participation in employment-based health insurance, but the difference is not as great—86.0 percent of men public sector workers who are represented by unions are policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan, compared to 74.4 percent of their non-union-represented counterparts, a difference of 11.6 percentage points.

The Gender Gap in Employment-Based Health Insurance Is One-Third Smaller for Union-Represented Public Sector Workers



Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2010-2014 data using IPUMS-CPS. Includes workers where the individual is a policyholder for employment-based insurance. The “represented by unions” category includes both members and those who are represented but not members.



The gender gap in employer-based health insurance is one-third smaller for union-represented public sector workers.

- Men public sector workers are more likely to be policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan than women public sector workers, but the gender gap is one-third smaller among workers represented by unions (7.9 percentage points) than among their non-union-represented counterparts (12.0 percentage points).

Wages and participation in employer-based health insurance are higher both for union members *and* nonmembers whom public sector unions represent.

- Women in the public sector who are union members typically make 25 percent more—\$202 per week—than women in the public sector who are non-union-represented workers (\$997 v. \$795).
- Women in the public sector who are represented by a union but who are not union members make 15 percent more—\$119 per week—than women in the public sector who are non-union-represented workers (\$914 v. \$795).
- The gender wage gap is smaller both among people who are union members and people who are represented by unions but who are not union members, compared to public sector workers not represented by unions and to the workforce as a whole. Among full-time, year-round workers:
 - o Women union members in the public sector typically make 89.7 percent of what their male counterparts make, leaving a wage gap of 10.3 cents on the dollar.
 - o Women public sector workers who are represented by unions but not members typically make 90.0 percent of what their male counterparts make, leaving a wage gap of 10.0 cents on the dollar.
 - o Women public sector workers who are not represented by unions typically make 79.7 percent of what their male counterparts make per week, leaving a wage gap of 20.3 cents on the dollar.
 - o Women workers in the workforce as whole typically make 79.8 percent of what their male counterparts make per week, leaving a wage gap of 20.2 cents on the dollar.
- More than three-quarters of women public sector union members (78.5 percent) and women public sector workers who are represented by unions but not members (75.1 percent) are policyholders for employer-based health insurance, compared to less than two-thirds (62.4 percent) of public sector women who are not represented by unions.

Methodological Note: All figures are NWLC analyses of CPS ASEC 2010-2014 data using IPUMS. Figures are for employed individuals but exclude self-employed workers. Wage gap data are median weekly earnings for full-time, year-round workers and are in 2013\$. Women of color are all women who are not white, non-Hispanic. Health insurance is limited to people who are policyholders of an employment-based policy. A larger share of workers has access to health insurance than participate.

¹ The overall wage gap figure reported here differs slightly from the often reported overall wage gap figure of 79 cents in that the figure reported here excludes self-employed workers and is based on median weekly earnings whereas the other figure includes self-employed workers and is based on median annual earnings. For more information see NWLC, FAQ About the Wage Gap (Sept. 2015) available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/faq-about-wage-gap>.