

Ending Pay Inequity Will Lift Up Working Families

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While women make up a growing majority in the workforce, their pay lags behind that of men doing the same jobs. Senator Smith discusses what we can do to move towards pay equity.

MADISON - “WHEREAS, Equal Pay Day occurs each year on the day that symbolizes how far into the new year women must work full time to earn the same wages that their male counterparts earned the previous year...”

That’s the beginning of a joint resolution I recently coauthored with my colleagues in the legislature. The resolution recognizes Wednesday, March 15, 2023 as Equal Pay Day in Wisconsin. I was proud to sponsor this resolution in 2021 and 2019 and co-author equal pay legislation during my service in the State Assembly.

Although it’s only been in the last several decades we have been bringing attention to the pay gap with Equal Pay Day, the fight for equal pay has been going on for well over a century now. While there are states that have explicitly recognized equal pay for equal work, Wisconsin is not among them.



Paying women less than men for the same work is wage theft, plain and simple. The gap is even more significant for women of color, women with disabilities and women who did not graduate with a high school degree.

In 2009 the Wisconsin Legislature passed the Equal Pay Enforcement Act, of which I was a co-sponsor. That law increased penalties for people and businesses that break workplace anti-discrimination laws. It protected women from discrimination, but also covered anyone who encountered discrimination in the workforce. Unfortunately, Governor Walker and a Republican legislature repealed the law just two years later.

There's not much chance of similar legislation passing in this legislature, but the people of Wisconsin have put their trust in us to do the right thing. That's why we must do all we can to right this wrong and ensure equal pay for all. That includes taking thoughtful and concrete action to address very real problems for women and families in the workforce.

We are going through a serious crisis that disproportionately affects women and helps contribute to pay inequity. We have a serious problem with child care availability, both in Wisconsin and on a national level. It's simple: parents can't work if they can't find anyone to take care of their children. Child care must be high-quality, accessible and affordable.

