



Paycheck Fairness: Ending Gender Discrimination for Rhode Island Women

According to the Congressional Joint Economic Committee, women in Rhode Island earn 81 cents for every dollar paid to men.ⁱ Pay disparities for women exist across all occupations, regardless of education, industry, marital status or other factors. Median earnings for women are less than those for men **in 264 of 265 major occupation categories.**ⁱⁱ And the gap is even bigger for minority women: Black women in Rhode Island earn only 55 percent of the wages of white, non-Hispanic men, with Hispanic women earning only 44 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ

But equal pay is not just a women's issue: it is an issue that touches all Rhode Islanders. Women in Rhode Island contribute an average of 40 percent of their family's income, and 38 percent of our state's women are their family's primary wage earners.^{iv} Ensuring paycheck fairness for our state's women will **strengthen our families** by providing them with much-needed income in a time when many of them are struggling to make ends meet. If we can eliminate gender pay discrimination, our families would have additional earnings to purchase:

- 77 more weeks of food;
- Five more months of mortgage payments;
- 2,532 additional gallons of gas.^v

A fairly paid and productive work force is the backbone of a strong economy. Improving equal pay in Rhode Island will not only help our families: it will inject money into our local economy, and reduce the burden on government services as well.

Just as importantly, equal pay is good business. Companies who promote pay equity attract the best and brightest. Equal pay practices promote a happy and productive workforce that feels valued, which can lead to a positive impact on the bottom line.

Rhode Island has a law on the books forbidding wage discrimination on account of sex, yet the wage disparity between men and women persists. That's why, as governor, I will immediately take action to promote a culture of paycheck fairness in our state, by:

- Creating an anonymous tip line, so that women who are earning less for equal work will be able to report their employer's non-compliance, and have access to resources to help them earn the pay they deserve;
- Create an equal pay certification status that will be awarded to all Rhode Island businesses that show a commitment to equal pay practices.
 - In order to earn this certification, a business must show that it adheres to state and federal level equal pay laws, and has internal policies which forbid discrimination on the basis of sex, and procedures in place to remedy discrimination complaints.

If we want to reduce wage inequality in Rhode Island, we must foster a culture that recognizes the value of equal pay for equal work, and provides women with the resources and support they need to ensure that they are being paid fairly. As the state's first female governor, I will work tirelessly to ensure that our state stands behind our families and pays its working women the wages they deserve.

ⁱ U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, May 9, 2012.

ⁱⁱ **Bloomberg**, March 16, 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ National Women's Law Center, *The Gender Wage Gap Persists in Rhode Island*

^{iv} Joint Economic Committee

^v National Partnership for Women and Families, April 2012