



PROPONENT TESTIMONY OF:
Erin Ryan
Managing Director
The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network

IN SUPPORT OF:
HB 221– Wage Discrimination
To require the Ohio Civil Rights Commission to establish a system for individuals to make anonymous complaints regarding wage discrimination
House Civil Justice Committee

Chair Hambley, Vice-Chair Patton, Ranking Minority Member Brown, and distinguished members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Ohio House Bill 221.

My name is Erin Ryan, and I serve as the Managing Director of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network (WPPN), a coalition of more than 30 organizations working collaboratively to advocate for public policies that build economic opportunity for women and their families.

We are united by a shared vision for Ohio in which all women – particularly women of color and other marginalized women – have the resources to achieve economic self sufficiency and the opportunity to lead safe and healthy lives. Equal pay for equal work is a core component of our policy agenda, and we strongly urge the committee to support the passage of House Bill 221, which would create a system through the Ohio Civil Rights Commission for someone to file an anonymous complaint of wage discrimination. This legislation would help address and end unfair and unequal pay practices, providing women an opportunity to reach their full economic potential and provide for themselves and their families.

The persistent, pervasive wage gap remains a harsh reality for women, particularly women of color, and legislation like House Bill 221 would provide a structure to address instances of unfair pay and wage discrimination. In Ohio, women make up 48 percent of the state's workforce, and families are increasingly dependent upon the wages of women. In fact, 85 percent of Black mothers, 62 percent of Latina mothers and 53 percent of white mothers are key family breadwinners.¹ Yet, workplace policies have not kept pace with the changing American workforce. With HB 221, our state has the opportunity to do better.

On average, women who work full-time in Ohio continue to make 75 cents for every dollar their male colleagues take home, amounting to an annual wage gap of nearly \$13,000. But this is just

¹<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-ohio.pdf>

the average for all women, and women of color face a substantially larger wage gap: In Ohio, Black women are paid 64 cents and Latinas paid just 61 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.² Failing to provide equal pay not only impacts women's paychecks, but also has longer term impacts on women's wealth attainment, investment, and retirement savings.

Whether in low-wage or high-wage jobs, women experience a pay gap in nearly every occupation and sector of work. And the wage gap cannot be merely explained away by women's choices. Even when adjusting for certain variables - like age, experience, and education - a gap still exists for "unexplained" reasons, most likely thought to be discrimination and bias.

Equal pay is exceptionally important for working moms, as women play an increasingly integral role as breadwinner for their families. Yet, working mothers often face an even larger pay gap, known as the "motherhood penalty," earning, on average, just 71 cents for every dollar a working father takes home.

This gap may seem inconsequential when narrowing in on the cents lost for every dollar, but over a 40-year career, Ohio women stand to lose more than \$500,000 compared to male counterparts. And again, this is the average; the wage disparities for women of color mean that they will experience an even higher typical loss of lifetime earnings, and over a lifetime, Black women stand to lose more than \$700,000, Latina women typically lose nearly \$800,000.

Behind these statistics are real women, real families bearing the weight of unfair and discriminatory wage practices. Wage inequality means that women have less to spend on themselves and their families, less to invest and save for the future, and less to put back into businesses and the local economy.

In fact, if the annual wage gap were eliminated, on average, a working woman in Ohio would have enough money for nearly 21 more months of child care; 1.2 additional years of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees at a two-year community college; approximately 93 more weeks of food for her family (nearly two years' worth); more than 10 additional months of mortgage and utilities payments; or 17 more months of rent.

The pay gap is a real problem for our economy. To respond to the challenge, there must be a concerted effort to dismantle systemic discrimination and enact stronger workplace policies that support the dual role women play as caregivers and breadwinners, like paid family leave, and update our state's laws to better promote fair and equal pay practices – and that means supporting House Bill 221.

This legislation would allow for employees to anonymously report wage discrimination on an Equal Pay Hotline if they suspect or discover that they have been unfairly paid. Although there are laws protecting workers' rights to discuss pay and other workplace matters freely, including the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, many companies still strongly discourage their employees from discussing pay. In a 2014 report, the Institute for Women's Policy Research

² <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/4-2017-oh-wage-gap.pdf>

found that about half of American employees in all sectors are either explicitly prohibited or strongly discouraged from discussing pay with their coworkers.³

The current law might protect an employee from being fired solely for discussing pay, but employees still fear being cold-shouldered by management or risking an opportunity to rise within the company. Internal pay secrecy policies often persist because companies face no real enforcement, and pay secrecy opens the door for discrimination to occur unchecked. By providing an anonymous hotline for employees to report possible wage discrimination, workers are given a system to file a complaint, without fearing retaliation, and their rights are protected in a more concrete way.

This legislation would make important strides in closing the gender wage, which holds back women – particularly African American and Latina women – and their families from reaching their full economic potential. If the current pace of change continues at the same rate as it has in the United States since 1960, men and women will not reach gender pay parity until the year 2059. And that is far too long for women and their families to wait. We strongly urge the committee to step in and overcome this harmful trend for Ohio families and women – by supporting the passage of Ohio House Bill 221.

Chair Hambley, thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. I am available to answer any questions today.

³ Jonathan Timm, "When the Boss Says, 'Don't Tell Your Coworkers How Much You Get Paid'," The Atlantic, July 15, 2014 , accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/07/when-the-boss-says-dont-tell-your-coworkers-how-much-you-get-paid/374467/>.