

House Bill 221 Sponsor Testimony
House Civil Justice Committee
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Good afternoon Chairperson Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and esteemed members of the Civil Justice Committee. It is my honor to share my testimony with you today. I represent members of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. Central Ohio and the Greater Cleveland Chapters as a proponent for the establishment of the Wage Discrimination Hotline, HB 221, co-sponsored by Representative Janine Boyd and Representative Erica Crawley.

The mission of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. is to advocate on behalf of Black women and girls to promote leadership development and gender and racial equity in the areas of health, education and economic empowerment.

The Wage Discrimination Hotline Legislation would be a step towards Black women's economic empowerment. As you know, wage discrimination is a huge barrier to women's economic security.

Paying women less than men for the same work has been illegal since the Equal Pay Act of 1963 became a law, aimed at abolishing wage disparity based on gender. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, employers were no longer allowed to pay women less than men, refuse to hire women, or fail to provide equal training and promotion opportunities to employees "because of" their sex. And undoubtedly, you

know that the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 loosen the statute of limitation requirement for filing pay discrimination claims.

According to the National Women's Law Center, nearly 14 percent of women in Ohio live in poverty. The national average is roughly 12 percent. Nearly 40 percent of female-headed households in Ohio live in poverty. The national figure is nearly 35 percent.

Women in Ohio, especially Black women, continue to experience a pay gap at a higher risk of poverty than men. Women working full-time, year-round typically make only 80% of their male counterparts. Black women working full time year-round typically make 61 cents for every dollar paid to white non-Hispanic men. Black women are over-represented in low-wage jobs and under-represented in high earning jobs, both contributing factors to the gender pay gap and economic security.

Fifty-five years after the passage of the Equal Pay Act, women are still paid less than men. Women disproportionately face barriers to high-quality jobs, at a time when women play an increasingly integral role in securing their families' livelihood.

Women are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinner in roughly two-thirds of all families in Ohio. And Black women account for two-thirds of the workforce in jobs that pay minimum wage or just above, as well as two-thirds of workers in tipped jobs. Poverty level wages heighten women's economic vulnerability.

According to a recent report by the Women's Fund of Ohio, women's median earnings for full-time work continues to lag men's at about 80 cents to the dollar.

For Black women in Ohio, they typically make 64 cents for every dollar paid to white men. National figure: \$0.61. This gap translates to an average loss of over \$15,000 per year, and hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime.

Black women experience a wage gap at every education level – even when they have earned graduate degrees. Black women without a high school diploma, make just 60 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men without a high school diploma.

Black women with a bachelor's degree are typically paid \$46,694 – just under what white, non-Hispanic men with only a high school diploma are paid (\$46,729).

Black women must earn a master's degree to make slightly more (\$56,072) than white, non-Hispanic men with just an associate degree (\$54,620).

A Black woman would typically have to work until she is 83- years old to catch up to what a white, non-Hispanic man has been paid by age 60.

When women are paid less than their male counterparts, are denied advancement, or lose or are forced to leave a job, their smaller paychecks have long-lasting repercussions for housing, education, health, and retirement.

Pay discrimination persists in part because of outdated stereotypes that continue to infect workplace decision making, such as the idea that families do not rely on women's income and that women do not need higher pay, which stand in contrast to the economic reality for women and their families.

Discriminatory workplace policies and practices make it difficult for women to keep a job, put food on the table, make decisions about whether to have children, and care for their families.

Pay discrimination is difficult to detect, in part because 61 percent of private sector employees report that discussing wages is either prohibited or discouraged by employers. And even when working people discover unfair pay, loopholes in the law make it difficult to hold employers responsible for pay discrimination.

House Bill 221, requiring the Ohio Civil Rights Commission to establish a system for individuals to make anonymous complaints regarding wage discrimination would at least strengthen pay discrimination laws, protect employees who discuss their pay with each other from retaliation, require employers to collect and report pay data, give employees a voice to protect their economic security and position Ohio as a state that cares about the economic security of all its citizens. For these reasons, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women Central Ohio and Greater Cleveland Chapters support HB 221.

Thank you for your attention and support. I'm happy to take any questions from the committee.