



Office of State Representative Stephanie Howse  
House District II

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Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 232

Commerce and Labor Committee

June 22, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for hearing sponsor testimony on House Bill 232 (HB 232), the Ohio Equal Pay Act, which would recognize the full value and potential of Ohio's working women. I am proud to sponsor this bill along with Rep. Jessica Miranda.

In 1963 when the Equal Pay Act was signed (58 years ago), women working full time year round made \$0.59 to the dollar paid to men. Today, women earn just \$0.82 – the time is now for Ohio to enact 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace policies. Currently, Ohio ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation for its gender wage gap<sup>1</sup>. With women making up nearly half of Ohio's workforce, this pay discrepancy has a significant negative impact on Ohio families and Ohio's economy. The pandemic amplified existing gender inequalities, causing COVID-19 to have a disproportionate impact on women. Between February 2020 and January 2021, 2.5 million women left the workforce<sup>2</sup>. Female dominated industries like hospitality have struggled during the pandemic, forcing many women out of work, and others have quit due to a lack of child care options or workplace flexibility. By reducing the gender wage gap, we can increase family security and stability, lower poverty rates and boost economic growth across our state.

My colleague Rep. Miranda has laid out the data and statistics for the committee. When you look deeper into those statistics, you will find that women of color must work an additional two to eleven months to earn what their white, male counterparts did the previous year. This pervasive wage gap continues to devalue and diminish the work of Black women and women of color in Ohio, which is rooted in a patriarchal society where we have allowed gender bias to thrive in the workplace. Passing the Ohio Equal Pay Act is more important than ever as women and their families continue to endure the most of the health and economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure our wages reflect the true promise of Ohio—that our economy works for everyone and not just the wealthy and well connected, we need to work together to ensure working families are paid equally.



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There are four main parts to the Ohio Equal Pay Act.

- First, it requires businesses with 4 or more employees who contract with the state or receive state economic development grants or other development packages to obtain an Equal Pay Certificate, which will certify that the employer offers growth opportunities to all employees regardless of gender. The certificate would also ensure the business is not paying women less than men in similar positions.
- Second, HB 232 prohibits gag orders on employees that keep them from talking about their salaries with one another. Women often don't know they are making less than men because salary information is kept secret and they are punished for talking about it.
- Third, HB 232 prohibits an employer from requesting information regarding or seeking a prospective employee's wage or salary history from the prospective employee or the prospective employee's current or former employer.
- Finally, our bill requires government entities to evaluate their employees' pay scales to ensure that compensation is based on similar skills, effort, responsibilities and working conditions across job categories so that adjustments can be made as needed where woman dominated job categories have been undervalued. Women in Minnesota saw their wages increase by 9% after a similar provision was implemented.

Since the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, what has happened to the two generations of women and families we have left behind, because we have not implemented systems to hold government and businesses accountable to pay working families equally? Here in Ohio, we cannot control what happens on the national level, but it is within our power to take care of women and families here at home. With your support, the Ohio Equal Pay Act will empower women and families in the workplace to be what they are—equal. Thank you again for providing me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on this bill and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> National Women's Law Center 2019, "Wage Gap State Rankings <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Overall-Wage-Gap-State-By-State-2021-v2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Pushed out by pandemic, women struggle to regain footing in U.S. job market <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-women-jobs/pushed-out-by-pandemic-women-struggle-to-regain-footing-in-u-s-job-market-idUSKBN2AW19Y>