



Advocacy Update

Sent April 14, 2015

Equal Pay Day Brings the Launch of WRJ's Pay Equity Initiative

[Rachel Chung](#), Legislative Assistant, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Women of Reform Judaism

Today, on **Equal Pay Day**, we mark how far into the new year women must work to earn what their male counterparts did in the previous year. Today also marks the official launch of WRJ's [pay equity initiative](#), through which we will begin new conversation about women's equality in the workplace, in society, and in our personal lives to ensure that the next generation of women will not face the same injustices women face today. The issue of women's economic empowerment, through the focused lens of paycheck fairness, will provide opportunities for our individual members, [WRJ sisterhoods](#), [WRJ Districts](#), Reform congregations, and others in the [Reform Movement](#) to engage in legislative advocacy, social action efforts, and educational programs. [Learn more about the initiative on the WRJ website](#), and continue reading to see how you and your sisterhood can get involved as we launch this new chapter in our advocacy.

In the United States today, women on average earn 78 cents for every dollar their male counterparts make. Women of color face an even greater disparity, with African American and Latina women earning an average of 64 and 54 cents on the dollar, respectively. The gap is only slightly smaller in Canada, where women on average earn 81 cents on the male dollar. The gender wage gap persists at all levels of education, within occupations, and across industries. The pervasiveness of this disparity indicates that deeply embedded pay discrimination, rather than women's occupational decisions, is responsible for the injustice of pay inequity.

Jewish tradition has long recognized the importance of paying fair wages as a matter of justice. In Leviticus 19:13, we are taught that to withhold a worker's wages is to defraud her, an act akin to robbery. In Genesis 1:27, we learn that all human beings are created *b'tselem Elohim*, in the image of the divine, and are thus deserving of equal rights and treatment. Together, as a community of Jewish women, these teachings compel us to fight for fair wages for all people, so that gender no longer prevents anyone in our society from earning just compensation for their work.

[The Huffington Post published a joint op-ed](#) today by Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, WRJ Executive Director, and Rachel Laser, Religious Action Center Deputy Director (RAC), to mark Equal Pay Day. The piece highlights our role as Reform Jewish women and emphasized that while we've certainly made important progress, we still have a long way to go:

As inheritors of Reform Judaism's prophetic tradition, we must also lead by example by continuing to address these inequities in our own community. We are proud that our many decades of statements and policy resolutions, adopted by vote of our congregations, have always called upon Reform congregations to uphold the policy of non-discrimination based on gender in all employment practices. Reform Judaism grew from a desire to adapt to modern times and incorporate modern thinking. Modern thinking meant women's equality—in Jewish life and in the rabbinate, in secular life and in the workforce. Yet, numerous surveys relating to clergy salaries within our congregations, as well as salary levels within other Jewish organizations, suggest that we have more work to do.

Lilly Ledbetter to Give Keynote Address at WRJ Assembly

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

We are excited to announce that **Lilly Ledbetter** will deliver a keynote address at [WRJ Assembly](#) later this year! Ledbetter will be featured in the opening plenary as the **WRJ Jane Evans Pursuit of Justice Award Winner**.

Lilly Ledbetter worked for nearly two decades at Goodyear Tire before discovering that for years, she was paid less than her male colleagues for the same work. Ledbetter made her way through the court system, along the way becoming a trailblazer for women's equality. The Supreme Court rejected Ledbetter's appeal, holding that claims of race or gender pay discrimination must be made within 180 days of the first discriminatory pay check. But, as Justice Ginsberg wrote in her dissent, the decision "does not comprehend, or is indifferent to, the insidious way in which women can be victims of pay discrimination."

So, Ledbetter pressed on, this time with success. The first bill President Obama signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which clarifies that every new discriminatory paycheck begins anew the 180 day window of opportunity. Standing by his side was Lilly Ledbetter, who said she fought for our nation's daughters and granddaughters: "[That's what makes this fight worth fighting. That's what made this fight one we had to win.](#)"

About the Jane Evans Pursuit of Justice Award: Jane Evans served the Reform Movement for more than 70 years, 43 of them as Executive Director of what was the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, now WRJ. Evans was deeply committed to human rights, women's rights, civil rights, interfaith relations and countless other manifestations of justice. They are reflected in the resolutions and advocacy efforts that have put Women of Reform Judaism in the forefront of religious action. This award is given to a humanitarian who models Jane Evan's values.

Advocacy Update: Equal Pay Legislation in the U.S. and Canada

Lilly Ledbetter is not the first, and unfortunately will not be the last woman to face discrimination in the work place. Although there exists specific legislation to combat wage discrimination, the persistent gap between men's and women's salaries indicates that we must continue to fight for fair wages. One key way to continue this fight is through policy advocacy, to progress legislation like the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to provide additional protections for women in our society.

United States: Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-3) recently reintroduced the [Paycheck Fairness Act \(S. 862 / H.R. 1619\)](#), key legislation to address the persisting injustice of gender pay discrimination. The bill would take steps to correct pay discrimination by closing loopholes in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and by barring retaliation against workers who disclose their wages. In addition, the Paycheck Fairness Act would allow women to receive the same remedies in court for pay discrimination as those subjected to discrimination based on race or national origin—a critical tool for ensuring pay equity for American women. [WRJ and the Religious Action Center issued a statement](#) to celebrate the bill's reintroduction and to urge swift passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act.

[Add your voice; click here to contact your Senators and Representative today to urge them to support the Paycheck Fairness Act!](#)

Canada: **The Pay Equity Task Force Recommendations Act (C-389)** would require the Canadian government to implement the recommendations of the task force in their report "[Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right](#)," which was issued in May 2004.

Recommendations include: creation of a new Canadian Pay Equity Commission, a Canadian Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal, a pay equity adjudication system, advocacy services, and a deeper commitment to research.

Want to learn more about federal legislation? Check out [WRJ's Legislative Guide](#) for more details on proposed and existing legislation in the U.S. and Canada.

What equal pay protections exist in your state or province?

The most recent statistics from the U.S. Census show that [the gender wage gap exists in almost every congressional district](#). Yet, not every state provides the same protections for working women. Each state has different laws and commissions that are relevant to fighting wage discrimination—and some have no laws at all. Some states draw distinctions between public and private employees, so it is important to know what kinds of laws are in each state. Check out these fact sheets for a more detailed look into [how the gender wage gap affects women in your state](#).

Of the ten Canadian provinces, six have pay equity laws: Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Each law is slightly different and applies to different people. For example, Manitoba's law applies only to public employees, as does New Brunswick's law and Prince Edward Island's. Quebec's law covers public employees and private, and Nova Scotia's covers all public and some workers employed by corporations.

What Can Your Sisterhood Do?

Legislative advocacy is key to the complex puzzle of pay discrimination. Yet, we must also begin conversations within our own communities to empower individuals and to gain momentum at a local level. [WRJ has put together an array of resources and program guides to help you get started](#):

- Host a program to discuss why pay equity is important in your community, to practice lobbying skills, and to start the ball rolling to ensure your synagogue pays clergy and staff justly.
- Organize a lobby visit to your Senators' or Representative's district office to urge them to support the Paycheck Fairness Act, or meet with your state legislators to advocate for improved pay equity laws at the state level.
- Plan time into your sisterhood's closing meeting to discuss pay equity plans for the coming year, or to include an educational component like a text study or to feature a panel or speaker.
- Host a text study using the [WRJ Equal Pay Living Talmud](#), a compilation of ancient texts, modern commentaries, and secular sources that inform our commitment to pay equity.
- Learn how to make sure that your congregation and Jewish agencies in your community have just compensation policies.
- Create a mentorship program or network to help young women in your community hone professional skills and to empower all to negotiate for fair pay.
- Host a book discussion or start a book club to read and share inspiring stories. Consider starting with *Grace and Grit*, Lilly Ledbetter's account of her experience at Goodyear Tire and her subsequent fight for fair pay.

Visit the [WRJ pay equity program materials page](#) for more details to guide you as you prepare any of these programs.

As with any sustainable, long-term initiative, we'll continue to expand the resource bank with more suggestions and guides for engaging your sisterhood and your community in the fight for pay equity. Stay tuned as we roll out these new opportunities!