

**Hearing on “Honoring ‘Equal Pay Day’ Examining the Long-Term Economic Impacts of Gender Inequality”  
House Committee on Oversight and Reform  
9:30 AM, Wednesday, March 24, 2021  
Statement for the Record  
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Chairwoman Maloney, thank you for holding today’s hearing on Equal Pay Day. This hearing is held just days after the House’s historical passage of the Violence Against Women Act. Our efforts do not start or end in Women’s History Month. We intend to take continued steps toward justice and equity every single day.

I have been fighting for equal pay and equal political representation for women throughout my career. I am proud that one of my first votes in Congress was in support of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, bolstered protections against pay discrimination for women. These issues are not exclusively women’s issues. These are family issues. In most Northern Virginia households and in more than 50 percent of all American households, women’s salaries help pay the bills. Today, nearly a quarter of the 8.2 million woman-led households in this country, including 6 million households with minor children, have incomes below an artificially low poverty level.

According to the National Partnership for Women and Children, women who work full-time, year-round on average earn just 82 cents on the dollar compared to men working in identical positions. While the state of Virginia is on par with the national wage gap, for women in my home district, it is even worse — with women making just \$0.77 to the dollar, compared to men. These discrepancies present a pay gap of more than \$10,000 each year — the cost of a used car, an unexpected medical bill, college tuition at a state school, or a down payment on a home.

The gender pay gap is more dire for women of color and women with children. For every dollar paid to white men, black women, on average, are paid 63 cents, Native American women are paid, on average, 60 cents, and Latinas are paid, on average, 55 cents. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women make 85 cents for every dollar paid to white men, and different groups within America’s AAPI community have unique experiences with economic discrimination—including with the gender pay gap. For example, between 2015 and 2019, Hmong women earned 60 cents for every dollar paid to white men. While nearly half of men in this nation reportedly do not believe this wage gap exists — that it’s “fake news” — we know the truth.

The pandemic has exacerbated the gender pay gap and put unequal and unprecedented new stresses on women. According to one analysis, women make up 80% of health care workers and 83% of workers providing critical social support services, including childcare and emergency services, in the United States. As a result, women workers have disproportionately shouldered the burden the pandemic has placed on the American health care system and community support programs.

The lack of paid family and medical leave programs at jobs have also exacerbated the uneven distribution of the pandemic’s effects. Prior to the pandemic, workers of color were less likely to have access to paid leave benefits. Although the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R.6201) temporarily expanded access to paid leave to some workers, as many as 106 million private sector workers — including as many as 9 million health care workers — were not permitted to access paid leave benefits to care for themselves or their loved ones. Women without access to paid leave during the pandemic have been forced to choose between their families’ welfare or their professions.

The pandemic is not the cause of these inequities placed on women. Gender pay inequity persists in part from antiquated and patriarchal institutions — as the need for more workers grew through history, employers reasoned that they could pay women lower salaries because men were the primary support for their families. But we can no longer foster this system, which will allow unfair wage gaps to remain through 2059 unless we take action now. I'm ready to do just that.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP), recently signed into law by President Biden, is projected to lift as many as 4 million children and families out of poverty, and 1 million children and families out of deep poverty. We must now work to make these benefits permanent. The law temporarily expanded the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to up to \$3,600 per child under the age of six and \$3,000 per child under the age of 17 and removed the \$2,500 minimum earning threshold for eligibility.

The ARP also dramatically expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-income workers, particular women of color who are more likely to hold these types of jobs. For workers without qualifying children, the EITC expansion nearly triples the maximum amount from \$540 to \$1500. Research indicates that women who benefit from the earned income tax credit experienced higher wage growth than similarly situated women who did not.

Finally, we have a collection of legislative priorities that serve to eliminate the wage gaps and achieve greater equity for women — particularly women of color.

- **The Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7)** would help ensure equal pay and families' economic security by breaking patterns of discrimination and strengthening the Equal Pay Act;
- **The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act (H.R. 804)** would build a strong and comprehensive national family and medical leave insurance program that provides cash benefits to working families with significant caregiving and medical needs;
- **The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (H.R. 1065)** would address legal ambiguities and help ensure that pregnant women are treated fairly on the job;
- **The Equal Rights Amendment (H.J. Res 28)** would establish freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex as a constitutional right, elevate the judicial standard by which sex-based claims are reviewed and provide a constitutional hook from which to pass more robust legislation to protect women, girls and all marginalized genders;
- **The Child Care for Working Families Act (H.R. 1364 from 116<sup>th</sup> Congress)** would address the current early learning and care crisis by making childcare more affordable, increasing pay for workers, and facilitating more high-quality providers;
- **The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784 from 116<sup>th</sup> Congress)** would create a strong national paid sick days standard that will boost families' financial stability and lower health care costs; and
- **The EMPOWER Act (H.R. 1521 from 116<sup>th</sup> Congress)**, a bipartisan package to protect against harassment and discrimination, would ensure equitable workplaces.

We must do more to ensure that women are compensated fairly for the work they perform. I have a long record that speaks for itself when it comes to women's issues. I will continue to champion the rights of women and do what I can to support finally closing the gender pay gap for good. It's time to move from rhetoric to action. Our nation's women are depending on us.