



MARCH 24, 2021

Today is Equal Pay Day, the day in 2021 where women's earnings finally caught up to what men earned in 2020. While strides had been made to close this earnings gap, this past year has the potential of erasing years of progress because of the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women.

The pandemic has dealt an unprecedented blow to every aspect of American society, taking more than half a million lives and costing our economy trillions of dollars. Our nation is facing multiple crises: the COVID-19 virus, economic uncertainty, and a caregiving shortage. As such, while the pandemic has caused virtually every American to struggle in some fashion, the brunt of this disaster has been felt by women – especially women of color.

Due to unstable child care and disruptions to school schedules, millions of mothers have been forced to leave the workforce to care for a child. Roughly 10 million working mothers have a child age 6 or younger, and many of these women have been forced to leave their jobs to care for their children.[1] According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 865,000 women left the labor force in September 2020 alone – more than four times the number of men who left the labor force that month.[2]

Women are being forced out of the workforce for other reasons as well. Women disproportionately work lower wage hourly jobs that have been slashed across the country due to store closings and other pandemic-related restrictions. This has resulted in women suffering the majority of pandemic-related job losses, totaling more than 5.4 million net jobs, or 55 percent of the overall net job loss since the start of the crisis.[3] This is especially true for Black, Latina, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American women who are significantly more likely to work hourly jobs that have either been eliminated or have had their hours greatly reduced over the last year.

Even women who have maintained their job during this crisis have disproportionately been affected. Women hold a greater share of frontline essential jobs that have faced greater risks of exposure, such as nurses, teachers, home health care providers, flight attendants, transportation workers, grocery store clerks, child care providers, and countless other positions. Simply put, we are getting through this pandemic and are on the brink of beating COVID-19 because of the tireless work of American women – and they deserve tangible support.

While we are encouraged by the passage of the American Rescue Plan and strongly support the provisions that help protect working women, we also encourage our colleagues to consider this package as a down payment. We need transformational structural change to fight against the economic, financial, gender, and racial injustices. We need massive investments in our child care infrastructure, including universal child care and early learning, \$15 minimum wage, and paid leave programs; without these, women will be set back a generation by this pandemic.

For decades, women have unionized and joined forces to fight for fair hiring practices, workplace protections, and our ongoing fight for equal pay. We simply cannot turn this clock back and we must continue to protect our right to organize and in doing so, fight to narrow the income gap. It will take all of us to dedicate the needed energy and resources to ensure that our daughters and granddaughters do not need to acknowledge Equal Pay Day in future years to come.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Betty McCollum in blue ink.

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Grace Meng in blue ink.

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Lucille Roybal-Allard in blue ink.

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Brenda Lawrence in blue ink.

Brenda Lawrence
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

Marie Newman
Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Carolyn Bourdeaux
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

REFERENCES

1. Steven Jessen-Howard and Simon Workman, "Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots," Center for American Progress, April 24, 2020, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/04/24/483817/coronavirus-pandemic-lead-permanent-loss-nearly-4-5-million-child-care-slots/>.

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