



A Wage Justice Agenda for Black Women

2026 Black Women's Equal Pay Day

By Seher Khawaja, National Economic Justice Director, Equal Rights Advocates
Research support by Susana Barragan, Law Clerk, Equal Rights Advocates
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Black women are leading the nation as family breadwinners, movement leaders, and community organizers in the workplace, government, and as influential voters. Yet, they face significant wage and wealth inequity.

Black women working full-time year-round make, on average, 65 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts, with the gap growing to 63 cents when part-time and part year seasonal workers are taken into account. This wage gap contributes to Black women experiencing poverty at higher rates than white men and women. They disproportionately continue to face barriers to fair wages and high wage jobs, exclusion from paid leave and other family care support, and are subjected to higher rates of harassment and discrimination, disrupting their ability to earn fair wages or build wealth over their professional lives. These longstanding contributors to the pay gap are now exacerbated by a direct and intentional assault by the Trump Administration on Black women in public and private sectors.

These wage injustices are solvable. The time is now to drive nationwide progress by enacting policy initiatives in states across the country [and to build momentum for federal change]. Over the past decade, the Equal Pay Today Initiative has built community power behind policy reforms that address the key contributors to the pay gap harming Black women. Supported by research led by Equal Pay Today members, this report tracks the state of wage justice for Black women and

identifies key contributors and the Black women-centered policy solutions to address them.

CLOSER LOOK

Equal Pay Today, a project of Equal Rights Advocates, is a coalition of over [50 national, regional, state, and tribal organizations](#) dedicated to advancing wage justice and eradicating long-standing gender and race wage gaps impacting the economic security of women, families, and communities of color. Together, Equal Pay Today is building a movement around gender- and race-based wage justice. The [2026-2027 Policy Agenda](#) of Equal Pay Today addresses contributors to the gaps: (1) pay inequity and secrecy; (2) caregiver bias and lack of adequate paid and job-protected leave; (3) the segregation of women into low wage work; (4) the poverty-level minimum wage, subminimum wage, and wage theft; and (5) harassment and discrimination disrupting earnings. These new laws now help millions of workers nationwide.

The State of Wage Justice for Black Women

Across the country—from California, to Kansas, to New York—Black Women endure some of the widest pay gaps, resulting in devastating consequences for themselves and their families. Today, Black women in the United States still make only 65 cents per dollar,

compared to their white non-Hispanic male counterparts.¹ This figure drops to 63 cents if you take into account part-time and part-year workers, and it drops to 52 cents per dollar in states like Louisiana.² Disparities are further compounded for Black LGBTQ+ individuals.³

Not only does this gap rob Black women of over \$1 million in income over the course of their lifetimes,⁴ the spending power of their reduced income is further eroded by rising inflation, drastically undermining basic economic security. With the Trump Administration's attacks on public benefits; labor and anti-discrimination enforcement; diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; and workers—particularly women of color—in the federal workforce, Black women are at heightened risk. In fact, in 2025, Black women—especially college-educated Black women—experienced the largest decline in employment and labor force participation in the country.⁵

As a result of gender- and race-based wage theft, too many Black women are living in survival mode: barely able to make ends meet in the face of artificially depressed and stagnant wages that don't come close to covering the rising cost of living. As a result, Black women continue to face severe barriers to and achieving basic economic security.

The majority of Black mothers (69 percent) are breadwinners for their families.⁶ Yet in every state, Black women earn only a fraction of the income paid to white men to cover the costs of basic necessities, like food, housing, and childcare; to build savings, wealth, and retirement income; and to achieve long-term economic wellbeing for themselves and their families. Based on a 2024 survey, researchers found that Black women were left with greater student debt compared to the general population, faced higher barriers to home ownership, were restricted by limited career advancement opportunities, were providing critical financial support to their immediate families and often extended families, were carrying out part-time jobs in addition to full-time employment, and had less retirement savings.⁷

Unsurprisingly, Black women experience higher rates of poverty compared to both white men and women⁸—rates that, in recent years, are on the rise.⁹ Conversely, Black women have built approximately 90 percent less wealth compared to white non-Hispanic men.¹⁰

Gender- and race-based disparities in wages result in concrete impacts on the day-to-day livelihoods of Black women and directly impede Black women's ability to cover basic needs. In the United States today, a Black woman earns a median salary of approximately \$41,990, compared to a median annual salary of \$66,850 for a white non-Hispanic man.¹¹ With the median cost of childcare exceeding \$13,000 a year for one child, a Black woman at this income level with

two children loses almost 80 percent of her income to childcare costs alone.¹²

If we compensated Black women for the average \$24,860 in wages that are stolen from each of them due to the wage gap, they would have enough money to cover approximately 30 months of food, 23 months of childcare, 12 months of mortgage and utilities payments, and 11 months of health insurance premiums.¹³

CLOSER LOOK

Economic Mobility and the Democratic Process

According to a recent survey, only 17 percent of Black women feel that federal policymakers are responsive to or represent their interests. According to women in the survey, federal policies should focus on advancing economic mobility in the United States.¹⁴ Research has also shown that Americans with less money and fewer resources are less likely to and incur more costs when participating in elections.¹⁵ Those juggling childcare and work, or multiple jobs, are less likely to register to vote.¹⁶ Despite this fact, Black women have shown up in past elections. During both the 2012 and 2014 election cycles, Black women represented the second highest rate of voter registration among women, when compared to their male counterparts.¹⁷

To advance anti-discrimination efforts and address widespread inequities in our economy, economic mobility must be at the center of our reform agenda and Black women must be mobilized in voting and political leadership around a comprehensive wage justice agenda.

A Comprehensive Wage Justice Agenda for Black Women

The persistent and sizable pay gap for Black women is not a coincidence. The gap is the result of longstanding discriminatory policies that have both excluded Black women from opportunities to build economic security and wealth while segregating them into lower wage occupations.

Since its founding, Equal Pay Today has supported successful pay equity legislation in 44 states, helped lead advocacy in support of successful federal actions, and built upon these wins during the most recent legislative sessions across the country. Based on this experience, here are the policy solutions making a difference for Black women in many states, ready for replication nationwide. These solutions set forth in our [Policy Agenda](#), not only defend against a hostile federal administration; they are paving a new vision for

valuing the labor of Black women and building long-term consensus around vital federal legislation.

A comprehensive wage justice agenda for Black women, includes:

Confronting systemic discrimination barring Black women from accessing equal opportunity

Black women have consistently been denied equal access and opportunity at work, education, housing, healthcare, benefits, capital, and personal financing.¹⁸ These inequities are rooted in longstanding and purposeful policies grounded in racialized and gendered stereotypes and structural discrimination that originated with chattel slavery.¹⁹ Examples of these policies and practices include discriminatory land-use restrictions, redlining, broad disenfranchisement, discrimination in educational institutions, gerrymandering, artificially suppressed wages, and the exploitation of unpaid and underpaid caregiving.

Centering the leadership of Black women, Equal Pay Today is working to preserve and advance key tools to address systemic discrimination. At the federal level, Equal Pay Today, in collaboration with partners, is opposing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC's) attempt to eliminate the longstanding EEO-1 data collection. For 60 years, the agency's collection of workplace demographic data broken down by gender, race, and ethnicity, has been vital in identifying discriminatory trends in hiring, salary-setting, and job segregation. At the state level, Equal Pay Today supported legislation in Illinois to codify disparate impact liability, which allows employees to challenge workplace practices that appear neutral on their face, but result in biased outcomes for women, people of color, and other protected groups (see State Spotlight below).

Tackling job segregation into low-wage undervalued industries.

Women make up 61 percent of the low-paid workforce, serving as the vast majority of childcare workers, home healthcare workers, food service workers, retail, education support roles, and social workers.²⁰ Black women are especially overrepresented in these essential yet undervalued industries. In 2024, Black women made up 6.1 percent of the overall workforce yet 8.5 percent of the low-paid workforce.²¹

These industries pay lower median hourly wages, typically lack essential benefits like healthcare and paid sick time, rely on unstable employment structures, and are often understaffed, factors that drive other forms of workplace exploitation and abuse.²² Black women are six times more likely than white men to work in an occupation dominated by part-time work and are more likely to be working through a temporary agency,²³ resulting in additional job insecurity. Conversely, Black women are underrepresented in

higher paid occupations and face significant barriers to entry into these industries such as jobs as software developers, attorneys, and marketing and sales managers.²⁴

Equal Pay Today is working to raise wages in underpaid and undervalued industries where women and workers of color are disproportionately represented. At the federal level, Equal Pay Today is fighting to preserve federal data collections that are critical for identifying trends in occupational segregation. Equal Pay Today also supports the [Fair Pay Act](#), a federal bill that would require employers to provide equal pay to employees for comparable or equivalent work helping to address wage differentials due to occupational segregation.

Equally important is the creation of pathways for women into male-dominated higher paying industries with union protections. Giving women equal opportunities to these jobs helps families escape poverty and achieve economic security. Equal Pay Today supports projects led by Equal Rights Advocates to create these pathways.

Tradeswomen Taskforce

The National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues, a project of Equal Rights Advocates, is comprised of tradeswomen, tradeswomen-serving organizations, and allied organizations fighting to increase access for women and other underrepresented groups into well-paid jobs in the male-dominated construction trades. Equal Pay Today has supported Tradeswomen-led efforts advancing state-level policy reform, fighting back against efforts by the current federal administration to eliminate critical protections related to apprenticeship programs—a key pathway to trades careers, and preserving \$5 million in federal funding for women entering high-wage, nontraditional careers. Learn more about this work [here](#).

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As a sheet metal worker, my life has greatly been impacted from just being able to afford simple things. . . . During the pandemic, there was a lot of inflation on products and stuff . . . and it really didn't hurt us to bring home those paychecks.

KALIMA RAMSEY-WALKER, NATIONAL TASKFORCE ON TRADESWOMEN'S ISSUES COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR, SMART LOCAL 100, & CO-FOUNDER OF DMV TRADESWOMEN

Promoting equal pay by strengthening pay equity laws, implementing salary history bans, and prohibiting retaliation.

Black women must contend with intersectional discrimination based on sex and race that drives hiring biases, and unequal treatment on the job that limits advancement mobility and brings down wages. Irrespective of educational level, Black women are paid less than white men, including in leadership and professional positions.²⁵ Black women with advanced or professional degrees earn between 64.4 and 59.0 percent of what their White male counterparts make.²⁶ Even Black women working in higher wage industries where they are underrepresented face larger wage gaps.²⁷

To address these inequities, Equal Pay Today advocates for state and federal legislation closing loopholes in existing pay equity laws that mandate equal pay for equal or substantially similar work and prohibit the use of prior salary in hiring and salary-setting. At the federal level, this includes the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#). In the states, Equal Pay Today members have supported dozens of wins, including recent wins in Virginia which enacted a [2026 law](#) prohibiting the use of prior salary in salary-setting decisions and requiring salary ranges in job postings. Equal Pay Today also stands strong with partners defending against rollbacks, including with the Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable pushing back on a regressive state equal pay law that expressly authorizes reliance on prior salary, a practice known to perpetuate pay discrimination, among other harmful provisions.

Demanding pay transparency to empower workers with leverage and hold employers accountable.

Secrecy around pay is a major contributor to wage disparities for Black women.²⁸ When employer pay practices remain secret, workers face major barriers in

identifying discriminatory pay disparities and employers can maintain these practices absent scrutiny. When Black women don't have basic information about the pay that is offered for a job or the wage range applicable to a job they hold, it is harder to advocate for themselves, negotiate fair wages, or identify gender or race-based disparities.

Equal Pay Today supports passage of the federal [Salary Transparency Act](#) and leads efforts to support states to enact laws that mandate employers disclose pay ranges in job postings and to existing employees. This past session, Equal Pay Today supported pay transparency bills in New York and Virginia, with success in Virginia and positive movement in New York.

Establishing caregiver protections and reducing caregiver penalties.

Women are disproportionately tasked with unpaid caregiving responsibilities that can cause workplace interruptions that result in women receiving less pay, being denied promotions, and facing barriers to advancement in their careers. The absence of an adequate caregiving infrastructure in the United States imposes a unique toll on Black women. Black women disproportionately lack childcare and are more likely to have to leave their jobs due to lack of access to childcare.²⁹ Black women are more harmed by the absence of paid sick leave, with over six million Black women living in states without paid sick day requirements and with state statutes that prohibit local governments from passing these laws.³⁰

Wage justice requires adequate protections for caregivers, including affordable childcare, paid family leave, and paid time off. Equal Pay Today supports efforts to enact the federal [FAMILY Act](#) to establish paid family and medical leave benefits; the [Healthy Families Act](#), to establish paid sick leave; and the [Job Protection Act](#) and the [Caring for All Families Act](#) to expand existing leave protections nationwide. Equal Pay Today also supported state legislative efforts to achieve these protections in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and successfully in [Virginia](#), which passed a paid family and medical leave law this year.

Raising the wage floor, eliminating poverty-wages, and challenging wage theft.

Black women are more likely to earn poverty wages. Occupations in which Black women are overrepresented pay significantly less, with Black women earning a median income of \$31,785 in these occupations.³¹ For women with children, these wages are generally insufficient to cover the cost of living in any state.³² In 2024, 17.5 percent of Black women working low-paid jobs were living under 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) with 44.5 percent living under 200 percent of the FPL.³³ These numbers increase to 29.1 percent and 62.5 percent for Black

mothers.³⁴ Due to these structural barriers and inequities, working Black women and families must disproportionately rely on public benefits programs, including SNAP, TANF, SSI, and Medicaid; small income increases often are insufficient to eliminate reliance on these benefits but risk resulting in ineligibility.³⁵

Wage justice cannot be achieved without addressing the inequities created by job segregation and its role in driving the wage gap without increasing the wage floor. Equal Pay Today supports the federal [Raise the Wage Act](#) to increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$17.00 per hour and supports efforts to preserve and expand funding for public benefits. Equal Pay Today also supported state legislation to increase wages in Illinois and Maryland.

Creating robust workplace protections against sexual harassment and other forms of harassment and discrimination that drive and exploit economic vulnerability.

Black women experience higher rates of sexual harassment and overall harassment compared to white men, men of color, and white women.³⁶ Research shows that workplace sexual harassment results in a range of stress and trauma, forcing job change, impacting job performance, precipitating further discrimination and retaliation, all of which undermine a woman's career attainment.³⁷ More than one in three women who file sexual harassment complaints report retaliation, which results in broader detrimental impacts on employment and economic security.³⁸

Equal Pay Today supports the federal [BE HEARD in the Workplace Act](#), which would strengthen the law to better address and prevent workplace discrimination and harassment, including by covering all workers, regardless of employer size, and eliminating the tipped minimum wage, which places tipped workers at greater risk of harassment by customers. At the state level, Equal Pay Today supported bills to strengthen protections against workplace harassment in Arizona, California, Georgia, and Maryland, with [success in California](#).

Strengthening enforcement and challenging attacks on enforcement infrastructure.

Equal Pay Today strongly opposes the gutting of our nation's civil rights enforcement agencies and other

critical programs, which are essential to ensuring that our laws have meaning. Equal Pay Today continues to engage in robust federal defensive work to stem the current administration's attempts to dismantle existing public benefits, civil rights and labor protections, and enforcement. Equal Pay Today is actively engaged in advocacy to safeguard and restore federal enforcement agencies like the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), to preserve critical data collections carried out by the EEOC and the U.S. Census Bureau, and to oppose the rescission of critical guidance and federal regulations clarifying enforcement of core civil rights workplace protections.

CLOSER LOOK

Federal attacks are exacerbating wage injustice for Black women. These assaults include:

- Eliminating federal positions, including a net total of 113,000 jobs carried out by Black women.³⁹
- Banning and targeting public and private diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that help ensure access and opportunity for all.
- Attempting to abolish disparate impact liability.
- Gutting federal labor and anti-discrimination enforcement agencies by eliminating agencies, firing independent civil rights enforcement officials, reducing staffing, and dramatically cutting resources.
- Stripping away landmark guidance on workplace harassment and affirmative action.
- Targeting and refusing to enforce protections for LGBTQ+ workers.
- Eliminating anti-discrimination and equal opportunity requirements for federal contractors.
- Carrying out actions without following established procedures or accepting public input and comment.

STATE SPOTLIGHT

Women Employed Leads Passage of Disparate Impact Bill in Illinois

Women Employed, an EPT member and leading partner, achieved a significant victory strengthening state protections in the face of these federal attacks on civil rights. For more than 50 years, Women Employed has been leading policy and legislative reform, expanding access to educational opportunity, and advocating for fair and inclusive workplaces to improve the economic status of women and their families and to remove barriers to economic equity.

This year, Women Employed helped pass Senate Bill 3777, the Civil Rights Safeguard Act, which preserves disparate impact protections in Illinois. Disparate impact liability has long been recognized as an important tool to address discrimination in employment, housing, financial services, and education. It allows individuals to legally challenge a policy or practice that seems neutral on its face, but results in unfair outcomes for certain groups of individuals who are protected from discrimination under the law. These protections are well established, having been codified under federal laws and recognized by the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, the current federal administration is attempting to abolish disparate impact liability, putting millions of people at risk of discrimination and eliminating an important tool for Black women and other protected groups from challenging practices that may not have been intended to be discriminatory but nonetheless have discriminatory outcomes.

SB 3777 plays a critical role for Black women in particular, allowing them to challenge hiring or salary-setting criteria that are rooted in stereotypes and unrelated to one's ability to perform the job. This bill will also ensure that core anti-discrimination protections will be preserved for:

- Women kept out of historically male-dominated occupations;
- Survivors of domestic and sexual violence, who are disproportionately female;
- Black and brown homeowners and consumers who face barriers from redlining;
- Immigrants and naturalized citizens who face barriers to language access;
- Disabled veterans who face housing voucher-based discrimination;
- LGBTQ+ persons who face sex discrimination;
- Students with disabilities who face inequitable school policies.

Women Employed's advocacy on SB 3777 marks a major victory towards preserving core civil rights protections and fortifying state civil rights infrastructure at a time when federal protections are being eroded. EPT continues to uplift and celebrate the incredible advocacy of state partners and will support Women Employed as it pushes for Governor Pritzker to sign this bill into law.

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