

February 1, 2024

A huge win for closing the gender and racial pay gaps was announced this week: the White House is banning the use of current or past pay when determining the salaries of new federal employees. This means:

- The country's largest employer will halt a practice known to foster discriminatory pay and allow it to follow an individual throughout their career.
- Federal contractors may soon follow a similar rule in the future and may be required to post salary ranges in job listings, as proposed by the White House.
- Women's paychecks, and the respect for our value in the workplace, should be positively impacted.

It was fitting that these announcements came on the 15th anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Lilly has been tenacious in her advocacy for the [fight to reduce pay inequity](#). Her journey inspires our continued advocacy with the White House, Congress, and around the country to advance policies that address gender and racial inequity.

In solidarity,
Meghan Kissell
Senior Director, Policy & Member Advocacy

Act – Support Paid Leave for All

For the more than three decades since the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law on February 5, 1993, it has remained a cornerstone piece of legislation in efforts to create healthier and more equitable workplaces. While FMLA provides job-protected, unpaid leave, many people can't afford to take leave without pay. Nearly 40 percent workforce is not eligible for FMLA, with Black, Latina, and Native workers disproportionately impacted by this.

We all need access to paid leave, and the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, would do just that. We know that women continue to disproportionately bear the economic opportunity cost of providing care for children or elderly family members. Congress must do better for women and families.

This legislation builds on successful state programs, creating a national paid leave insurance program, to provide wage replacement and job protection. It would expand the definition of “family” to cover more loved ones, cover care for military families, and support those experiencing domestic violence. Paid leave has broad bipartisan voter support.

As we honor how FMLA has protected workers for the past 31 years, [urge your members of Congress to take the next step and support the FAMILY Act \(H.R. 3481\) to support paid leave for all!](#)

Learn – Exploring the Intersection of Race and Gender

Racial and gender-based inequities persist in the United States’ education system. Their effects are clear. In K-12 schools, Black students are punished more harshly and more frequently than white students for similar offenses. Data from the U.S. Department of Education finds that Black girls are more significantly more likely than white girls to be suspended or receive referrals to law enforcement.

To combat the damaging impact of this reality, AAUW supports policies like the Counseling Not Criminalization Act, which provide money and resources to schools, and that increase the presence of mental and behavioral health personnel in schools. These steps have been shown to improve educational outcomes, increase attendance and graduation rates, and lower the rates of suspension and expulsion.

As Black women enter college, they are more likely to have to take on more student loan debt to acquire a degree. The student loan debt crisis highlights [glaring disparities](#) in who accumulates student loan debt, with women of color encountering the greatest challenges due to the combination of wealth gaps, gender, and racial pay gaps. To uplift Black women in college, AAUW continues to advocate for policies that make college more affordable, including increasing Pell Grant awards, and providing meaningful debt relief.

Black women then graduate into a [pay gap that is wider](#) for them than other women — with full-time workers earning only 69 cents in comparison to white men. This adds up to a loss of more than \$1 million over the course of a 40-year career, according to the National Women’s Law Center. Additionally, women still face discriminatory employment practices and inadequate legal protections at work. This is why AAUW continues to fight for stronger pay equity laws, improved paid leave and child support, and collection of wage data that helps identify ongoing areas of gender and racial discrimination.

AAUW supports closing the gender, ethnic, and racial gaps in education and employment. This month and every month, we work to ensure that Black women and their families are served in the actions and policies we support. The bottom line is this: We need to address when and where sexism and racism intersect to truly foster equity for all women.

Engage – Share the important work we’re doing

- *Mark your calendars: March 12 is Equal Pay Day 2024. Each year, this symbolic day is used to raise awareness around and combat the impact of pay inequities. Learn how you can raise awareness with our [Pay Equity Now Toolkit](#).*
- *A slate of anti-abortion bills were recently introduced in the House of Representatives, including the Pregnant Students’ Rights Act. AAUW [joined](#) coalition partners in voicing strong opposition to the bill, which fails to address key barriers to pregnant students’ educational attainment. The White House also [expressed opposition](#) to the bill in its current form. The bill (H.R. 6914) passed the House in January and it faces an uncertain outcome in the Senate.*
- *In a positive step for student borrowers, the U.S. Department of Education responded to a call from [AAUW and coalition partners](#), to hold a forth session of the negotiated rulemaking process to address student debt relief. The additional session will provide an opportunity to give more attention to the significant burden of student loan debt for Black and Hispanic women. The [fourth session](#) will be held on Feb. 22 and 23.*
- *As a result of sustained advocacy, in January, Congress reached a bipartisan agreement on a tax package that will temporarily expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC). AAUW [joined](#) over 350 organizations in urging Congress to prioritize this expansion which would benefit about 80% of the 19 million children who are currently left out of the full CTC or don’t receive it at all because their parents’ earnings are too low.*
- *The Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act ([H.R. 6585](#)) was advanced out of the House Education & Workforce Committee in December 2023. The bill would allow federal Pell Grants to be used for short-term education and job training programs. Higher education advocates have raised concerns over the inclusion of for-profit schools and how the bill is funded.*
- *AAUW joined a letter in opposition to the College Cost Reduction Act ([H.R. 6951](#)) due to our concerns that the bill would repeal current Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment regulations which AAUW has supported as a way of protecting students from unaffordable student loan debt.*
- *The U.S. Department of Education began [negotiated rulemaking sessions](#) in January to improve regulations that hold higher education institutions accountable for the quality and integrity of their programs, including reforms to give students timely access to financial aid disbursements. AAUW [joined](#) partners in*

recommending reforms to the accreditation process for higher education institutions to better protect students from predatory practices and ensure they receive a high-quality education.

- *The U.S. Department of Education has extended the deadline to consolidate student loans for [Income-Driven Repayment \(IDR\) Account Adjustment](#) to April 30, 2024. This extension will give borrowers more time to consolidate and keep the maximum amount of credit toward cancellation programs on their loans.*
- *Last year, a bipartisan Paid Family Leave Working Group in Congress was established to explore federal paid family leave policies. In December 2023, the Working Group released a [legislative framework](#) that will serve as the basis for roundtable discussions later this year and is gathering input from stakeholders to inform their efforts to expand paid leave access in the United States.*
- *Registration is [now open](#) for AAUW's National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL), May 30 – June 1, 2024! NCCWSL brings together hundreds of college students every year for leadership training, advocacy, and networking. Please share widely and reach out to nccwsl@aauw.org with any questions.*
- *Join AAUW Lobby Corps and make your voice heard! We're holding virtual trainings on February 8 at [9:30am](#) and [5:00pm](#) ET. All AAUW members and college students in the Washington, D.C. area are welcome to join Lobby Corps.*