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Equal Pay Day

Today, Tuesday, April 14, 2015 is the national observance of Equal Pay Day, the day when citizens around the country recognize the wage gap between working women and men. According to statistics released in 2014 by the United States Census Bureau, women are now paid, on average, just 78 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earn. Minority women fare even worse with Hispanic or Latina women earning 54 cents for every dollar and African American women earning 64 cents for every dollar. The mid-April date was chosen because this pay gap means that a woman must work three and a half months longer than a man to reach parity with his annual earnings.

Yes, some progress has been made. In 1963 women made just 58 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earned, but improvement has been slow in coming. Projecting previous gains into the future means that it will take almost another 50 years to actually reach equality with men's compensation! In the meantime we will, like our mothers and grandmothers before us, be losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost income during our working life.

What is so surprising about these statistics is that for more than 50 years federal laws have been in place to prohibit employment discrimination based on sex. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 specifically forbid an employer to "fail or refuse to hire or discharge any individual or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin." Title VII of the 1964 Act also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to implement and enforce these laws.

Times have changed since wage disparity could be explained by citing "men were the breadwinners" and women only worked by choice. Now, there are over 12 million single parent households in

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this country, and 80% of them are headed by women. Additionally, 70% of married women with children over the age of six are now working. For most families a second paycheck is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Women have been racing ahead in other areas. In 1982 women, for the first time, earned more four year college degrees than men. By 2006 they were achieving the majority of masters and doctorate degrees and those well-educated women were going out and starting businesses at an unprecedented rate. According to an American Express OPEN commissioned report it is estimated that as of last year there were nearly 9.1 million women-owned businesses in the U.S. employing nearly 7.9 million workers. Significantly, those same businesses grew at 1.5 times the national average.

That trend is even more apparent in our local area. Florida is ranked 4th among the states in the number of women-owned businesses. In the Tampa Bay area the latest numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners reflect an estimated 75,000 women-owned businesses in Tampa Bay that contribute roughly \$11.4 billion to our economy.

Yet, pay inequality has continued to be a major drawback in the workplace. So, what can we do to remedy this pay gap for women? The first step is to raise awareness of this important issue among employers, employees and governmental policy makers. On a personal level we need to start talking with colleagues and co-workers about workplace rights. We need to know whether our employers are committed to the implementation of the purposes and principles of the pay equity legislation passed so many years ago.

Legislators at all levels need to become informed, educated and active in the discussion of the appalling salary disparity pervasive throughout our society. There are steps they can take by supporting newer legislation that makes it easier for both groups and individuals to take action against employers who continue to discriminate. Women cannot wait another 50 years to end this inequality.

To increase awareness and highlight this injustice the Florida Commission on the Status of Women, the Hillsborough County Commission on the Status of Women, as well women's commissions from across the state recognize Tuesday, April 14, 2015 as Equal Pay Day. We encourage all citizens of Florida to recognize the full value of women's skills and significant contributions to the labor force and further encourage businesses to conduct an internal pay evaluation to ensure women are being paid fairly.

Submitted by the Florida Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission is a nonpartisan body, statutorily charged with studying the changing and developing roles of women in American society. Visit the Commission on the web at www.fcsw.net.