



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Legislators Unveil Equal Pay Proposals

MADISON – Senators Hansen (D-Green Bay) and Ringhand (D-Evansville) and Representatives Sinicki (D-Milwaukee) and Ohnstad (D-Kenosha) unveiled the Equal Pay Enforcement and Transparency Acts Monday, two proposals that aim to narrow the wage gap in Wisconsin.

[The Equal Pay Enforcement Act first became law in 2009](#), only to be [repealed](#) by the Republican Legislature two years later. It strengthened enforcement of our job discrimination laws with stronger penalties on employers guilty of discrimination. Under the Act, employers may be held liable for compensatory and punitive damages, rather than merely providing back pay or reinstatement to victims.

"A burglar wouldn't be permitted to merely return the items he stole and avoid any other penalties," said Sen. Hansen. "Why should businesses that discriminate be treated any differently? Without the Equal Pay Enforcement Act, [our Fair Employment Law](#) doesn't do enough to deter employer discrimination."

"The Equal Pay Enforcement Act made a difference for Wisconsin's working families," said Rep. Ohnstad. Wisconsin's wage gap for women narrowed from the 37th widest in the nation to only 25th under our 2009 law. Companies work harder to avoid discriminating if they face stiff consequences for breaking the law. Gov. Walker should never have repealed the law, but he and the Legislature now have the opportunity to correct that mistake by supporting this common-sense proposal."

The Equal Pay Transparency Act tackles discriminatory practices that help create the pay gap in the first place by creating new protections for employees regarding information about their wages.

The bill creates wage transparency in the workplace, by first of all requiring employers to allow voluntary discussions of salaries among their employees. "Employers often forbid their workers from discussing wages or salaries with each other, and some enact penalties for doing so," said Rep. Sinicki. "The Equal Pay Transparency Act helps employees find out if and when their pay is lower than that of co-workers doing equal work."

The Equal Pay Transparency Act also includes an important ban on employers asking job applicants for their salary histories. "Many employers set salaries for new hires using past pay as a baseline," said Sen. Ringhand. "If this happens to women in their early jobs, then their initially lower wages can follow them through their entire careers, cementing in for a lifetime and lowering their Social Security accounts and pensions."

The Equal Pay Enforcement and Transparency Acts would protect Wisconsin workers of either gender and also cover veterans, people with disabilities, minorities and other groups that may also be subject to pay or other types of employment discrimination.

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