



Improving Working Conditions and Increasing Employment Opportunities for Women

In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was signed, requiring that men and women in the same workplace be given equal pay for substantially equal work. A year later, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin and religion. Although women have made great progress over the past nine decades, women still have a long way to go when it comes to equality in the workplace. Many families are increasingly dependent on two incomes, and many other families depend solely on women's paychecks; however, women still hold a majority of low-wage jobs. And the pay gap still exists despite the fact that more women are working than ever before. For the first time in history, women now make up almost half of today's labor force.

Within the first ten days of his new Administration, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to reverse a Supreme Court decision that made it even more difficult for women to bring pay discrimination cases. The Fair Pay Act re-establishes a reasonable time limit for filing pay discrimination claims. The Department of Labor is focused on promoting equal pay, workplace flexibility, paid leave and employment opportunities for all women. The following is a sample of investments and activities of U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis and the Department of Labor – actions that demonstrate this Administration's strong commitment to improving working conditions and increasing employment opportunities for women and their families.

- **Reaching Women:** Secretary Solis has met personally with women across the country to listen to their concerns. She met women working in the solar industry in Memphis, spoke at the California Working Families Policy Summit and the Women's Conference in Long Beach, participated in the White House Council on Women and Girls forum addressing Workplace Flexibility, hosted a roundtable with women in the trades during Women's History Month, and addressed the National Domestic Workers Alliance, an organization that supports immigrant women working in cleaning and child, elder, and disabled care. As part of the Department of Labor's ongoing efforts to promote and improve business practices and policies that provide greater work-life balance and workplace flexibility, Secretary Solis engaged stakeholders across the country as part of the Women's Bureau's National Dialogue on Workplace Flexibility.
- **Working Together – White House National Equal Pay Enforcement Taskforce:** By establishing a collaborative effort among the Labor Department, the Department of Justice, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Administration will ensure strategic enforcement of pay discrimination cases and take steps to reduce the persistent pay gap between men and women through improved data collection, improved interagency coordination and enforcement efforts, a public education campaign to educate employers on their obligations and employees on their rights, and ensuring the federal government is a model employer. In December 2010, the Women's Bureau hosted an Equal Pay Research Summit, bringing together some of the foremost experts to discuss the best approaches to data collection so as to better understand the scope of the pay gap and improve enforcement efforts.



- **Enforcing Equal Opportunity and Pay:** The Department is focusing enforcement efforts on individual and systemic pay discrimination which affect the lives of every American family. The Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) enforces Executive Order 11246, which establishes a federal-wide requirement of equal opportunity in employment by federal contractors and subcontractors. OFCCP has hired nearly 200 new compliance officers to increase its ability to investigate and resolve cases and has also prioritized compensation cases for enforcement in Fiscal Year 2011. Through rulemaking, OFCCP will seek input on how to develop a compensation data collection tool which can be used to identify and root out wage-based discrimination. Along with the Women's Bureau, OFCCP will launch new public education efforts so that working women, and their employers, understand their rights and responsibilities under the law.
- **Work-life Balance and Workplace Flexibility:** The Administration supports passage of the Healthy Families Act. The Department's Wage and Hour Division recently published a Request for Information on the break time requirement for nursing mothers which took effect when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law in March, 2010. This law clarified the definition of "in loco parentis" under the Family and Medical Leave Act to ensure that an employee who assumes the role of caring for a child receives parental rights to family leave regardless of the legal or biological relationship.
- **Employment and Training Services for Women:** The workforce investment system provides important employment, educational and training services to help individuals, including women, find good jobs and move along a career pathway. Approximately 45 percent of participants who exited the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker programs in the most recent program year, ending June 30, 2010, were women. Approximately 55 percent of the individuals exiting the WIA Youth program were women and girls.
- **Training Women for Jobs in a Clean Energy Economy:** Ensuring women are trained to succeed in a clean energy economy is critical to ensuring opportunities are available in industries that are growing and have good jobs. Training for women and other under-served job seekers is being funded by the Department's "Pathways Out of Poverty" grants. These grants are providing \$150 million to support programs that help disadvantaged populations find ways out of poverty and into economic self-sufficiency. A number of these grantees have succeeded in recruiting women participants (23 percent on average as of September 2010), while focusing on green industries, especially construction, energy, and transportation, which have historically employed fewer women. On Earth Day 2009, Secretary Solis held a roundtable with White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley to discuss the opportunities for women in the clean energy economy. The Women's Bureau hosted a series of five teleconferences for workforce practitioners, designed to offer information and an exchange of ideas to better connect women with green jobs training. In 2011, the Women's Bureau will publish an online guide, *Why Green is Your Color: A Woman's Guide to a Sustainable Career*.



- **Advancing Women in Non Traditional Occupations:** In 2010, the Department’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service and the Women’s Bureau partnered to award \$1.8 million in grants to support partnerships that ensure that women have training opportunities and career support to succeed in non-traditional occupations in growing sectors of the economy. Over 26 grants were awarded in 14 states and the District of Columbia for job training, counseling and placement services (including job readiness, and literacy and skills training) to expedite the reintegration of homeless female veterans and veterans with families into the labor force. Through the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) grant program the Department promotes the recruitment, training, employment and retention of women in apprenticeship and nontraditional occupations. In June and July 2010, six grantees were awarded WANTO grants totaling nearly \$2 million dollars. The awards sustain the partnerships needed to ensure that women have the training opportunities and career support to succeed in non-traditional occupations in growing sectors of the economy

- **Supporting Female Veterans and their Families:** More women are serving in the military than ever before. The Women’s Bureau hosted a series of listening sessions with homeless female veterans and service providers across the country to gain further insight into reintegration challenges specific to women. As a result of the listening sessions, the Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau has developed a guide for service providers, *Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*, that equips service providers with a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and needs of female veterans. In addition, in 2010 the Women’s Bureau hosted the first-ever Stand Down for Women Veterans in the United States, held in Kansas City, Missouri.

- **Strengthening the Safety Net for the Unemployed:** The Recovery Act provided incentives for states to update antiquated unemployment laws to make unemployment assistance available to more American workers, including part time workers who are disproportionately women, and efforts by the Administration have resulted in unemployment benefits being extended. And because of the modernization efforts in the Recovery Act, an estimated 200,000 unemployed Americans received benefits they would not otherwise have received.

- **Increasing Women’s Retirement Security:** The Department’s Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) educates women about retirement to help them increase their financial fitness and to exercise their rights under the law. Most recently, EBSA partnered with the Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER) and the Center for American Nurses for a free webcast to provide retirement savings education to nurses and other working women of all ages. EBSA also held a “Taking the Mystery Out of Retirement Planning” workshop in Boston and was joined by the Social Security Administration for that event. In addition, EBSA has a number of publications available on its website with information specifically for women that address the many challenges they face when saving for retirement.

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