



Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement

**Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement
Testimony**

for the

New York City Pay Equity Public Hearing

Sept. 19, 2019

The New York City Bar Association

"If women and people of color were to receive wages equal to those of men for comparable jobs, poverty among working women and their families would be cut in half and add a staggering \$513,000,000 to the national economy." (The Institute for Women's Policy Research – March 2018)

Thank you to the NYC Commission on Gender Equity, Commission on Human Rights and Department of Consumer and Worker Protection for this opportunity to speak today on the issue of pay equity in NYC. My name is Merble Reagon and I am Executive Director at the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement.

From 1970 to 2015, our Women's Center has helped thousands of women to prepare for further education, jobs and careers. We learned early on that full-time jobs didn't always mean that they were earning enough money to meet their families' most basic living expenses. Since 2000, we have partnered with NYC philanthropies, human services agencies and many others to define exactly what incomes working NYC families need to earn to make ends meet, depending on where they live in NYC and the ages of their children. Over the past 19 years, we have developed five NYC Self-Sufficiency Standard reports, most recently, **Overlooked and Undercounted 2018**, which "highlights" the real life circumstances of 2.5 million members, or 40%, of working New York City families who are struggling to make ends meet because their wages do not cover the cost of their basic necessities." They represent more than 900,000 households in New York City and for them "pay equity" is a critical issue.

Our report findings are divided into briefs focused on differences experienced by working families based on their race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, education, NYC borough and other factors. One of the most important findings is that since 2000, the actual cost of living (87%) in NYC has risen at nearly three times the rate of wages (31%). (The "official" inflation since 2000 is just 42%.)

We worked with 32 other NYC human services agencies to review the basic data and findings and then collaborated to develop a series of public policy recommendations designed, among other things, to be most impactful to and reach working families most in need. It goes without saying that the issue of Pay Equity has hurt traditionally marginalized populations most. We know that, while on average, women in New York earn 89 cents per dollar earned by men, the gap is wider for women of color: Black women on average earn 64 cents and Latinx women, 55 cents per dollar.

Most of us who are here this evening do not need to be persuaded that, in addition to pay equity, there are other public policies that will contribute to improving the financial security of low-wage working New Yorkers by: reducing major nondiscretionary costs; reaching a broad audience, inclusive of marginalized populations; and, by advancing coordinated and interconnected solutions. For the details, we encourage the panelists to review the proposed public policy recommendations in the "Key Findings & Recommendations" brief we distributed this evening.

Finally, we do applaud the historic equal pay legislation passed in NYS and NYC. However, while NYS has extended the Pay Equity Act to all protected classes, we strongly recommend to NYS and NYC, that for both employers and workers, the necessary education, training, oversight and enforcement resources be made available to ensure that the new legislation and regulations have the intended benefits for the intended beneficiaries.

For further information, contact:

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