Pay Transparency Laws and the Gender Pay Gap:
Evidence from a National Survey of US Adults

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Introduction

For nearly sixty years, women in the United States have looked to the Equal Pay Act to guarantee “equal pay for equal work.”1 But despite these protections, U.S. men have consistently received higher salaries compared to women. A Pew survey in 2020 found that women currently earn 84% of what men earn, based on median hourly earnings of full- and part-time workers.2 This gap was smaller for some subgroups, such as women aged 25-34 (93%), but it was present in the same direction in every group.3 Across industries, the Department of Labor has documented that men outearn women in early every occupation.4 The pay gap expands as wages increase: women earn 92% compared to men at the 10th percentile of the wage distribution, but only 74% compared to men at the 95th percentile.5 Over a lifetime, the average woman in the workplace foregoes more than $530,000 due to the gender pay gap, escalating towards $800,000 for women with college degrees.6 The gender disparity in wages remains even when analyses control for education, workforce experience, occupation, industry, and part-versus full-time employment. Women also report reduced access to non-wage benefits compared to men, including access to employer-sponsored health insurance.7

1 https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/internal/policies/equal-pay-for-equal-work
2 https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts/
3 Id.
4 https://blog.dol.gov/2021/03/19/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-gender-pay-gap; Foster et al., US Census Bureau 2020
6 Id.
7 Id.
8 DOL, supra note 3.