Defining Comparable Worth/Pay Equity

Comparable Worth (also called job-title pay equity) - A reform effort to pay job titles based on their value to the employer regardless of the gender of those working in such titles.

Job titles traditionally associated with women’s work have been systematically undervalued in the marketplace. The result is that these jobs are paid less than comparable male dominated job titles with the same levels of skills and responsibilities. For instance, some school districts pay secretaries and teaching assistants (job titles that require exams and certification) less than the cleaners. In Denver, nurses were found to make less than gardeners. Nurses in the West Islip school district once started at $27,000 while groundskeepers started at $29,000.

This bias can be demonstrated and eliminated by assessing the economic value of different job titles through the use of a gender-neutral job evaluation system. Food service, nurse, maintenance, dispatcher, clerk and drafting job titles, for example, can be compared.

How Can You Compare Apple Job Titles and Orange Job Titles?

Apples and oranges can be compared by using any common denominator such as vitamins, juice content or calories, etc. For nearly a century, large employers have had wage-setting processes in place to relate job title common denominators. This is the primary responsibility of personnel/human resource departments. Most such systems are composed of nine to twelve factors that include:

- **Job knowledge** (education and experience)
- **Accountability** (responsibility for people, budgets, resources)
- **Management/Supervision** (responsibility for the work of others)
- **Working conditions** (exposure to discomfort and hazards)

As demonstrated in the many countries and jurisdictions that have passed pay equity reform, it is possible to evaluate job titles fairly using the same job evaluation system and set salaries accordingly.

A Brief History of the Equal Pay for Job Titles of Comparable Worth in NYS

1982 - After reaching a study consensus, LWVNY announces its position favoring equal pay for job titles of comparable worth salary adjustments.

Mario Cuomo was elected governor in 1983

If it had been left to the male voters, he would not have been elected.

- So he announced a study of equal pay for comparable worth for State employees to address any historical bias against traditionally female jobs.
• The study was done by the Center for Women in Government of SUNY Albany.

• In 1987 comparable worth adjustments (reclassifications of job titles where women predominate to higher salary grades based on comparison with male dominated job titles) were made to 239 NY State Civil Service job titles. All of the employees in these job titles, over 47,000 of them, received raises. See handout.

But, no laws were passed to require equal pay for job titles of comparable worth in NYS.

Some other states have required it. Most notably Minnesota, where it is monitored throughout the public sector and as a result there is no wage gap between working women and men in the Minnesota public sector.

The 1990s - Women on the Job (a Long Island group) discovered some LI school districts did not provide equal pay for job titles of comparable worth.

• Notably the Teaching Assistants who had to be certified by the state and take college level courses to maintain that certification were being paid less than the male dominated entry level cleaners.

• They took a complaint to the State Human Rights Commission. After almost a decade, the commission wrote its response to the complaint. They agreed there was real inequity and unfair pay, but they noted it was not against the law.

So Women on the Job (WOJ) set out to change the law and drafted bills.

When the WOJ leadership retired The New York State Pay Equity Coalition was formed to take over trying to pass pay equity legislation. The League was and is a prominent member. Since 1998, bills requiring equal pay for job titles of comparable worth have passed the NYS Assembly each year. To date, these bills have not been acted on by the Senate, but we are hopeful for change in the future.

Pay Equity Bills passed by the NYS Assembly in 2013

A753-implements a policy of compensating employees in state service equally for work of comparable value. Sponsor - Rosenthal

A1729-requires for all the political subdivision in NYS, including state government, fair and equal pay for equivalent value of work. Sponsor - Jaffee

A5958-The New York State Fair Pay Act - implements in the public and private sectors, compensating employees equally for work of comparable value. Sponsor-Heastie

It is time to end the discriminatory underpayment of traditionally female job titles which is historically carried forward from centuries of gender bias.

Pay equity is good personnel policy