

## PAY EQUITY

### EMPLOYMENT IN NEW YORK STATE

#### Statement of Position

As announced by the State Board, November 1982

**The League of Women Voters of New York State supports state policies for both public and private sectors of employment to ensure equal pay for equal work and equally evaluated jobs, to encourage affirmative action in hiring and promotion practices and to eliminate sexual harassment.**

**To achieve equal access and opportunity of employment for women throughout New York State, the League believes it is necessary to educate the public about existing laws and procedures, to improve the enforcement of laws and to fund these efforts adequately.**

**The League of Women Voters of New York State supports state legislation and regulations that will establish greater equity in wage compensation for comparable jobs. Comparable worth of jobs should be determined by gender-neutral criteria such as responsibility, effort, skill, education and experience required, and the working conditions.**

The League has long supported the passage of legislation that would implement a state policy of compensating employees equally for work of comparable value. Over 20 years ago, in the spring of 1985 the League became a member of the New York State Committee for Pay Equity, which worked to further the principle of equal pay for jobs of comparable worth and to close the gap of wage discrimination. The state agreed in 1986 to a one-time-only funding pool to cover pay equity adjustment for state employees. The set-asides represented one percent of the gross payroll in 1986-87 and 1987-88.

In the absence of legislation, however, there has been no reexamination of pay equity for those in state service and no extension of pay equity to all those in the private and broader public sector including cities, counties, and school districts.

Pay equity bills have consistently passed the State Assembly since 1998. The League, as a key member of the New York State Pay Equity Coalition (NYSPEC), which includes Women on the Job, American Association of University Women (AAUW), National Organization for Women (NOW), Business and Professional Women (BPW), New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), United University Professors (UUP), United Public Service Employees Union (UPSEU), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and District Council 37. This coalition has played an important role in pushing for legislative passage of pay equity reform. Despite the fact that the pay equity bills are consistently passed by the Assembly and have had Republican sponsorship in the Senate, these bills continue to be stalled in the Senate.

In October of 2003, the League and its coalition partners met and decided to concentrate efforts on legislation to create the NYS Fair Pay Act. The Fair Pay Act is strongly written enforceable

legislation, which would provide for equal pay for jobs of comparable worth in both the public and private sectors.

Passage of the NYS Fair Pay Act will:

- Require that job titles where people of color and/or women predominate receive equal pay with comparable job titles. Pay equity (equal pay for comparable work) makes salary comparisons between job titles within an employer. Jobs disproportionately held by women and people of color have traditionally been undervalued and paid less than comparable jobs with the same level of skill and responsibility.
- Allow employees to voluntarily share salary information without fear of being fired or reprimanded for disclosing information or asking about pay. *The vast majority of workers are employed in the private sector where salaries can be kept secret and employees can be fired for sharing salary information.* Without this information, it is impossible for employees to know whether they are being paid fairly. Passage of the NYS Fair Pay Bill will enable private sector employees to share salary information, without fear of reprisal, in order to establish whether they are receiving equal pay for equal work.

In preparation for legislative advocacy in 2006, our coalition partners UUP and NYSUT passed **resolutions** at their Assemblies to make pay equity an important part of their lobbying package.

The League, along with its coalition partners, met with both minority and majority leaders, the result was action by the Democratic Minority which responded to NYSPEC's "Take the Pay Equity Pledge" campaign. At that time, every Democratic Senator also signed the pledge to support new laws guaranteeing fair pay for work of comparable worth.

Also in 2006, the coalition met with then-candidate Eliot Spitzer who expressed knowledge of and support for pay equity.

During the 2007 legislative session, representatives of NYSPEC's member organizations were able to secure sponsorship by the Senate of the "same as" Assembly Fair Pay Act. Although a recently elected democrat (minority in the Senate), Senator Johnson was felt to be an appropriate sponsor because of possible democratic takeover of the republican Senate in 2008.

In June 2007, following the U.S. Supreme Court's May 29, 2007 Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company decision, the League and its coalition partners held a press conference. This press event was held to make clear the increased importance of the New York State Fair Pay Act given the loss of the Federal Equal Pay protections. In conjunction with the Press Conference, petitions were delivered to the offices of Governor Spitzer, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno urging passage of the Fair Pay Legislation. This opportunity also led to a meeting with the Assistant Counsel to the Governor to discuss this issue.