



Press Release

For Immediate Distribution

April 17, 2012

CONTACT: Bob Estabrook, 503-709-0730

Oregon Taking the Lead in Tackling Pay Equity

Annual Equal Pay Day marks how long women's wages take to catch up to men's

PORTLAND—As the nation observes Equal Pay Day, the annual recognition of the 23% gender gap in wages between men and women, Oregon Labor and Industries Commissioner Brad Avakian and the Oregon Council on Civil Rights (OCCR) are getting ready to take action and eliminate the wage gap in Oregon. The lingering issue of the gender gap is exacerbated by data showing that African-American and Latina women face an even greater gap: almost 50% between Latina women and white men.

“Congress passed an Equal Pay Act in 1963, and the wage gap has closed about half-a-cent per year,” Avakian said. “Oregon isn’t going to wait another 50 years to see equal pay for equal work. And we aren’t going to ignore the reality that racial disparity is part of the problem and should be addressed to combat all forms of pay disparity.”

OCCR, first created by Avakian in 2009, brings together advocates and community leaders of diverse backgrounds to address civil rights challenges with a cooperative, statewide focus. The council has already begun to take specific steps on addressing pay disparity, such as joining a coalition of sponsors for legislation in 2011 that would have strengthened Oregon’s equal pay law by applying it to all protected classes, not just gender.

“We want to attack the roots of pay disparity in very targeted ways,” said Dawn Holt, OCCR co-chair. “The action plan that we develop should be a blueprint for other states to tackle this lingering injustice, not just in terms of new enforcement powers but through pro-active, cooperative work with Oregon employers to craft lasting solutions.”

“Equal pay for equal work is a principle that Oregonians believe in and want to see realized,” Avakian added. “We can take real steps forward, in collaboration with Oregon’s business community, to ultimately close all of the wage gaps in our state.”

Meetings of OCCR are open to the public and notices are posted on [the state’s public meetings calendar](#). The council also plans to hold field hearings in the coming months to learn from and be responsive to Oregonians’ real-life experiences with pay disparity.

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