

## Pay Her More and Other Strategies for Closing the Gender Wage Gap

Valerie Kepner, King's College and Paula Cole, University of Denver

The U.S. gender wage gap is well documented and acknowledged by many Americans—less clear is why and how to reduce this economic problem. This paper seeks to outline the weakened economic power women have from lower wages and propose key changes that will help close the gender wage gap. The most direct way to close the gender wage gap is to increase her earnings. We examine how raising the national minimum wage would improve the earnings of women. Additionally, we evaluate efforts to improve pay transparency to give women more economic power. Finally, we examine the importance of reproductive freedom as necessary for closing the gender wage gap and this fight over economic power.

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### Introduction

In 2024, seventy-six cents to the dollar is what full-time working women earned compared to men in the United States. Over the course of a year that is the equivalent of \$14,640 (Majumder and Mason 2025). This gap in earnings is even larger when race and ethnicity are accounted for with Black women earning 63 cents and Hispanic women earning 54 cents compared to white, non-Hispanic men (Majumder and Mason 2025).

This story of disparity in economic earnings has been well told, and the gender wage gap can be clearly explained with occupational and industrial segregation, the care penalty, and discrimination. Less explored is how to solve this economic problem. This paper examines specific strategies for closing the gender pay gap through increasing the minimum wage, establishing effective pay transparency policies, and ensuring reproductive freedom for women.

### Pay Her More

The most direct way to decrease the gender wage gap is to pay her more. One strategy for doing this would be to increase the national minimum wage and to end the tipped minimum wage as women are overrepresented as minimum wage workers and as part-time workers. The national minimum wage is currently \$7.25 an hour, and it was last increased in July 2009; however, 31 states including the District of Columbia have set a minimum wage higher than \$7.25. The federal tipped minimum wage is even lower at \$2.13 an hour with employers required to make

up the difference if tips do not push wages to at least \$7.25 an hour (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024).

Although much of the minimum wage literature focuses on whether or not there are unemployment effects from the minimum wage, an increasing body of work explores how the minimum wage impacts inequality. Ellora Derenoncourt and Claire Montialoux (2021) demonstrated that the 1967 extension of the minimum wage to cover previously uncovered workers, a third of whom were black, explains a 20% decline in the racial earnings gap during the civil rights era. David Autor, et al. (2016) examine how the declining real value of the minimum wage impacts wage inequality and find that this was a contributing factor in increasing inequality, particularly for women. David Neumark and Emma Wohl (2024) find little support for higher tipped minimum wages in reducing earning gaps, but they do find some evidence for higher minimum wages.

Tatsushi Oka and Ken Yamada (2023) examined the minimum wage's impact on inequality and observed that increasing the minimum wage lowered the gender wage gap in the United States. Francine D. Blau, et al. (2023) study the impact of the minimum wage on wage gaps finding substantial wage increases for those at the bottom of the wage distribution, in particular Blacks, Hispanics, and women. They also estimate how a national minimum wage of \$12 would impact wage inequalities. Their results show inequality would be reduced at the bottom of the wage distribution for gender, race, and ethnicity in the U.S.

This is supported by international evidence linking increasing the minimum wage to the narrowing of the gender wage gap. Caliendo, M., & Wittbrodt, L. (2022) found that minimum wage reform in Germany lowered the wage gap particularly at the bottom of the wage distribution. Olivier Bargain, et al. (2019) examine the introduction of a national minimum wage in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In Ireland, they observe a decrease in the gender wage gap at the lower end of the distribution, while in the U.K. little change is noted. Aleksandra Majchrowska and Paweł Strawinski (2018) evaluate the impact of an increased minimum wage in Poland and find that this significantly lowered the gender wage gap for younger workers. Shi Li and Xinxin Ma (2015) observe in China that women are more represented with wages lower than the minimum wage and that the minimum wage lowers the gender wage gap, particularly for the low wage workers.

An effective national minimum wage policy is one that intentionally raises wages above prevailing market wages to push earnings higher for workers. Raising the minimum wage will reduce poverty and improve the earnings of women of color most. Paying her more by raising the national minimum wage would be a direct way to reduce the gender pay gap in earnings for those at the bottom of the income distribution.

## Pay Transparency

To reduce or, ideally, eliminate the gender wage gap, several countries and many U.S. states have implemented pay transparency policies of varying degrees. This section will present details of variations of pay transparency policies and summarize the statistical analyses of the effectiveness of said policies.

According to Laura Stateler (2025), three types of legislation have been used to make pay more transparent. The three types are (1) pay secrecy bans; (2) salary history bans; and (3) pay disclosure laws. Since 2010 more than a dozen states have passed laws banning employer pay secrecy rules, rules that have historically been both formally and informally enforced by employers who don't want employees to share their pay amongst each other. Twenty-one states and the District of Columbia have passed salary history bans, though Michigan and Wisconsin have gone in the other direction and prohibited bans on salary history requests. (Stateler 2025). Over the years, twenty states have enacted laws that penalize employers for retaliating against employees who discuss pay with their co-workers while an additional four states require the employer to provide coworkers' pay information or statistics upon request (Cullen 2024). In October of 2020, Maryland was the first state to enact a mandatory pay disclosure law with a total of fourteen states and the District of Columbia now having passed pay disclosure laws. Ten additional states have introduced pay transparency-related legislation (Stateler 2025).

Most public sector employers are required to make public their employees' pay information. Relatedly, publicly traded corporations must share their top executives' compensation with the public (Moriarty 2018). But for most employees, social norms encourage keeping one's pay a secret as it is information employees consider to be confidential. Potential negative consequences from sharing such information include appearing to brag about one's wealth, potentially losing a "sweet deal" made with the employer, or having others think less well of you because of earning a low salary (Bierman & Gely 2004).

Whole Foods is another example of pay transparency at work. Whole Foods has a wage transparency policy ensuring every employee can see another employee's wage. Whole Foods CEO John Mackey believes some companies do not implement the same wage transparency policy because of potential envy among employees. John Mackey, however, believes the policy motivates employees to want to do better and allows the company to fix pay mistakes. Unfortunately, the policy does not seem to have significantly reduced the gender wage gap as the Census Bureau reported that in 2019, a Whole Foods male worker's mean yearly income, (25 years and older and with only a high school degree) was \$45,971, whereas it was only \$29,261 for female workers (Clifford 2020). For those employers not as forthcoming as Whole

Foods, potential and current employees can now go to websites such as PayScale, Glassdoor, and Indeed to gather information on wages and salaries (Stateler 2025).

Michael M. Oswalt et al. (2023) provide evidence suggesting laws prohibiting pay secrecy rules have been ineffective. For example, since 2010, there has been a drop in the number of employers formally banning pay discussions among their employees; however, a survey conducted in 2017-2018 by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) found that informal pay secrecy policies remained common even in the face of legislation passed to ban such policies. What has happened instead is that employers have moved from formal pay secrecy policies to informally encouraging their employees to keep their pay a secret (Sun et al. January 2021). Women are both more likely to work for an employer with a formal pay secrecy policy and to violate such a policy (Sun, et al. 2021).

Julia B. Bear et al. (2023) found that pay transparency policies only sometimes mitigate gender pay gaps in salary negotiations. Encouragingly, additional salary information does seem to benefit women in that it raises their pay in absolute terms, but if we care as much about gender pay parity, the results are not as encouraging. Julia B. Bear et al.'s (2023) empirical results suggest that additional salary information may be increasing men's competitive spirit and encouraging them to ask for larger salaries in comparison to women thus leading to greater gender salary gaps.

Evaluating across countries, Emma Duchini et al. (2024) find that pay transparency policies do reduce the gender wage gaps at the firm level, but this happens via declining growth in men's wages. Perhaps not surprisingly, there's also a reduction in labor productivity following the passage of pay transparency laws, yet firms' profits do not suffer because of the lower wage costs already mentioned (Duchini et al. 2024).

Starting in 2018, UK firms with at least 250 employees were made to publicly disclose gender equality indicators on both a dedicated government website as well as their own websites (Blundell, et al. 2025). Such gender equality indicators include percentage gaps in mean and median hourly pay and the percentage of women in each quartile of a firm's wage distribution. Jack Blundell et al. (2025) present evidence to suggest that the UK's pay disclosure policy led to a narrowing of the gender pay gap by 19 percent. However, the gender pay gap closed because of a reduction in men's wage growth and not because of an increase in women's wage growth. Men's wages grew at a rate of 2.9 percent lower than before the implementation of the gender pay transparency policy. Notably, those firms and employers who reported particularly egregious gender pay gaps seemed to feel public scrutiny most acutely and reduced their gender pay gaps the most (Blundell, et al., 2025).

Employees in Germany, Spain, and Poland react to learning their wages are lower relative to others of the same gender by withholding labor and/or negotiating for higher pay; this is not true when employees compare their wages to the opposite gender (Baggio and Marandola 2023).

Surveying the literature on the effectiveness of pay transparency laws on the gender wage gap between men and women in comparable jobs, Bennedsen, Larsen, and Wei (2023) conclude that “several recent studies show that increased transparency causally reduces the gender wage gap” (Bennedsen, Larsen, and Wei 2023, p. 1773). The literature review also revealed that the gender pay gap doesn’t decrease because women’s wages are brought up to men’s wages but, again, because men’s wages have stagnated.

#### Reproductive Freedom

Although often overlooked in the examination of the gender pay gap, an essential element addressing the disparity in earnings is the reproductive freedom of women. The ability to control when and if she has a child is consequential to her earnings ability and workplace experience. The following explores how both her access to the Pill and to abortion impact her economic well-being.

Martha J. Bailey (2006) demonstrated that greater fertility control supported the 1970 to 1990 boom in young women’s market work by showing that cohorts with early legal access to the Pill decreased births to those under 21 and increased work for pay during their late twenties and early thirties. Younger access to the Pill resulted in an 8 percent hourly wage premium by the age 50. Additionally, it was estimated that the Pill contributed to the convergence of the gender gap in the 1980s by 10 percent and the 1990s by 30 percent (Bailey, et al. 2012).

In addition to contraception, abortion access is critical to the economic earnings of women. In 1999, Philip Levine et al. found that legalization of abortion decreased fertility rates by 4%. Caitlin K. Myers (2017) argues that abortion policy was more impactful than the Pill by demonstrating that “in states where abortion was legalized and young women could obtain an abortion without involving a parent, the likelihood of becoming a mother before age 19 declined by a third and the likelihood of a shotgun marriage by more than one-half.”

Beyond decreasing fertility rates, abortion access has a direct impact on earnings outcomes. Abortion access improves the economic outcomes of black women by increasing their college entry and completion rates, an increased likelihood of a professional career, greater earnings and a decrease in poverty rates (Jones 2021). Greater abortion access leads to higher rates of college graduation, lower rates of single parenthood and lower rates of welfare receipt (Oltmans Ananat, et al. 2009). Ali Abboud (2019) found that abortion access delayed motherhood causing positive economic outcomes resulting in a significant increase in yearly

labor earnings for black women and increases in wages were offset by a decrease in labor force participation and hours worked for white women. David Kalist (2004) found that abortion access increased labor force attachment by roughly two percent with a greater impact on the labor force participation rates of black women. Early access to contraception and to abortion increases the likelihood of Social Security covered jobs (Lindo, et al. 2020).

Sarah Miller, et al. (2023) examined the financial consequences of being denied an abortion and found greater financial distress in terms of past due debt and negative public records such as evictions and bankruptcies. Those denied an abortion typically cared for an additional child without increases in personal or household income. Abortion access has been shown to increase women's labor market participation, improve her job outcomes and earnings, and decrease the likelihood of poverty.

### Policy Outcomes

Table 1 examines the state average of key economic outcomes for women by the policies they have in place. In those states that have a minimum wage higher than \$7.25, women experience a five-cent lower gender wage gap and earn \$139.20 more a week than women in states with a minimum wage of \$7.25. Most notable for those states without abortion bans is a poverty rate of 7.3% compared to 10.1% in those states with abortion bans. Women in states with pay transparency laws experience a five-cent lower gender wage gap, earn an extra \$214.40 a week, and have a 2.8% higher labor participation rate.

Table 2 identifies those states that have minimum wages higher than \$7.25, no abortion bans, and state pay transparency laws as well as those states that have a minimum wage of \$7.25, have abortion bans, and have no pay transparency laws. For reproductive freedom, a yes means that no abortion is allowed or abortion is not allowed after 6-12 gestational weeks. Thus, comparing the states (13 and the District of Columbia) with all three policies in place to those 11 states that have none of the policies in place.

Table 3 examines the economic outcomes of women in these select states. Women who live in states with all three policies in place experience a 5-cent lower gender wage gap, earn an extra \$277 a week, have a 4.5 percent higher labor force participation rate, and a 3.3 percent lower poverty rate than women who live in states without these three policies. These economic data demonstrate a clear increase in economic well-being for women living in states with higher minimum wages, no abortion bans, and pay transparency laws.

### Conclusion

In the United States, the gender wage gap has narrowed, though only slightly, over the past 20 years (Pew Research Center 2025). To fight for the closing of the gender wage gap requires not only research on the causes of the gender wage gap but also measuring the effectiveness of

already implemented policies to close the gap. This paper brings together research on the effectiveness of three policies: (1) raising the minimum wage; (2) implementing pay transparency laws; and (3) expanding access to reproductive rights.

While some studies report higher unemployment rates because of higher minimum wage rates, there is also research suggesting a higher minimum wage rate narrowing the gender wage gap with women's wages rising relative to men's. Higher minimum wage rates also contribute to lessening income inequality at the lower end of the income distribution. Regarding pay transparency laws, the evidence is more mixed. While several studies suggest greater pay transparency leads to a lower gender pay gap, it is accomplished at the expense of men's wages, meaning women's wages stay stagnant while men's wages drop to be closer to a woman's wage. Lastly, expanding access to reproductive rights has been shown to improve the economic conditions of women including increasing labor market participation, improved job outcomes and earnings, and subsequently a decrease in the likelihood of a family living in poverty.

In order of effectiveness, we recommend focusing on all three proposed policies, but increasing the federal minimum wage first because of the economic power that comes with higher wages. Next would be ensuring the reproductive freedom for women. Finally, while the results are the least encouraging, we recommend the furtherance of pay transparency laws to assist women in learning how much men in similar positions make. All three policies will ideally close the gender wage gap and make both women and men better off as a result.

**Table 1 State Average Economic Outcomes by Policy**

	Gender Wage Gap, full-time year-round workers, 2024	Median Usual Weekly Earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, 2023 annual averages	Female Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024	Poverty Rate, 2019-2023
Higher Min Wage	0.84	\$1067.3	59.2%	8.0%
Min Wage of 7.25	0.79	928.1	57.9	9.1
No Abortion Bans	0.80	1038.0	57.9	7.3
Bans	0.80	900.1	56.5	10.1
Pay Transparency	0.85	1161.9	60.6	7.3
No Pay Transparency	0.80	947.5	57.8	8.8

**Table 2 Select States by Policy**

State	Minimum Wage	Abortion Ban	Pay Transparency Laws
California	\$16	No	Yes
Colorado	14.42	No	Yes
Connecticut	15.69	No	Yes
DC	17.5	No	Yes
Hawaii	14	No	Yes
Illinois	14	No	Yes
Maryland	15	No	Yes
Massachusetts	15	No	Yes
Minnesota	10.85 or 8.85	No	Yes
Nevada	12	No	Yes
New Jersey	15.13 or 13.73	No	Yes and Local
New York	16.00 or 15.00	No	Yes and Local
Vermont	13.67	No	Yes
Washington	16.28	No	Yes
State	Minimum Wage	Abortion Ban	Pay Transparency Laws
Alabama	\$7.25	Yes	No
Georgia	7.25	6 to 12	No
Indiana	7.25	Yes	No
Iowa	7.25	6 to 12	No
Kentucky	7.25	Yes	No
Louisiana	7.25	Yes	No
Mississippi	7.25	Yes	No

North Carolina	7.25	6 to 12	No
Oklahoma	7.25	Yes	No
Tennessee	7.25	Yes	No
Texas	7.25	Yes	No

**Table 3 Select State Average Economic Outcomes**

State	Gender Wage Gap, full-time year-round workers, 2024	Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, by state, 2023 annual averages	Female Labor Force Participation Rate, 2024	Poverty Rate, 2019-2023
California	0.87	\$1,118	56.5%	8.4%
Colorado	0.84	1,235	62.7	5.9
Connecticut	0.84	1,194	60.3	6.8
DC	0.86	1,726	70.9	10.7
Hawaii	0.88	902	57.2	6.9
Illinois	0.82	1,055	60	8.2
Maryland	0.86	1,296	61.6	6.3
Massachusetts	0.86	1,331	62.8	6.6
Minnesota	0.85	1,131	64.8	5.5
Nevada	0.85	912	57.9	9
New Jersey	0.83	1,168	59.4	7
New York	0.87	1,090	55.9	9.8
Vermont	0.88	1,089	61.6	5.7
Washington	0.79	1,165	56.9	6.4
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>1,172</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>7.4</b>
State	Gender wage Gap, full-time year-round workers	Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers, by state, 2023 annual averages	Female Labor Force Participation Rate	Poverty Rate

Alabama	0.74	\$873	51.5%	11.3%
Georgia	0.82	976	56.9	9.9
Indiana	0.78	934	58.1	8.4
Iowa	0.81	921	62.1	6.9
Kentucky	0.82	920	54.1	11.8
Louisiana	0.71	833	53.1	14.2
Mississippi	0.78	775	51.4	14.3
North Carolina	0.87	904	55.2	9.4
Oklahoma	0.78	860	57.4	11.1
Tennessee	0.83	905	59.6	9.9
Texas	0.82	947	57.9	10.5
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>895</b>	<b>56.1</b>	<b>10.7</b>
<i>Average</i>				
<i>Difference</i>	0.05	277	4.5	3.3

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