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NY Makes it Harder and More Expensive to Discriminate Against Women Employees *New York State Passes Package of Equal Pay Legislation*

Albany, NY – A significant piece of legislation that has made its way through the New York Legislature puts an end to wage secrecy policies and strengthens the ability to enforce pay discrimination laws and hold employers accountable for discriminating against women in the workplace.

The Assembly's passage of (A.6075/S.1) today culminates a three-year campaign by NOW NY to advance women's rights at work and hold employers accountable for treating workers fairly.

"New York has now done at the state level what federal lawmakers haven't been able to do nationwide," said Sonia Ossorio, president of NOW New York. "Wage secrecy policies hurt women's chances at getting fair and equal pay across the country. We applaud New York's legislature for moving forward on this important measure. Today we are one huge step closer to closing the wage gap."

Equal pay is an important economic security issue for women and their families. New York has over one million households headed by women, and 28% of those families live below the poverty level. Pay inequity leaves women with less income to pay for life's necessities, including health care, housing, childcare, and groceries, and results in lower Social Security benefits for women when they retire. In New York, women earn only 86% of what men earn, and this wage gap is even larger for women of color: African-American women earn only 66% and Hispanic women earn only 54% of what men earn.

The Equal Pay bill, originally one of the measures included in the Women's Equality Act, now heads to the Governor's desk. The bill was sponsored by Assemblymember Michelle Titus and State Senator Diane Savino.

"New York lawmakers are doing the right thing by moving forward provisions of the Women's Equality Act," Ossorio said. "This is progress for women."

The New York State Equal Pay Legislation will:

- Outlaw wage secrecy policies and prevent employer retaliation for sharing wage information. A majority of private sector U.S. employees—61%—say that their employers discourage or prohibit any discussion of wage or salary.
- Strengthen the enforcement of equal pay laws, by closing a current loophole in the law that makes it easier for employers to justify paying women less. Similar to the federal Paycheck Fairness Act, this bill will raise the bar on the affirmative defense that employers use in justifying pay differentials, changing the law from "any other factor other than sex" to "a bona fide factor other than sex."

- Establish that employees who work for the same employer but at different workplaces must be paid equal wages (within the same county). Currently only employees at the same physical location have to be paid the same wage.
- Hold employers accountable, by increasing damages that an individual who brings and wins a pay discrimination case in court to 300% of unpaid wages.

The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. NOW New York aims to advance reproductive justice, secure workplace equality, combat racism and homophobia, and end discrimination and violence against all women.

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