



the work and family legal center

**Letter Submitted to the Alabama State Legislature in Support of HJR 115  
April 4, 2022**

**Submitted by: A Better Balance Southern Office**

Dear Alabama Senators:

**We are writing to urge you to SUPPORT HJR 115** which establishes the Alabama Workforce and Wage Gap Task Force to identify evidence-based policies to assist lawmakers in implementing laws to close the wage gap in Alabama.

A Better Balance<sup>1</sup> is a non-profit legal organization dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace for women and families. Through our regional Southern Office, which has a presence in Montgomery, Alabama, we have worked to craft and implement policies that promote pay equity for working parents and caregivers.

Alabama currently ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in the nation for gender pay equity.<sup>2</sup> In Alabama, the gender pay gap, which is measured by comparing the annual salaries of full-time, year-round working women to the annual salaries of full-time, year-round working men, is \$12,738, while the national average is just \$10,150.<sup>3</sup> For women of color, the statistics are even more concerning. Black women and Latina women were paid just 64% and 57%, respectively, of what white men were paid in 2020.<sup>4</sup> In Alabama, this amounts to an additional annual income loss of \$14,889 for Latina women and a loss of \$18,957 for Black women when compared to white women.<sup>5</sup>

The passage of the Clarke-Figures Equal Pay Act of 2019—which prohibits pay discrimination based on sex or race for jobs that require “equal skill, effort, education, experience, and responsibility, and performance under similar working conditions”—was an exciting step forward for working women and families in Alabama.<sup>6</sup> However, there is more work to be done in order to fully close the pay gap in our state.

While women still often shoulder most of the caregiving responsibilities, they are increasingly taking on the role of breadwinner as well. In Alabama, nearly two-thirds of working mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in their families.<sup>7</sup> In other words, working mothers provide a key source of financial support for the majority of families in our state. Yet recent data has shown that women bore the brunt of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, women lost 1.8 million more jobs than men during the pandemic and between February and April 2020, nearly 4.4 million women left the workforce altogether.<sup>8</sup>

The pandemic has only highlighted the difficult choice that too many women have to make between caring for themselves and their loved ones and protecting their family’s economic security. Without supportive workplace policies such as flexible scheduling, accommodations for pregnant and postpartum workers, and child care supports, many women have no choice but to leave the workforce altogether in order to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities. Even if these women are able to re-enter the workforce later on, they are at a serious disadvantage in terms of pay and opportunities for career advancement.



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If the gender pay gap was eliminated in Alabama, it is estimated that women would, on average, be able to pay for an additional 7.8 months of health insurance premiums, an extra 2 years of child care, and pay off average student loan debt in just 2.7 years.<sup>9</sup> And even more strikingly, researchers estimate that the poverty rate would be cut in half.<sup>10</sup>

Recent findings have shown that just 53.2 percent of women in Alabama aged 16 and older are in the labor force, compared with 62.1 percent of men, making our state 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for women's labor force participation.<sup>11</sup> With today's highly competitive labor market and an expected shortage of 500,000 workers in Alabama by 2025,<sup>12</sup> it is imperative that more be done to bring women back into the workforce, so that our economy can thrive. Enacting policies that support working mothers and caregivers while closing the gender and racial wage gap is one way to achieve this important goal.

In conclusion, **we urge you to SUPPORT HJR 115.** We applaud Alabama legislators' passage of the Clarke-Figures Equal Pay Act of 2019, but more must be done to close the wage gap here in Alabama. The task force created by passage of HJR 115 would ensure that progress continues in Alabama, provide the necessary data on the root causes of the gender pay gap, and identify additional policy-based solutions to close the gap.

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<sup>1</sup> *Our Issues*, A Better Balance, <https://www.abetterbalance.org/our-issues/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Wage Gap Overall State Rankings*, Nat'l Women's L. Ctr., (Mar. 2021), <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Overall-Wage-Gap-State-By-State-2021-v2.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Gender Pay Gap*, United States Census Bureau (Mar. 1, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/gender-pay-gap.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *America's Women and the Wage Gap*, Nat'l Partnership for Women & Families (Jan. 2022) <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *The Wage Gap in Alabama*, Nat'l Partnership for Women & Families, <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/wage-gap/the-wage-gap-in-alabama.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ala. Code § 25-1-30(b).

<sup>7</sup> Diana Boesch, Rachel Kershaw, and Osub Ahmed, *Fast Facts: Economic Security for Women and Families in Alabama*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Aug. 8, 2019), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fast-facts-economic-security-women-families-alabama/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Bearing the Cost: Report Fact Sheet*, U.S. Dep't of Lab., (Mar. 15, 2022), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *The Wage Gap in Alabama*, Nat'l Partnership for Women & Families, <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/wage-gap/the-wage-gap-in-alabama.html>.

<sup>10</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Alabama*, Inst. for Women's Pol'y Res., <https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-alabama.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Clearing the Path: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Workforce for Alabama*, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, [https://wفالabama.org/assets/2019/05/TWF\\_CTP\\_2019\\_INTERACTIVE.pdf](https://wفالabama.org/assets/2019/05/TWF_CTP_2019_INTERACTIVE.pdf).