

## Support Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (SB19-085)

Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee

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Good afternoon committee members and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Dorsa Djalilzadeh and I'm a public interest policy fellow at the Bell Policy Center. We provide policymakers, advocates, and the public with reliable resources to create a practical policy agenda that promotes economic mobility for every Coloradan.

The Bell Policy Center supports SB19-085 because it creates a necessary protection for employees that ensures wages are distributed solely to the merits of the work, and in doing so, bolsters the economic potential and livelihoods of all, especially working women in Colorado.

I would like to draw your attention to the recent brief by the Bell Policy Center in front of you, "[The Future of Work: Implications for Colorado Women](#)." This brief highlights the issues working women in Colorado face and provides recommendations for solutions. Current workplace policies, regulations, politics, and societal norms — remnants from the 1930s when the workplace was predominately controlled by men — are antiquated and haven't evolved to accommodate the needs and demands of today's workers. Until the workplace catches up with the workers who are occupying it, bills like SB19-085 do the critical work of modernizing wage laws and leveling the playing field.

Some of the factors hindering women reaching their full economic potential in Colorado include automation, "non-traditional" work arrangements, the proliferation of low-wage work, caregiving expectations, and the gender wage gap. Addressing this final issue is one policy lever we have the power to address with SB19-085. Colorado has one of the highest female labor force participations in the nation, yet women are more likely to work low-wage jobs. In Colorado, more than half of all low-wage jobs are held by women, according to a [2013 Colorado Fiscal Institute report](#). More specifically, [recent research](#) by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) finds a majority of Colorado jobs paying less than \$11.50 per hour are held by female workers. As women act as primary providers for their families, this discrepancy in wages has huge consequences on family financial security across the state. [In Colorado](#), over 200,000 households have women as the breadwinner of the family, and about 25 percent of those families have incomes that fall below the poverty level.

If the quality and type of work is equal, the compensation should be as well. Still, a [Pew Research Center Survey](#) shows 40 percent of women report gender discrimination at work, while 1 in 4 working women say they have earned less than a man doing the same job. This wage disparity manifests in different ways for different women: Specifically, the discrimination experienced by women of color has a significant effect on every part of their lives, but is very apparent when it comes to their economic prosperity. [Data from WFCO's Economic Status of Women in Colorado](#) shows workforce participation rates vary when accounting for race and ethnicity, but the median earnings of Native American, Latinx, and black women are the lowest. In fact, the wages of almost all women of color have actually worsened since 2015 compared to white men's and white women's wages, the latter of which have improved marginally.

Not only is this an economic issue with broad consequences for Colorado families and our state's growth, but it's also a moral issue. SB19-085 would eradicate discriminatory standards based on our intrinsic identities and instead set up crucial boundaries that would ensure standards of equitable pay for equal work. This is why we urge you to vote yes.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to speak today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.