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Mississippi Misses the Mark on Equal Pay ... Again

This year, seven bills were introduced by Republicans and Democrats in both the Mississippi House and Senate on pay equity. Mississippi is one of only two states in the nation that does not have any wage discrimination laws on the books, and any one of these bills would have remedied that. I was very disappointed that every one of those bills died in committee without the Legislature so much as debating the issue.

Our State Economist's office pegs the pay gap in Mississippi at 27% -- far higher than the 19% national gap. Closing the pay gap would be good for Mississippi in so many ways:

- It would help break the cycle of poverty. Mississippi has the highest poverty level in the nation, and three out of four children who live in poverty in our state live in a household headed by a woman.
- It would help stop the brain drain. In the last four years, 60% of degrees at Mississippi universities have gone to women. Are they more inclined to look elsewhere to start their careers if 48 states have taken action to protect equal pay for equal work, but not Mississippi?
- It would put \$4 billion back into the State economy. That's what the estimated annual lost wages equals. We're talking about the equivalent of 77 weeks of groceries or 9 months of utility or mortgage payments that women can't afford because of the pay gap.

Many people have pigeonholed pay equity as a partisan issue. But, it's not. In fact, the first pay equity bill – the language that eventually became the federal Equal Pay Act – was written and introduced by a Republican Congresswoman, Winifred Stanley (R-NY). I was proud to join with Democrat Representative Sonya Williams-Barnes to write an op-ed in the Clarion-Ledger about pay equity. I hope you'll read it and help encourage the Legislature to take a second look at this [issue](#).