

December 4, 2014

Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Executive Order

Dear Senator Reid,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express our support for the Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Executive Order. We are organizations dedicated to eradicating all forms of discrimination in the workplace and promoting good jobs for women. This executive order is the latest in a series of important steps the President has taken to bring the federal contractor community closer to achieving these goals. We strongly urge you to defend against any efforts to undercut this executive order through the legislative process.

Employers that have the privilege of doing business with the federal government also have a responsibility to abide by the law. This executive order is crucial to the communities we represent because it helps ensure that federal contractors behave responsibly and ethically with respect to labor standards, civil rights laws and more. The executive order will ensure that companies applying for federal contracts have every incentive to comply with federal labor and employment laws, including for example the Fair Labor Standards Act (which includes the Equal Pay Act), Title VII, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and their state law equivalents. This will lead to fairer treatment for workers in the federal contractor workforce and raise awareness among other employers about their legal obligations. The executive order will also ban compulsory arbitration of claims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, which is critical to ensuring that workers can have their day in court.

The government has long held on both moral and economic grounds that contracting should not be merely a way to acquire goods and services cheaply, but should also allow government to establish itself as a model for the private sector. For example, Executive Order 11246, signed by President Johnson in 1965, prohibits employment discrimination by federal contractors and requires that employers with federal contracts take affirmative actions to make equal opportunity employment a reality, which has resulted in the contractor workforce becoming significantly more diverse and has achieved more economical and efficient contracting for the public.

Yet government contractors are among the worst violators of workplace laws, with one study finding that almost 30 percent of the top violators of federal wage and safety laws hold federal contracts. Too many federal contract jobs are low-paying and poor quality, leaving workers especially vulnerable to abusive employment practices. These low-road practices have dire consequences for workers and their families. For example, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that one in five federal contract workers do not earn enough to keep a family of four out of poverty and often do not receive benefits. And many of the workers earning low wages are women.

Promoting federal contractors' compliance with basic labor, employment and civil rights laws is particularly important in light of the trends in the workforce overall. More than one-third (35 percent) of women's job gains during the economic recovery have been in the ten largest low-wage occupations—those paying \$10.10 or less—compared to 18 percent of men's gains in the same occupations. And, two-thirds of workers in low-wage jobs are women. Low-wage workers are especially vulnerable to workplace abuses such as wage theft, discrimination, harassment, last-minute scheduling practices, violation of their rights to family and medical leave, and retaliation for banding together to improve their working conditions.

This executive order will have a direct and positive impact on the lives of America's working families and provide much needed oversight for a vital sector of our economy. The women and men who serve food in our nation's museum cafeterias and clean federal office buildings deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. This executive order will create strong incentives for federal contractors to comply with baseline labor standards under federal laws and their state law equivalents to ensure that federal contract jobs are high-quality and family sustaining. We urge you to vigorously defend against any attacks on this crucial step forward for millions of workers and their families, and we look forward to working with you to help secure its successful implementation.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American Psychological Association
Business and Professional Women, St. Pete-Pinellas
Catalyst
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Communications Workers of America
Economic Opportunity Institute
Equal Pay Coalition NYC
Equal Rights Advocates
Family Forward Oregon
Family Values @ Work
Feminist Majority Foundation
Florida Institute for Reform and Empowerment
Institute for Science and Human Values
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action
Jobs With Justice
Labor Project for Working Families
Legal Aid Society - Employment Law Center
Legal Momentum, The Women's Legal Defense & Education Fund

Legal Voice
Maine Women's Lobby
Make it Work Campaign
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Consumers League
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO)
Older Women's Economic Security Task Force, NCWO
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
NC Women United
New Hampshire Women's Foundation
New Jersey Citizen Action
New Jersey Time to Care Coalition
New York Paid Leave Coalition
New York Union Child Care Coalition (NYUCCC)
NYS PowHER
Organize Now (Florida)
PHI – Quality Care through Quality Jobs
Public Justice Center
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Social Work Helper
The Solomon Project
Southwest Women's Law Center
TakeAction Minnesota
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The VASHTI African American Women's and Girls Initiative
UltraViolet
Union for Reform Judaism
Voices for Illinois Children and The Fiscal Policy Center at Voices for Illinois Children
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women AdvaNCE
Women Employed
Women of Reform Judaism
Women Voices Women Vote Action Fund
Women's Law Project