

State of Equality and Justice in America: 'The Maternal Wall'

Written by Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner
Wednesday, 27 March 2013 14:37



In our national conversations about equality and justice in America, we have too often avoided the conversation about the realities of women and mothers in the workforce. This is particularly odd given that women comprise half of the entire paid labor force, three-quarters of moms are now in the labor force, and most families now need two breadwinners to make ends meet.

Yet, despite comprising half of the paid labor force, only 5 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. The glass ceiling remains solid and a Maternal Wall is blocking the way for many women to even get anywhere near that glass barrier. Yes, a Maternal Wall.

Here's what the Maternal Wall looks like:

- Women without children make 90 cents to a man's dollar, mothers make only 73 cents, single moms make about 60 cents to a man's dollar, and women of color experience increased wage hits on top of that.
- Mothers with equal resumes are hired 80 percent less of the time than non-mothers and are offered lower starting salaries.

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- More than 80 percent of women in our nation have children by the time they're 44 - and most hit the Maternal Wall.
- Overall women make only 77 cents to a man's dollar for full-time year round work, with African-American women making only 68 cents to a man's dollar and Latino women making just 59 cents to a man's dollar.

Think all of this doesn't matter to you, or to our national economy? Consider this: Women make three-quarters of purchasing decisions. When women don't have adequate funds in their pockets, our entire economy - which for better or worse is now built on consumer spending - suffers.

The glass ceiling and Maternal Wall not only hurts women's pocketbooks, they also hurt the bottom line of our nation's businesses. A 19-year Pepperdine University survey of Fortune 500 companies found that those with the best record of promoting women outperformed the competition by anywhere from 41 to 116 percent. In other words, more women in leadership meant higher profits.

Many women and mothers are struggling against tradition, subliminal discrimination, and structural barriers. Indeed, we need to start uniting and lifting each other up. We are living in more than one America.

The realities of life for higher-wage earning women are vastly different from the realities of most women in our country. More than 80 percent of low-wage workers don't have access to a single paid sick day for themselves or their children.

Our national "floor" for workplace policies is way too low. These floors need to be raised; and structural barriers need to be addressed, particularly since it now costs over \$200,000 to raise one child from birth to age eighteen.

Despite what it may appear from the focus of recent media coverage, there are vastly more women in low wage positions than in high. In fact, only 9 percent of all women in the labor force earn \$75,000 or more annually, 37 percent earn between \$30,000 and \$74,999 annually, and 54 percent earn less than \$30,000 annually. The majority of minimum wage earners are women.

Most mothers in the low wage workforce are struggling to find quality and affordable daycare (which now costs more than college in most states) and are working in jobs without paid family leave, sick days, or flexible work options that ensure that employees can be successful both at home and at work.

Middle-income women struggle with many of these same work structure issues, while women in higher income positions often have access to these programs. We've seen recently that the mere ascension of women in the workplace alone does not guarantee that family friendly policies will be implemented. One example is Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's move to end the

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company's policy of allowing employees to work remotely.

Solutions are within our reach.

We know which policies - like paid family leave, earned sick days, and affordable childcare - save taxpayer dollars, improve women's economic security, act to help close gender-based wage gaps and break down the Maternal Wall, while strengthening our national economy as a whole.

These solutions won't magically happen without people coming together to push to update our outdated workplace policies, practices, and laws. It's going to take all of us - women, men, elected and corporate leaders - leaning forward together to build a nation where women, families, and businesses can thrive.

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner is Executive Director/CEO & Co-Founder of MomsRising.org. This article - the tenth of a 20-part series - is written in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. The Lawyers' Committee is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to enlist the private bar's leadership and resources in combating racial discrimination and the resulting inequality of opportunity - work that continues to be vital today. For more information, please visit www.lawyerscommittee.org.