



Equal Rights Advocates

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Press Release

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WOMEN AND CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CALL UPON U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS TO CONTINUE TRACKING GENDER INEQUITY

San Francisco, CA (February 22, 2005) Equal Rights Advocates (ERA), The Impact Fund, and the Discrimination Research Center (DRC), protested a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) proposal to drop gender data from its Current Employment Statistics (CES) Survey, in a letter sent on February 17, 2005 to BLS Commissioner Kathleen P. Utgoff. The BLS announced in December 2004 that, as of July 2005, it would stop asking employers a single question – how many employees are women – in its seven-minute CES survey, saying that it wished to alleviate the burden on employers.

A wide array of women's advocacy organizations and civil rights groups also signed on to the letter, along with individual women in fields ranging from academia to the construction trades. ERA, which spearheaded the drafting of the letter, notes that CES gender data works as an irreplaceable puzzle piece in assembling a complete picture of economic trends on women and men, and is a vital link in the process of crafting effective responses to gender inequity.

Without CES gender data to bridge the gap between employment discrimination and economic realities, the findings below would not be known and would therefore remain unaddressed:

Women remain underrepresented in various employment fields. CES data reveals, for example, how many hours employees work in a given field. This allows comparison of the hiring rates of women and men, respectively.

The widening wage gap between women and men is caused in part by men's domination of higher-paying fields. Without CES's reports that track women's employment by field, this information would be unknown.

Women do better in economic downturns than men, prompting investigation into what makes women more successful than men. This knowledge can then be used to design public policies and programs to help all workers fare better in difficult economic times.

The letter refutes the BLS's contention that the CES gender series is redundant by using Utgoff's own 2003 testimony to the Congressional Joint Economic Committee in which she said, "the [CES] payroll survey provides more reliable information on the current trend in wage and salary employment," than other surveys because CES data use a larger sample size and come from employer payroll records, not employee self-reporting. Economists widely agree that the CES provides an accurate view of general employment trends.

ERA Law Fellow Emily Arnold-Fernandez said, "Discontinuing reporting by gender sends one of two troubling messages: Either women no longer experience workplace discrimination; or gender discrimination is not important enough to warrant an employer's time on a single question in a seven-minute survey. The first message is inaccurate, and the second is at odds with the federal government's own stated goal of economic opportunity for women in the workplace."

Equal Rights Advocates (www.equalrights.org) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization that advocates for women's rights through public education, litigation, and free advice and counseling. The Impact Fund (www.impactfund.org) is a public foundation dedicated to providing representation, technical assistance and funding for complex, public interest litigation. The Discrimination Research Center (www.drcenter.org) is a project of The Impact Fund that utilizes research to measure the extent of unlawful barriers to equal employment or access to unemployment.

The letter and list of signatories are available at www.equalrights.org.

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