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April 12, 2016

Dear Friends,

I am sorry my schedule does not allow me to be with you today, but let me congratulate the Vermont Commission on Women and all the groups that organized today's Equal Pay Day.

It has been more than 50 years since President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, and few would deny our country has come a very long way since then. But it is also clear that we still have a long way to go.

Today, on average, a woman still makes just 79 cents for every dollar a man makes. African American women make just 64 cents for every dollar paid to their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts; Hispanic women earn just 54 cents. Moreover, the gender pay gap is found at every level of education and at every stage of a career. No matter how hard women work, it is next to impossible to overcome it.

Not surprisingly, the pay equity gap has a significant bearing on the economic status of female-led households; in fact, only 18 percent of families headed by single moms have economic security. A lifetime of lower earnings means less retirement savings and fewer Social Security benefits – it is no wonder that senior women are nearly twice as likely as senior men to live in poverty, and the average senior woman receives approximately \$4,000 less a year in Social Security benefits than a senior man.

The gender wage gap is not only an issue of justice, it is also an issue of economics. Closing the wage gap and establishing pay equity would mean raising incomes for millions of women, reducing the ranks of the poor, and increasing the size of the U.S. economy by 3 to 4 percent.

Of course, closing the pay equity gap is just one of the major economic issues facing women. It is unconscionable that in 2016, someone can work full time and still be considerably below the poverty line. We should increase the minimum wage to a livable wage to lift low-wage workers – who are disproportionately women – out of poverty. We should guarantee universal health coverage, and make sure women have access to all forms reproductive health care. We should guarantee that new mothers have paid parental leave so they can spend time with their babies without worrying about losing their jobs. And we should make sure every worker has paid sick and vacation time.

The fight for pay equity is part of a long arc of struggle for women's rights and against sexism; a struggle that includes a women's right to choose, access to birth control, and non-discrimination in the workplace and in society.

I sincerely thank everyone here today for your tireless efforts on these critically important issues, and I proudly stand in solidarity with your call for equal pay for equal work.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
UNITED STATES SENATOR