

# Improving Wage Equity and Promoting Family Friendly Workplace Policies throughout King County

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE KING COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND METROPOLITAN KING COUNTY COUNCIL PREPARED BY THE KING COUNTY WOMEN'S ADVISORY BOARD

### Introduction

In 2014, the Women's Advisory Board (WAB) adopted the focus topics of Wage Equity and Family Friendly Workplace Policies. Since January 2014 the board meetings have focused on educating the WAB members about these issues and successful strategies for implementation of policies that will lift up women throughout King County. We have heard from a diverse group of leaders on these topics both during WAB meetings and community outreach, including Dr. Diana Pearce of University of Washington School of Social Work, Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner of MomsRising, Liz Vivian of Women's Funding Alliance, Ericka Singh of YouthCare Human Resources, Patricia Lemus of King County Department of Community and Human Services, Brigitte Merriman of Seattle Wage Equity Task Force, Heidi Swartz of The Swartz Company, and others.

The following are the WAB's recommendations for improving wage equity and family friendly workplace policies throughout King County. Due to the scope of and interest in these important topics, the WAB will dedicate its resources in 2015 toward expanding upon, disseminating, and aiding in the implementation of these recommendations. We invite the Executive and the Metropolitan King County Council to engage the WAB in any efforts they make in 2015 to pursue these recommendations or otherwise improve wage equity and family friendly workplace policies in King County

### Recommendations

#### **Recommendation #1: Create a public/private compact pledging to end the wage gap and encourage family friendly workplace policies.**

Background on the Boston Compact: In late 2013, Boston's mayor pledged to end the wage gap in Boston. He created a council, the first of its kind in the country, to transform Boston into "the best city in the country for working women". Its first priority was to identify new and creative ways to help close the wage gap between working men and women. The result was a road map for private companies to follow to help close Wage Gap, and retain and promote more women.

*See Boston Closing the Wage Gap Interventions Report.pdf.* The Compact outlines the primary obstacles, specific solutions and gives 33 intervention measures for employers, higher education and investors to implement.

### **Specific Action:**

Create a committee to develop a Compact for King County similar to that of Boston's. The King County version should also include a goal for signing on King County based companies committed to implementing the measures outlined in the compact, and offer reasonable incentives to those businesses that join the effort. Based on our research, the King County Compact would likely include many of the WAB's following recommendations.

### **Recommendation #2: Promote and encourage employees regardless of gender to take family leave by creating incentives for employees at higher levels to both role model this and to create a work environment where taking family leave is acceptable.**

According to Dr. Diana Pearce of the University of Washington, family leave policies and applications contribute to gender inequality in the workplace and the wage gap because more women are taking family leave than men. This isolates women and stigmatizes family leave. In addition, due to existing gender discrimination in the workplace as it relates to childcare, men do not typically disclose to their employers when they miss work due to childcare or family related issues further propelling the stigma that only women's workplace schedules are affected by family needs. Finally, families often do not take all the family leave they are entitled to because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

### **Specific Recommended Actions:**

- Promote awareness among all employees in King County, including King County employees, that family leave is available for both men and women under the Federal Family and the Washington State Family Leave Act and state laws.
- Offer paid family leave to King County employees, and encourage King County based employers to offer paid family leave as well.
- Through public-private partnerships actively encourage male employees working for and in King County to take family leave upon birth or adoption of a child, and when family members of any age are ill and need care. Encourage and offer reasonable incentives to King County employers who provide and promote family leave for both their male and female employees.
- Incentivize Executives, Directors, Managers, and other people in leadership positions to encourage employees to take family leave and develop flexible opportunities to enable coming back to work a viable possibility. Leaders should let the employees know they are valued in their jobs, with the hope that the employee will return to work after family

leave is finished. Leaders are encouraged to set an example for their employees and take leave themselves.

**Recommendation #3: Offer and promote workplace flexibility. Encourage options such as job sharing, telecommuting, time-shifting and expand part-time employment opportunities to higher level jobs.**

Both male and female employees state that one of the most valued aspects of any particular job is flexibility. When businesses fail to provide family friendly workplace policies, it affects women disproportionately because women are still taking a disproportionate amount of responsibility for child and family care. Accordingly, more women than men are forced to cut back on work hours, decline a promotion, or take time off work to take care of family matters, including care for children and elderly family members.

Unfortunately, professional and skilled women are often forced to abandon full-time, high paying, jobs because employers will not allow them the flexibility they need. When flexibility is lacking, women are forced to seek part-time employment. The nature of available part-time work contributes to lower wages for women by forcing them to choose jobs for which they are overqualified. This hurts King County businesses as well, because they are left with the costs of rehiring and retraining.

In June 2014, President Barack Obama brought national attention to this issue by directing federal agencies to expand and promote family-friendly workplace policies. President Obama made this policy announcement at the Summit of Working Families, hosted by the White House Council on Women and Girls, the Department of Labor, and the Center for American Progress. In his address at this Summit, President Obama declared that family-friendly workplace policies are not a frill, but a “basic need” of American workers. For more information, visit <http://workingfamiliesummit.org/>

**Specific Actions:**

- King County should change its current policy, which encourages only full-time employment. *See Performance Audit of Part-time Employment in King County, May 7, 2014.* Offering meaningful and skilled part-time employment will allow King County to recruit and retain more female employees, including working mothers.
- King County should adopt uniform policies to encourage part-time employment and job sharing. In particular, King County should offer job-sharing opportunities in higher-level positions—not just administrative work. This is important because it is the nature of available part-time work that contributes to lower wages for women. Higher-level part-time opportunities will reduce the gender wage gap and lead to more women remaining in the workforce after childbirth or when elderly family members need care.

- King County should offer and encourage flexible hours to both male and female employees, which will allow both moms and dads to accommodate childcare needs (*i.e.*, pick up and drop off for childcare). This will also lead to shorter commute times for all employees, which improves quality of life.
- King County should encourage telecommuting when possible and adopt a results oriented evaluation of employees.
- King County should promote awareness of these policies and encourage participation.

**Recommendation #4: Achieve wage transparency.**

In April 2014, President Barack Obama signed executive orders on wage transparency aimed at income disparities based on gender and race. By making wages more transparent, female employees can better determine if they are being paid less than their male coworkers for the same work. Furthermore, employers will become more aware of any pay disparities within their own organization that may be the product of discrimination. Wage transparency will lead to honest conversations about wage equity and provide female employees with the facts they need to fight for equal pay outside of litigation.

**Specific Actions:**

- King County should encourage and offer incentives to employers in King County who eliminate policies which prohibit employees from sharing their salaries or hourly wages with their coworkers.
- King County should encourage and offer incentives to employers in King County who share rates of pay and salary ranges for current positions with their employees.

**Recommendation #5: Eliminate conscious and unconscious gender bias in hiring and in the workplace.**

Gender discrimination in hiring is often unconscious. Studies have shown that women, especially women of color and women who have children, are offered and paid less than their male counterparts for the same job.

**Specific Actions:**

- King County should encourage employers in King County to provide education and training to their hiring managers on how to recognize and eradicate gender discrimination in hiring practices, including discrimination against women with children, which is often unconscious and overlooked.  
  
(see: <http://gender.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/motherhoodpenalty.pdf>) and (National Women’s Law Center, Explaining the Wage Gap, April 2013.)

- King County should encourage and offer incentives to employers in King County to institute changes in hiring practices that include gender-blind applicant screening and diversity goals.
- King County should encourage employers in King County to reevaluate pay for new hires based on objective criteria that rates the value of the work rather than history of pay for traditionally female jobs and the individual female applicants being considered.
- King County, as an employer, should provide the same policies and sanctions for other workplace discrimination to gender discrimination and harassment. It should encourage employers in King County to do the same.

**Recommendation #6: Provide access to affordable childcare.**

Many families are forced to choose between working and providing childcare due to the high cost of child care. As a result of unaffordable care, many women leave the workforce and do not return until their children begin attending elementary school. This gap in employment costs working families in King County hundreds of thousands of dollars in spending power. Women who make less than their male spouse may be more likely to quit a lower paying job to provide necessary care thus exacerbating the already existing gender wage gap.

**Specific Actions:**

- King County should provide on-site and/or subsidize childcare for its employees.
- King County should encourage and offer incentives to employers in King County who provide and offer on-site childcare or subsidize childcare for their employees.

**Recommendation #7: Increase representation of women in traditionally "male" fields.**

According to Dr. Diana Pearce, occupational segregation plays a role in the wage gap because women are underrepresented in fields paying higher wages. This is particularly true of engineering, scientific, technological, and construction related fields. A local example of this occupational segregation can be found in King County’s own apprenticeship program, where only six out of 280 apprentices were women.

See <http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/BusinessDev/apprenticeship.aspx>.

**Specific Actions:**

- King County should work to inform and recruit female candidates for its own apprenticeship opportunities and make a conscious effort to achieve a certain number of female candidates. King County should also encourage or offer incentives to King

County employers in traditionally male fields to create similar apprenticeship programs and recruit female apprentices.

- King County should encourage and offer incentives to King County Employers in traditionally male fields to recruit and hire female employees.
- King County should continue its efforts to achieve a higher percentage of female and minority owned businesses earning county contracts for large public works and other publicly funded projects.