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Gender pay gap widens nationally, while shrinking in New York

By Celia Young and Brianne Ledda

"Mommy lawyer." That's what some male colleagues called Jeanne D'Esposito as she pulled 60 to 70 hour weeks as a commercial litigator at a Westchester law firm.

Now retired, the Malverne resident at one time worked from home two days a week while raising her two children. That's what led to the nickname, she said, even though her male co-workers also had children. Later, she confronted management after learning they paid her less too, despite her Ivy League law degree and history of legal wins.

"The look of panic on their faces, right?" recalled D'Esposito, now 62. She asked for a raise and got it, but she still wasn't sure it equaled what her male colleagues were making.

D'Esposito isn't alone. Ten years after stepping back from her law career, women across the country and on Long Island still face wage discrimination. Nationally, the gender pay gap widened marginally in 2025 for the third year in a row, reversing decades of progress.

Smaller pay gap in NY

On average, women were paid 18.6% percent less than men last year - a wider gap than the 18% difference between men and women's pay in 2024, according to a recent report from the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

The pay disparity between Black and Hispanic women and white men was even larger. Black women made 25.3% less than white men of similar ages and educational backgrounds. Hispanic women made 27.4% less, according to the report.

In direct contrast to national statistics though, wage disparity in New York has grown smaller in recent years.

Women were paid 91.4 cents for every dollar a man made in 2024, the most recent year data is available, according to a report released on Wednesday by the New York State Department of Labor. That's an improvement from 2023, when women were paid 87.3 cents on average for every dollar a man made.

Still, Black and Hispanic women in the state made less than their white female counterparts. In 2024, Black women were paid 65.7 cents on average for every dollar earned by a white man. Hispanic women took home just 60.8 cents per dollar, according to the state Department of Labor.

New York's smaller gender pay gap is because the state offers more employee protections, said Traci Levy, an associate professor of political science and director of gender and sexuality studies at Adelphi University.

For example, New York mandates a minimum wage of \$17 per hour in New York City and Long Island. It's also one of a handful of states that offer paid time off for new parents or those caring for sick family members, Levy said.

Exacerbates affordability crisis

It's already difficult to carve out a living on Long Island. That's why, in a place where every dollar matters, earning less than male counterparts can make it more difficult for women to navigate the affordability crisis in the region, experts said.

The wage gap really hurts "women and families," said Beverly Neufeld, president and founder of the advocacy group PowHer New York. It makes it "so much harder for everyone to pay their bills and to afford to live in New York."

Nationally, the gender wage gap for full-time, year-round workers means women may lose more than half a million dollars across a 40-year career, according to the National Women's Law Center. That number is higher for women who are Black, Latina, Indigenous and Pacific Islander, with losses totaling more than a million dollars over a lifetime.

In New York, women working full-time stand to lose \$249,120 throughout their career, the law center said. But, even though the wage gap is smaller than other parts of the country, 14.2% of New York women live in poverty - more than the 10.9% of women nationally.

The number is higher for single mothers, 31% of whom struggle financially in New York.

"When you think about that month to month, how many bills you could pay if there wasn't a wage gap, it's extraordinary," Neufeld said.

Plus, many women juggle additional expenses to maintain their health and appearance, said Kari Tabag, adjunct professor at Adelphi University's School of Social Work, such as co-pays for mammograms and OB appointments, and costs for hair, nails and makeup.

"We are expected to look just so," she said of women in the workplace.

What employers should know

New York outlaws discrimination based on a person's gender in the workplace - something that hasn't always been the case in the state, said Christine Malafi, senior partner and chair of the corporate department, Campolo, Middleton & McCormick.

Malafi recalled how her mother, when working for a now-shuttered defense contractor, was fired from her position as a secretary after she became noticeably pregnant, Malafi said.

"Somebody literally stopped her in the hallway and said, 'Wait, are you pregnant?'" Malafi said. "She said 'yes,' and they said, 'You're fired.'"

Modern-day discrimination is often more subtle, and something employers need to keep in mind when examining their compensation and policies.

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"Employers and companies ... have to actually train their people not to consider women less than men for any reason whatsoever," Malafi said.

Malafi advises her clients to offer flexible schedules to women or those caring for a child or relative.

Employers also should examine their compensation every one to two years to make sure there are not huge gaps between employees in similar roles with similar experience, Malafi added.

How to close the gap

One policy under consideration that could help close the gender and race wage gap is a state senate bill that would require employers to include information about benefits and nonwage compensation in job listings, Neufeld said.

A similar law requiring companies to post salary ranges with job listings has helped with the wage gap, she said.

Other policy priorities that would help include accessible, affordable child care and housing, said Steven Kent, economist at regional business group the Long Island Association.

Neufeld said employees should be aware they were protected from retaliation for seeking information about their salary, and that employers couldn't ask for salary history.

Also, if someone notices a colleague is working in "a very similar job with a different title or in a different department and they're being paid less," she said, "there's protections for that."

If a person becomes aware that they're being paid less, they should sit down with their employer and ask why, she said. "A lot of equal pay laws depend on the individual taking action."

Some Long Islanders can also choose to become their own boss, rather than working to break the glass ceiling at other companies, said Erica Chase, regional director of the Small Business Development Center at Farmingdale State College.

"The gender equality gap in the workplace is real. It's well documented," she said. "If you're working for yourself, there's so much greater opportunity for exponential growth."

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