

EMPLOYMENT

FACT SHEET

Women's Stake in the Battle Over Collective Bargaining Rights

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The Senate is considering legislation that would abolish or sharply limit collective bargaining rights, including the collective bargaining rights of public employees. Women who work in state and local government work in fields critical to our communities, such as teaching, nursing, social work, law enforcement, firefighting, and custodial services. Child care workers and home health care workers also have secured collective bargaining rights in some states. Collective bargaining helps ensure that these jobs providing important community services also provide decent wages, benefits, and working conditions. Women who are members of unions or covered by union contracts earn more than their non-unionized peers and experience a smaller gender wage gap. Collective bargaining has helped women achieve economic security for themselves and their families.

In workplaces across the country, collective bargaining has allowed women to obtain better working conditions. Moreover, when workers in positions like nursing or child care achieve better working conditions, this often benefits the women and families who rely on the services they provide, by reducing employee turnover and enhancing their ability to do their job. Attacks on employees' rights to collectively bargain directly threaten working women and the public services they provide.

State and Local Government Depend on Women Workers

Most people working for state and local government are women.

- In April 2012, women made up 57.2 percent of all government workers.
- Women were 52.5 percent of state government workers and 61.4 percent of local government workers.¹

- Many of these women providing vital public services belong to unions or are covered by a union contract. In 2011, 40.7 percent of workers in the public sector were union members or covered by a union contract, compared to only 7.6 percent of workers in the private sector.²

Women Workers Who Belong to Unions Earn More³

- Attacks on collective bargaining threaten women's earnings, because women who are members of unions or whose jobs are covered by a union contract are paid substantially more than women who have no union affiliation.³
- In 2011, among full-time wage and salary workers, workers who were members of a union or covered by a union contract had higher median weekly earnings (\$934) than workers who were not represented by a union (\$729).⁴



- Women who were members of unions or who were covered by a union contract were paid nearly one-third (33.4 percent) more per week than women who were not represented by a union—or \$218 more per week.⁵
- Hispanic women, whose median weekly earnings are lower than any other demographic group, experienced particularly large financial benefits from union membership or coverage by a union contract, with median weekly earnings that were 46.3 percent more than those of Hispanic women who were not represented by a union—or \$232 more per week. Black women in unions or covered by a union contract were paid 28.4 percent more than Black women who were not represented by a union, or \$164 more per week.⁶
- According to a 2008 analysis, being in a union or covered by a union contract increases the likelihood that a woman worker will have employer-provided health insurance by 18.8 percentage points, while finishing a four-year college degree increases this likelihood by only 8.4 percentage points.

Women Workers Who Belong to Unions Experience a Smaller Gender Wage Gap

Women who are members of unions or who are covered by a union contract also have a smaller wage gap as compared to their male counterparts than workers who are not represented by a union.

- The wage gap among non-unionized workers as measured by weekly median earnings was 18 cents in 2011, meaning women working full time were paid about 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.
- The wage gap as measured by weekly median earnings narrowed among full-time workers represented by unions, where women were paid nearly 89 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.⁸
- The wage gap in the workforce as a whole as measured by median annual earnings was 23 cents in 2010, meaning the typical woman working full time, year round was paid only 77 cents for every dollar her male counterpart was paid. The wage gap among full-time workers represented by unions is not directly comparable to this number due to differences in measurement and the groups of people examined.⁹

Women Workers Are Targets in Efforts to Abolish Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Rights

- Congress is considering the Rewarding Achievement and Incentivizing Successful Employees Act (S. 3221), which would amend the National Labor Relations Act to allow employers to disregard negotiated agreements and to grant pay increases to certain employees within a bargaining unit. Currently, many union-employer agreements link pay increases to performance; this bill does not link pay with performance and, in fact, eliminates the protections against employer favoritism and arbitrariness that have reduced gender inequality in compensation.
- In Wisconsin, a state law passed on March 9, 2011 stripped public employees of collective bargaining rights, but exempted firefighter, police, and state trooper unions. In Wisconsin in 2010, firefighter and prevention workers were 96.2 percent male and law enforcement workers were 80.2 percent male.¹⁰ Given that women make up most public employees even when these occupations are included, the exemption for these occupations means the great majority of workers affected by a repeal of collective bargaining rights, including teachers, nurses, child care workers, and home health care workers, are women.
- In Michigan, on March 3, 2011, Governor Rick Snyder stripped home-based child care workers of collective bargaining rights. In Michigan, 95.5 percent of all child care workers were women in 2010.¹¹
- In Tennessee, legislation passed in 2011 severely limited teachers' collective bargaining rights. In Tennessee, 79.8 percent of primary, secondary, and special education school teachers were women in 2010.¹²

- 1 NWLC calculations from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Employment Statistics Survey, *available at* <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/querytool.jsp?survey=ce> (last visited June 1, 2012).
- 2 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members – 2011" (Jan. 27, 2012), Table 3: Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by occupation and industry, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t03.htm>. Figures are for workers in the public or private sectors that are represented by a union, including both those who are union members and those who are not but whose jobs are covered by a union contract.
- 3 In this brief, workers are defined as falling into one of three categories: (1) Workers who are members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union; (2) Workers who are not members of unions, but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract; (3) Workers who are neither members of a union nor represented by a union in their job. Unless otherwise noted, NWLC analyzes the difference in earnings between those represented by a union (including union members and workers in jobs covered by unions, regardless of union membership) and those who are not represented by a union.
- 4 NWLC calculations from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members – 2011" (Jan. 27, 2012), Table 2: Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation and selected characteristics, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm>. Data are for workers 16 and older.
- 5 Id.
- 6 Id.
- 7 Center for Economic and Policy Research, "Unions and Upward Mobility for Women Workers" (Dec. 2008), *available at* http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/unions_and_upward_mobility_for_women_workers_2008_12.pdf.
- 8 NWLC calculations from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members – 2011" (Jan. 27, 2012), Table 2: Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by union affiliation and selected characteristics, *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm>. Data are for workers 16 and older.
- 9 NWLC calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2010 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2010, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex, *available at* <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cp-stables/032011/perinc/toc.htm> (last visited Sept. 13, 2011).
- 10 NWLC calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey, Table B24020: Sex by Occupation for Full-Time, Year-Round Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over, *available at* <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t> (last visited June 4, 2012).
- 11 Id.
- 12 Id.