



WORKPLACE JUSTICE

PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS PROMOTE ECONOMIC SECURITY AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Kayla Patrick

Public sector unions are crucial to the economic security and equality of working women, who make up a majority of the union-represented public sector workforce.¹ Women represented by public sector unions enjoy greater economic stability compared to public sector workers not represented by unions, as the result of higher wages and increased participation in employer-based health insurance plans. This means increased economic security for their families. They also experience greater equality in wages and health benefits compared to their male counterparts, especially when contrasted with public sector workers not represented by unions. These advantages accrue to women represented by public sector unions whether they are themselves union members or not.

The ability of public sector unions to promote equality and economic security for women union members and nonmembers alike is presently at stake in *Janus v. AFSCME*, a case that will be heard by the Supreme Court this term. The case seeks to overturn a more than 40-year-old Supreme Court precedent, *Abod v. Detroit Board of Education*, which held that public sector collective bargaining agreements may include “fair share” provisions. Everyone can choose whether or not to join a union at work, but when the majority of people in a workplace vote to form a union, the union is required by law to represent everyone in a workplace, whether that employee is a union member or not. Fair share provisions require employees who are represented by a union, but choose not to become union members, to contribute to the cost of securing the benefits and protections the union provides: collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance processes.

In the absence of such provisions, many individuals would decline to pay union dues while still seeking to take advantage of union services, thus weakening the ability of public sector unions to represent everyone in the workplace. To promote workplace equality and economic security for working women, the health of public sector unions must be protected.

Key Facts:

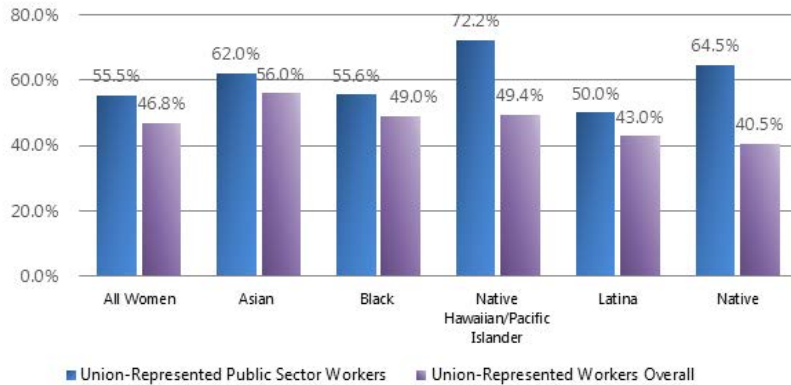
- Women are a majority—55.5 percent—of union-represented public sector workers.
- Women represented by public sector unions are paid 15 percent more than women in the public sector who are not represented by unions.
- Women represented by public sector unions are more likely to have employer-based health insurance coverage than women in the public sector who are not represented by unions (76.8 percent v. 61.2 percent).

PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN, INCLUDING WOMEN OF COLOR.

- Women make up less than half of all workers (48.6 percent)² but more than half of workers in the public sector (53.1 percent), and over half of public sector workers represented by unions (55.5 percent).
- Women of color³ also represent the majority of union-represented public sector workers of color (54.2 percent), though they are less than half of union-represented workers of color in the overall workforce (47.8 percent).
- The figures are even higher for certain groups of women.⁴ For example, Black women are 55.6 percent of union-represented Black public sector workers, compared to 49.0 percent of union-represented Black workers overall.



Representation of Women in Public Sector Unions and Unions Overall by Race/Ethnicity



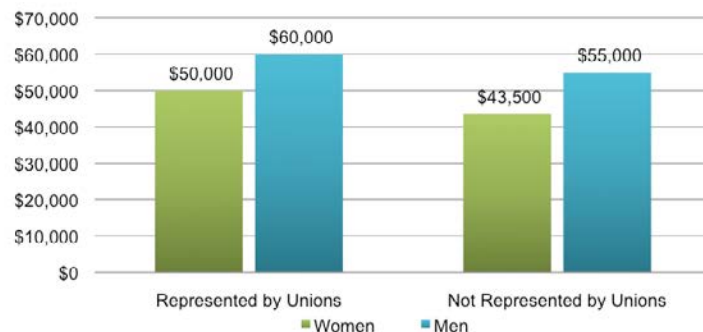
Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. The “represented by unions” category includes women who are members and those who are represented but not members.

Women in public sector unions have more equal pay.

Women in public sector unions have higher wages.

- Women public sector workers who are represented by unions make 15 percent more—\$6,500 more annually—than women public sector workers who are not represented by unions (\$50,000 v. \$43,500).
- Public sector unions also raise men’s wages, but the union advantage is not as large. Men public sector workers who are represented by unions make 9 percent more—\$5,000 more annually—than men public sector workers who are not represented by unions (\$60,000 v. \$55,000).

Median Annual Earnings of Public Sector Workers, by Gender and Union Status



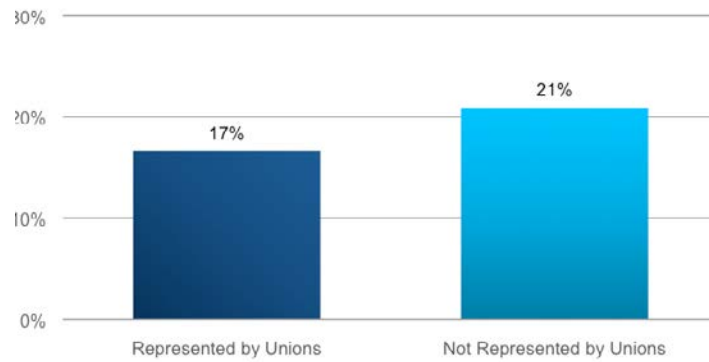
Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. The “represented by unions” category includes individuals who are members and those who are represented but not members. Figures are median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers.

The gender wage gap for union-represented public sector workers is smaller than the gap for non-union-represented workers and for workers overall.

- Women represented by unions who work full time, year round in the public sector typically make 83 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts, leaving a wage gap of 17 percent.
- Non-union-represented women who work full time, year round in the public sector typically make 79 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts, leaving a wage gap of 21 percent.
- Overall women who work full time, year round typically make 80 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts, leaving a wage gap of 20 percent.⁵



The Gender Wage Gap Among Public Sector Workers by Union Status

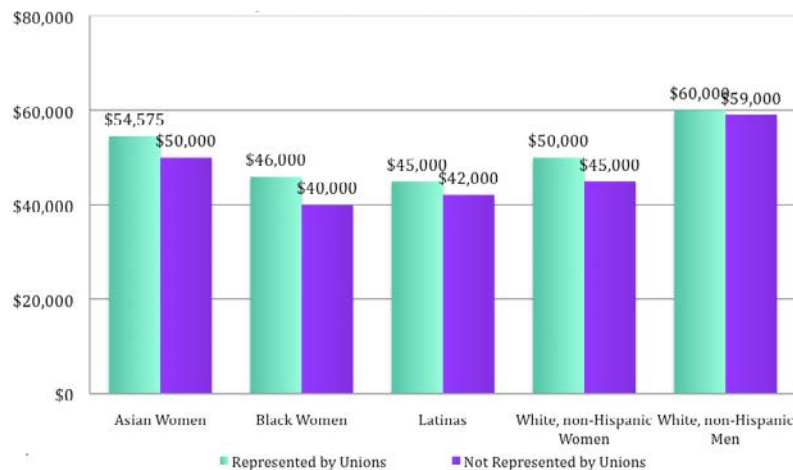


Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. Individuals represented by unions includes both members and those who are covered but not members. Figures are ratio of women's to men's median weekly earnings for full time, year round workers.

Women of color⁶ in public sector unions have more equal pay, although the wage gap between women of color and white, non-Hispanic men persists.

- Among union-represented public sector workers, Black women make 77 percent of what white, non-Hispanic men make. In contrast, among public sector workers not represented by a union, Black women make 68 percent of what white, non-Hispanic men make.
- Among union represented public sector workers, Latinas make 75 percent of what their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts make. Among public sector workers not in a union, Latinas make 71 percent of what their white, non-Hispanic male counterparts make.
- Among public sector workers, Black women see a 15 percent increase in wages and Latinas see a 7 percent increase in wages when they have union representation.
- Overall, Black women who work full time, year round make 63 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. Latinas who work full time, year round make 54 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

Median Annual Earnings of Public Sector Workers by Gender and Union Status



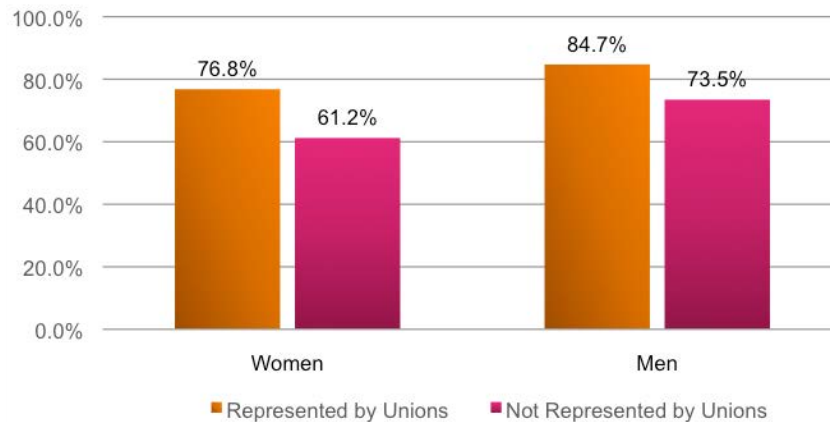
Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. The "represented by unions" category includes individuals who are members and those who are represented but not members. Figures are median annual earnings for full time, year round workers.



Public sector workers represented by unions are more likely to have health insurance than their non-union-represented counterparts—especially women.

- More than three-quarters (76.8 percent) of women public sector workers who are represented by unions are policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan, compared to 61.2 percent of their non-union-represented counterparts, a difference of 15.6 percentage points.
- Men represented by unions also have increased participation in employment-based health insurance, but the difference is not as great—84.7 percent of men public sector workers who are represented by unions are policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan, compared to 73.5 percent of their non-union-represented counterparts, a difference of 11.3 percentage points.
- Men public sector workers are more likely to be policyholders for an employer-based health insurance plan than women public sector workers, but the gap between men and women is smaller among workers represented by unions (7.9 percentage points) than among their non-union-represented counterparts (12.3 percentage points).

Public Sector Workers with Employment-Based Health Insurance, by Gender and Union Status



Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. Includes workers where the individual is a policyholder for employment-based insurance. The “represented by unions” category includes both members and those who are represented but not members.

Women make up the majority of public sector workers in nearly every state.

- Despite making up slightly less than half the overall workforce in every state, women make up the majority of public sector workers in all but 2 states – Hawaii and Maine.
- Women make up the majority of public sector workers represented by a union in 33 states.



State	Women as Percent of Workforce within State	Women as Percent of Public Sector Workforce within State	Women as Percent Represented by Public Sector Unions within State
Alabama	46.5%	55.8%	42.5%
Alaska	46.0%	52.3%	55.8%
Arizona	45.1%	52.5%	-
Arkansas	48.8%	61.9%	-
California	45.7%	60.1%	58.1%
Colorado	46.4%	58.2%	54.7%
Connecticut	48.9%	64.0%	65.7%
Delaware	48.3%	53.7%	50.4%
District of Columbia	52.0%	52.4%	49.6%
Florida	46.7%	54.0%	52.4%
Georgia	48.3%	57.8%	-
Hawaii	47.4%	48.5%	46.4%
Idaho	45.1%	50.6%	46.8%
Illinois	47.5%	59.3%	63.2%
Indiana	46.6%	55.4%	44.9%
Iowa	47.8%	57.6%	53.8%
Kansas	45.7%	58.5%	66.5%
Kentucky	48.0%	64.6%	67.4%
Louisiana	46.2%	53.3%	44.4%
Maine	47.4%	48.1%	51.5%
Maryland	48.3%	51.9%	58.9%
Massachusetts	48.1%	52.0%	48.8%
Michigan	49.6%	59.3%	61.0%
Minnesota	48.3%	65.5%	70.9%
Mississippi	49.4%	63.2%	-
Missouri	46.9%	54.7%	40.8%
Montana	49.4%	53.6%	57.5%
Nebraska	48.3%	60.0%	57.2%
Nevada	45.9%	57.8%	60.1%
New Hampshire	48.3%	57.7%	58.6%
New Jersey	46.4%	61.5%	59.0%
New Mexico	46.4%	51.2%	47.5%
New York	48.9%	52.6%	50.2%
North Carolina	46.9%	50.4%	-
North Dakota	46.9%	58.0%	73.8%
Ohio	48.5%	59.7%	61.6%
Oklahoma	45.5%	52.9%	31.4%
Oregon	47.9%	59.7%	59.7%
Pennsylvania	47.8%	52.7%	51.1%
Rhode Island	48.4%	55.7%	55.3%
South Carolina	46.8%	53.8%	-
South Dakota	45.8%	60.9%	62.3%
Tennessee	49.4%	58.7%	56.5%
Texas	44.5%	61.0%	56.5%
Utah	41.8%	50.8%	52.2%
Vermont	51.1%	60.7%	57.0%
Virginia	48.7%	55.5%	60.2%
Washington	47.3%	51.1%	46.1%
West Virginia	46.9%	56.1%	56.2%
Wisconsin	49.5%	60.6%	55.4%
Wyoming	44.5%	56.1%	-

Source: NWLC calculations based on CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. The “represented by unions” category includes both members and those who are represented but not members. Dashes indicate insufficient sample size.



Methodological Note: Unless otherwise noted, all figures are NWLC analyses of CPS 2013-2017 data using IPUMS-CPS. Union figures are for employed individuals but exclude self-employed workers and children. Wage gap data are median annual earnings for full time, full year workers. Health insurance is limited to people who are policyholders of an employment-based policy. A larger share of workers has access to health insurance than participate.

- 1 The “represented by unions” category includes both members of unions and those who are represented by unions but who are not members.
- 2 Workers do not include those who are self-employed.
- 3 Women of color are all women who are not white, non-Hispanic.
- 4 The “Asian” race category includes those who identified themselves in the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey as Asian. The “Black” race category includes those who identified themselves as Black or African American. The “Native” race category includes those who identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native. The “white, non-Hispanic” race category includes those who identified themselves as white, but not of Hispanic origin. The “Latinx” category includes people of any race who identified themselves to be of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- 5 National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement [hereinafter CPS, 2016 ASEC], Table PINC-05, *available at* <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html>.
- 6 Sample sizes for Native American women and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women too small to report wage gaps.

