

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Woman Behind “Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act” Visits Maine

Ledbetter Joins Maine Advocates To Urge Passage of “Paycheck Fairness Act”

(Augusta) Over 100 legislators and advocates crowded the Senator Inn to hear from Lilly Ledbetter, the plaintiff in the employment discrimination case *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.* and the woman for whom the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act is named. On the eve of Maine’s Equal Pay Day, the Maine Women’s Policy Center and the WAGE Project joined to celebrate the ongoing transformation of the American workplace through Lilly’s historic advocacy and to spotlight opportunities for further action.

Lilly Ledbetter was employed by Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company for 19 years before she discovered that she was being paid far less for the same work as her male peers. She filed a lawsuit against Goodyear, and after a long legal battle, her case was ultimately decided by the U.S. Supreme Court; she lost. The 5-4 ruling effectively allowed employers to discriminate as long as they weren’t caught within the first six months.

Lilly’s advocacy ultimately resulted in passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the first piece of real legislation President Obama signed. The law reversed the U.S. Supreme Court decision by ensuring that victims of pay discrimination have a fair chance to take action in the courts.

Said Ledbetter, “The Supreme Court said I should have complained every single time I got a smaller raise than the men, even if I did not know what the men were getting paid and even if I had no way to prove the decision was discrimination. According to the Supreme Court, if you do not figure things out right away, the company can treat you like a second-class citizen for the rest of your career. That simply does not make sense in the real world. I’m glad to have played a part in getting the law fixed so that it can provide real protections. But, more remains to be done.”

Said Sarah Standiford, Executive Director of the Maine Women’s Policy Center, “A woman in Maine earns just 79 cents, on average, for every dollar that a man does. That’s why we must work with Lilly on the next step—passage of the “Paycheck Fairness Act.” This would strengthen our 45-year old Equal Pay Law, and it would prohibit retaliation against workers who inquire about employers’ wage practices—something Lilly could have used in her case.” She continued, “The need for such a law is more urgent today than ever. Families today are more dependent on a woman’s earnings for economic survival than ever before. In the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression, pay equity is more than a question of fairness. It’s a question of survival.”

Speakers at the event noted that workers—both women and men—need more flexible work schedules, comprehensive child care policies, paid sick days, redesigned family and medical leave, and equal pay in order to succeed in a transformed workplace and a 21st Century economy. Added Standiford, “We need policies that truly value families at work.”

The Maine Women’s Policy Center, founded in 1990, is a private, nonprofit organization whose purpose is to improve the lives of Maine women and girls through public policy and leadership development. www.mainewomenspolicycenter.org

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