



Organization for
Latina
Opportunity and
Reproductive Rights

Written Testimony in Opposition to Allowing the Pay Equity Commission to Sunset

My name is Corrina Rivera-Fowler. I am the Deputy Director of the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR). COLOR was founded to empower young Latinas and their families. We work to provide a voice on reproductive rights, health and justice in Colorado and throughout the country. We endeavor to engage and empower the Latino community to speak out about the policies that impacts our community. We are committed to working to advance polices that allow every Coloradan to not only survive, but to thrive.

We are here to strongly oppose allowing the Pay Equity Commission to sunset. We believe that this commission has played an important role in supporting the financial stability of women and families in Denver and throughout the state of Colorado. We know how important efforts to achieve pay equity are for Latinas and our families. Our work on the ground talking to individual Coloradans has shown us that closing the wage gap is a critical part of ensuring that we all have the ability to parent and raise our families with dignity and in good health.

A fair wage is something everyone in Colorado should be able to depend on.

Colorado recently raised its minimum wage, but we still have a lot of work to do to support working families. We know that hardworking people who are paid minimum wage continued to struggle to provide basic necessities for their households. The simple fact is that no family can survive on \$15,000 per year.

Latino workers would benefit greatly from continued efforts to ensure that each person is receives a living because we are often paid wages well below our white and African-American counterparts. While Latinos comprise 16% of the country's workforce and 14% of the Colorado electorate, we make up nearly one-quarter of the workers who would be positively affected by raising the minimum wage. The Latino community, like all others, wants only to be paid a living wage – to be self-sufficient – to earn enough to provide for our families.

Closing the wage gap would have a particularly dramatic impact on Latino families.

The Pay Equity Commission found that women in Colorado earn 79 cents for every dollar a man earns, but for Latinas, this rate is 52 cents on the dollar, half of what an

average Colorado man earns. This represents the largest wage gap of any other group of working women.

Pay equity is an issue of fairness, but it is also about financial stability for women and families. Latinas are the primary earners – or “breadwinners” – in about half of households. That means that the wage gap falls especially hard on the Latino community. When women make less, their families are impacted.

The loss in income due to the wage gap means less money to support a family – less for housing, food, health care and education. This inequity impacts our communities long-term and keeps our families from attaining their full potential. Less income means that Latinas cannot put aside money for times of crisis or to build up savings for a college education for their children or for their own retirement.

I have been listening to the Colorado Public Radio series this month on childhood poverty. Listening to the stories of the children in our state who live with the stress that poverty causes within their young lives, I can't help but think that we can and we must do better.

This issue isn't going to go away without doing the hard work to create a road map and commitment to follow through.

According to the DORA sunset review of the Pay Equity Commission, their accomplishments have been remarkable. The PEC has accomplished or begun many of the tasks assigned to them – but much work remains unfinished. Since there is really no question that pay inequity based on gender and race do exist – the department supports the continuance of this work.

There are many factors that contribute to the wage gap for women and communities of color. The Pay Equity Commission provides several achievable, non-partisan, credible, measurable recommendations to move us forward. We must support the Commission so they may continue their important work. We also ask that this body considers the creation of a permanent Commission to work with the Department of Labor to ensure implementation and monitor progress.

We are hopeful that the work of the PEC will continue because we know that a fair wages lift us all. A higher wage can improve living conditions for workers and improve future opportunities for their children.

We urge members of this committee and our entire general assembly to support the critical work of the Pay Equity Commission. Our economy is stronger when we are all thriving. Thank you.

Submitted by: Corrine Rivera-Fowler, Deputy Director, Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR), 720-296-8389