



**Testimony of AnnMarie Duchon
Before the Senate Budget Committee
May 13, 2014**

Thank you Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Sessions, and all the Senators here today. My name is AnnMarie Duchon, I'm a member of MomsRising and I am honored to be here today to tell you my story and also give voice to all the women who can't be here today to share their experiences.

My work environment is not the sort of place where you would think we'd have a problem with unfair pay practices. I work at a progressive public university that prides itself on its commitment to diversity. I am the Associate Director of an inventive and forward thinking Disability Services office. I love my job, I am continuously learning and growing, and I get to work collaboratively with colleagues I greatly respect. Every day I oversee programs designed to assist people with disabilities gain full access to the university environment. However, even in an environment like this, wage discrimination based on gender still existed.

I am telling my story not because I hate my job, or because I had any ill-will toward my employer or toward the male colleague who made a higher salary than I did. In fact, I am good friends with him. But this isn't a story about him, it is about me. And it is a story that is all too common for women, and moms in particular, who face gender wage discrimination. It's unfair, it's bad for our economy and, to borrow a phrase, it's time to put an end to these Madmen-era policies.

I began working for the Disability Services office at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 2004. I was hired as a member of a team of Consumer Managers. From the moment I was hired I made less than a male coworker doing the same job. This was the case even though our resumes were nearly identical. We both have Master's Degrees and comparable professional experience. We even graduated from the same University, on the same day.

When I became aware of this wage disparity I asked my employer if I could be paid more. She said no. I was told that because my male coworker had accepted a pay cut to take this job he should be paid more. Here is a fact: I TOO had taken a pay cut to accept this position and my family depends just as much on my wages as my co-worker's depends on his wages. This is the kind of ridiculous stereotyping – the assumption that my male co-worker needed the higher salary and I did not – that is still prevalent in too many workplaces today and used to justify wage discrimination. My raise was denied and I was being paid less because I am a woman.

After 5 years, my male coworker and I were promoted at the same time. Since 2009, we both have held the position of Associate Director. And although I do love my work, it hurt to know

that my efforts were worth less than his. Initially, I was hopeful at the time of the promotion that my employer would finally acknowledge my work and equalize my pay. But instead, I was disappointed to learn that the wage gap increased.

Recently, my husband's teaching job was threatened due to budget cuts. This situation made me think about what those lost wages were costing my family. I added those lost wages up and calculated that my family had lost over \$12,000 in income.

My husband and I are both first generation college graduates with crushing student loan debt. On paper, it looks like we are doing well, but in reality, money is tight. We pay as much on our student loan payments each month as we do for our mortgage. Our daughter Gracie is in full-time daycare because neither of us can afford not to work. \$12,000 in lost wages accounts for a year's worth of childcare, or 10 months worth of mortgage or student loan payments. All expenses we struggle to pay for.

So I tried again. I approached my employer again this time with a visual chart that showed the stark salary difference between my coworker and me. I repeated my case that I should be paid fairly. This time, my employer agreed to raise my salary to equal my male coworker's. Five months later, I received a paycheck that finally reflected equal pay.

Yes, I was eventually able to get paid fairly, but it took more than seven years of difficult conversations and cost me thousands in lost wages. All of this in an environment where I could have open conversations about my salary without fearing repercussions.

I was thrilled last month when President Obama took executive action to ensure that federal contractors are barred from retaliating against employees who discuss their salary information. But we still need Congress to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would allow all workers to talk about their salaries to their coworkers and employers without worrying about being fired.

Millions of women trying to raise families while working minimum wage jobs that haven't seen an increase in years. Congress has the opportunity to right these wrongs. It is time to increase minimum wage, time to do something about the Student Loan crisis and it is long past time to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act.

I hope that by the time my daughter Gracie is able to understand what wage discrimination based on gender is all about, it will have long since been resolved. According to recent research, at the rate we're going, if we don't take action, the wage gap won't close on it's own until my 5 year old is 48 years old, or even much much older.

Instead, I hope that the idea of Mommy being paid less than a man while working at the same job will be a relic concept from ancient times (kind of like life without the internet or smartphones!)

I am honored to be here today and thank you again for the opportunity to testify.