

A proposal to stop the “snowballing” wage inequality that women face

The Bethlehem Gadfly Wage equality March 1, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on wage equality* 

On Tuesday, February 25, Councilman Callahan’s Wage Equality ordinance proposal was considered by the Human Relations committee. Councilman Callahan chairs the committee, whose other members are Councilwomen Negron and Van Wirt. Councilwoman Crampsie Smith was also present.



Find the text of the proposed ordinance here:

Wage Equality Memo (1)

Here Chair Callahan provides the rationale for the proposed ordinance and fills the committee in on an appeals court ruling just this month that cleared the way for a Philadelphia ordinance on which the Bethlehem ordinance is based. Councilman Callahan provides several pertinent quotes surrounding the Philadelphia decision as well as quotes from Women’s groups.

The basic idea is that this ordinance (which is gaining nationwide acceptance) hopes to free women from the spiraling trap of beginning their work careers at a low salary while they progress in their careers.

Attached is a proposed ordinance to establish a new Article of the City's Codified Ordinances. This ordinance is designed to combat widespread gender-based wage inequalities by prohibiting employer inquiries into prospective employee wage histories, as well as employer reliance on such wage histories for determining compensation.

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, women are paid 79 cents for every dollar a man makes, according to a United States Census Bureau 2015 report. Women of color are paid even less. African American women are paid only 68 cents to the dollar paid to a man, Latinas are paid only 56 cents to the dollar paid to men, and Asian women are paid 81 cents to the dollar paid to men. The gender wage gap has narrowed by less than one-half a penny per year in the United States since 1963, when the Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, the first law aimed at prohibiting gender-based pay discrimination.

Since women are paid on average lower wages than men, basing wages upon a worker's wage at a previous job only serves to perpetuate gender wage inequalities and leave families with less money to spend on food, housing, and other essential goods and services. The premise of this ordinance is that salary offers should be based upon the specific job responsibilities of a position, and not based upon an applicant's prior wage history, so as to avoid the perpetuation of gender wage inequalities.

This proposed ordinance generated significant discussion from committee members, which we will pick up in subsequent posts, and the proposal will be considered again in a meeting perhaps six weeks down the road.

But, as usual in Gadville, let's go one slow step at a time and first think about the proposed ordinance itself, its rationale, its worth.

Seem like a good idea?