

Women's Economic Security in Minnesota



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity, safety, and respect

Women's Economic Security Is Good For Minnesota

Protecting and promoting women's economic security and equal access to employment and opportunity in Minnesota is essential to Minnesota's economic health. Minnesota's laws protecting these rights keep talented women in the workforce, help lift up families and children, and benefit Minnesota as a whole by ensuring that everyone—regardless of gender—can afford to live their lives with dignity and respect.

But There Is Much Work To Be Done In Minnesota

However, despite progress in these areas, too many women in Minnesota do not have the same economic security or opportunities as men, including:

- Minnesota women on average make 79 cents for every dollar that men make. The gender wage gap in Minnesota hasn't narrowed over the past five years.
- The wage gap is largest for women of color. Black and Native American women make 61 cents and Latina women make 55 cents for every dollar that white men earn.
- Women make up the majority of workers paid at or below the minimum wage, even when they hold an advanced degree.
- Women are underrepresented in high-paying trade and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs.
- The shortage of affordable childcare and the lack of widespread paid family leave further disadvantages women economically.

Minnesota has a number of legal protections that can help improve gender equity in Minnesota, including the following:

The Equal Pay For Equal Work Law

Minnesota's Equal Pay Law prohibits employers from paying women employees at a rate less than what male employees receive for equal work or for jobs which require equal skill, effort, responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions. Paying a female employee less than a male counterpart is **wage theft**.

The Minnesota Department of Human Rights has authority to audit and certify that state contractors with more than 40 employees satisfy Minnesota's Equal Pay Law.

Employees whose Equal Pay rights are violated are entitled to one year of back wages at the higher rate of pay as well as up to an equal amount in punitive damages.

Pregnancy Accommodations

At an employee's request, an employer must provide reasonable accommodations to an employee for health conditions related to **pregnancy or childbirth**. Some accommodation requests should be made with the advice of a doctor or certified doula. Other requests, such as more frequent restroom, food, and water breaks; seating; and limiting lifting to 20 pounds do not require the advice of a doctor or doula.

Parenting Leave

Employers must allow employees who are **new parents of biological or adoptive children** up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. The leave begins at the time requested by the employee, within 12 months of birth or adoption or when the child leaves the hospital after birth.

Nursing Mothers

Employers must provide nursing mother employees with reasonable unpaid break time to express breast milk. Employers must make reasonable efforts to provide a room *other than a bathroom or toilet stall* for a nursing mother employee to express breast milk that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public. That room should include access to an electrical outlet where possible.

Protecting Your Rights

For all of the protections discussed above, employees may file a lawsuit on their own behalf. The Minnesota Attorney General may also enforce these laws pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 181.1721. The Minnesota Attorney General's Office may be reached at:

Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

445 Minnesota Street, Suite 1400, St. Paul, MN 55101

(651) 296-3353 (Twin Cities Calling Area)

(800) 657-3787 (Outside the Twin Cities)

(800) 627-3529 (Minnesota Relay)

www.ag.state.mn.us

Email: Attorney.General@ag.state.mn.us

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry also shares some enforcement authority in the area of gender equity and may be contacted at:

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

443 Lafayette Road North

St. Paul, MN 55155

(651) 284-5070 or (800) 342-5354

www.dli.mn.gov

Email: dli.laborstandards@state.mn.us

The Women's Economic Security Act also expanded antidiscrimination protections for workers and now includes protections for familial status—i.e. having minor children at home. Workers who believe they are experiencing gender, family, or pregnancy discrimination at work or in business may also wish to contact the Minnesota Department of Human Rights at:

Minnesota Department of Human Rights

540 Fairview Avenue North, Suite 201

St. Paul, MN 55104

(651) 539-1100 or (800) 657-3704

www.mn.gov/mdhr/

Email: Info.MDHR@state.mn.us

The Women's Economic Security Act also included unemployment protections for workers who are forced to leave employment because of issues related to loss of childcare, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues. Workers experiencing these issues may contact the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development at:

Minnesota Department of

Employment and Economic Development

1st National Bank Building

332 Minnesota Street, Suite E200

St. Paul, MN 55101

(651) 259-7114 or (800) 657-3858

www.mn.gov/deed/

Email: DEED.CustomerService@state.mn.us