

Open letter to the Prime Minister the Hon Julia Gillard MP

The following organisations, with a long and strong commitment to equality for women, wish to express concern at the apparent contradictions in the Australian Government's position on closing the gender pay gap in Australia.

We welcome the Government's clear commitment to the principles of equal pay for women, in both its 2010 federal election commitments and its November 2010 submission to Fair Work Australia. However, we consider this policy stand is weakened by other parts of the Government's submission to Fair Work Australia, which suggest that implementation of equal pay should be delayed for budgetary reasons.

As the Government recognised when signing a *Heads of Agreement*, the Australian Services Union (ASU) Equal Pay for community sector workers test case with Fair Work Australia presents a real chance to address pay inequities for women. The Community Sector has a workforce of over 200,000 workers – 85% are women. For too long community sector work been seen as 'women's work'; the skills required have been undervalued, and the work has been underpaid.

While recognising that paid parental leave and other initiatives are important for women's ongoing participation in the paid workforce, Australia's growing gender pay gap remains an unaddressed finance injustice for women in Australia. For working women caring for children, earned wages need to go further to cover costs of childcare and out of school hours care. We need to do better to remove barriers to women's workforce participation. And we need to do better to fairly remunerate workers in low paid, traditionally feminised workforces. This will bring together long term, positive social and economic effects for women workers and their families, communities, industries and Australia as a whole.

Fair Work Australia should be encouraged to make a decision on the ASU Equal Pay test case on fairness in industrial issues, and consideration of the current pay inequities that affect the majority women workforce in the community sector. We ask the Federal Government to supplement its submission with a clarification that questions of pay equity are separate from how equal pay will be paid for. We recognise the need for fiscal responsibility and we therefore ask that question of budget priorities be reviewed separately to ensure that the community sector is appropriately funded and community sector workers are paid fairly.

Only then will we see real action to close the gender pay gap.

This statement is supported by the following organisations

Equality Rights Alliance

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