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COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

February 17, 2026

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

RE: Women and Work Study in Erie County

Dear Honorable Members:

The Erie County Commission on the Status of Women is requesting authorization to enter into a consulting agreement with the Cornell University to provide research and data analysis on the persistent gender-based wage gap and its impact on Women of Color and Black women working women in Erie County, New York. This information will be maintained by the Commission on the Status of Women under the Department of Public Advocacy.

Should your Honorable Body require further information, I encourage you to contact Commissioner Karen King, PhD at the Department of Public Advocacy. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Mark C. Poloncarz, Esq.
Erie County Executive

MCP/mc
Enclosure

cc: Karen L. King, PhD, Commissioner of Public Advocacy and Executive Director of the Commission on the Status of Women

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Members of the Erie County Legislature
From: Erie County Commission on the Status of Women
Re: Women and Work Study in Erie County
Date: February 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The Erie County Commission on the Status of Women (ECCSW) seeks legislative approval to enter into a consulting agreement with Cornell University to preform follow up data gathering research and analysis on workplace discrimination, persistent pay disparities in wages and the increased growth of unemployment for Women of Color and Black women in Erie County, New York. This information will be maintained by the Commission on the Status of Women under the Department of Public Advocacy.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

None. Commission on the Status of Women has the funding available in its budget to enter this contract.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

In 2025 Cornell University produced a report for the ECCSW seeking to determine the extent of the gender wage gap in order to make recommendations on how such wage inequities can be addressed and eradicated. The report findings revealed persistent disparities in wages, career advancement, and political representation. Additionally, the findings revealed that Women of Color and Black women were experiencing discrimination in the workplace: mostly from mid-level managers. These finding combined with the high rate of unemployment Black woman and Women of Color experienced nationally in 2025, and the systematic dismantling of employee development programs, including employee resource groups and formal and informal sponsorship and mentorship programs in the workplace prompted the ECCSW to gain more of an understanding of how these conditions are impacting the economic health of women and the larger Erie County community, requiring a larger sample size comprised of Black women and Women of Color.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 19th publication reported in September 2025 that for the second year in a row, the gender pay gap has widened, a first since the government began tracking data on income around the 1960s. The gender pay gap had been steadily closing until 2023, when the disparity widened between men and women's wages. In 2024, women working full time were paid 81 cents for every dollar that men made, down from 83 cents the previous year. In 2022, they made 84 cents for every dollar made by a man.

According to Katherine Gallagher Robbins, a senior fellow at the National Partnership for Women & Families, the widening gap is likely due to men's earnings rising at a far faster rate than women's over the past several years.

The report was released as part of the annual poverty, income and health insurance data from the U.S. Census Bureau, which reveals that Black women continue to bear the brunt of pay disparity. Black women made 63 cents to every dollar paid to White men in 2024. Those numbers come even as the national poverty rate dipped 0.4 percentage points to 10.6 percent, according to the report.

In a January 2026 press release from the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) in its analysis of monthly data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) jobs report, found that 81,000 people aged 20 and over left the labor force in December 2025 meaning they are now neither working nor looking for work. In addition, the unemployment rate for Black women continues to climb: their unemployment rate increased from 7.1% in November to 7.3% in December 2025. The unemployment rate for Latinas aged 20 and over also increased slightly from 4.4% in November to 4.5% in December.

In a fact sheet published by the National Partnership for Women and Families in October 2025, on the impact of the persistent wage gap on Women of Color and Black women stated that Women of Color in the United States experience the nation's persistent and pervasive gender wage gap most severely. The gaps represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how our country systematically devalues women of color and their labor. The cents-on-the-dollar difference between what men and women are typically paid adds up, resulting in lost wages that mean women have less money to support themselves and their families particularly in the face of rapid inflation.

Black women are typically paid just 63 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. The median annual pay for a Black woman in the United States is \$41,990, while the median annual pay for a white, non-Hispanic man is \$66,850— a difference of \$24,860 per year. If the annual wage gap were eliminated, a typical Black woman working in the United States would have enough money to pay for approximately: almost 30 months of food; almost 23 more months of childcare; end their entire student loan debt in 19 months; twelve more months of mortgage and utilities payments and almost 14 additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

The Commission on the Status of Women will not be able to create report.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

The Commission on the Status of Women will enter into a contract with Cornell University to provide consulting services that will include providing research data and analysis of Women of Color and Black women wage earners in Erie County, and of unemployment data for Women of Color and Black women resulting in a report that will provide an analysis of these conditions and the economic impact these conditions are having on women and the larger Erie County community, and recommendations on how to remedy these conditions.

A RESOLUTION SUBMITTED BY:
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

RE: Women and Work Study in Erie County (Part 2)

WHEREAS, the Commission on the Status of Women (“CSW”) wishes to enter into a contract with the Cornell University to obtain current research and data analysis of employment earning statistics of women in Erie County; and

WHEREAS, this Honorable Body established the CSW in order to provide relevant data and reports that include current information on the economic status of working women in Erie County and make recommendations to ensure fair and equitable treatment of women in Erie County including promoting gender equitable wages; and

WHEREAS, the persistent gender wage gap impacts half the wage-earning population in Erie County and their ability to earn sustainable and thriving wages, provide economic security for themselves and their families and build financial security that will provide support in their post wage earning years; and

WHEREAS, it is in Erie County’s interest to learn more about the root causes of the persistent gender-based wage gap and what necessary steps must be taken to address and eliminate discriminatory gender-based wage disparities; and

WHEREAS, the results of such a study are necessary for CSW to implement several goals and strategies to assist in the elimination of gender-based wage disparities; and

WHEREAS, this will be done in coordination with the Department of Public Advocacy.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Erie County Legislature hereby authorizes the County Executive or Deputy County Executive to enter into a contract with Cornell University in an amount not to exceed \$5,000; and be it further,

RESOLVED, that authorization is hereby given for the Division of Budget and Management to make any technical adjustments necessary to effectuate this resolution; and be it further,

RESOLVED, that certified copies of this resolution be forwarded to the County Executive’s Office, Division of Budget and Management, Department of Law and Department of Public Advocacy.