



**Presented by Barbara Price, AAUW Pennsylvania Public Policy Chair at July 27, 2019 Summer Retreat**

### **A Tale of Two Women**

Women are affected at different stages of their lives by economic barriers. This is the Tale of Two Women and the complex issues that can arise in women's lives.

Two young women graduate from high school. One goes to work at a min. wage job in Pennsylvania of \$7.25 per hour, which means she continues to live at home with her parents since she would need to make a living wage of \$11.45 an hour to afford a place of her own in Pennsylvania.

The other young woman goes off to college and takes on student loans to pay for it. When she graduates, all things being equal to her male counterparts, she graduates to a pay gap of 7%. This of course means it will take her 2 yrs. longer to pay off her student debt than men with student loans. This is especially a problem in PA since we have the highest student debt in the country. \$36,193 on average.

Now both young women continue to work and eventually find love and marry. Two incomes help both with their standard of living. However, starting a family complicates things. Our min wage worker's employer does not offer paid leave, so when she has her baby and takes time off, she is losing money. As a result, she may even return to work in a shorter amount of time than she would like.

Our other mother's employer offers paid maternity leave of 12 weeks which gives her more time to recover and be with her baby. Of course, both women are then confronted with finding affordable, quality child care. For our low-income mother who has a work schedule that changes every couple of weeks, this can mean trying to cobble together a system of help from family and friends, knowing that anytime plans fall through, she will again lose wages.

As time moves on, and their families grow, both women will have to balance the cost of child care against their income to see if it is worth it. This may mean leaving the work force until the children reach school age, again resulting in a loss of wages.

Reaching mid-life, the economic impact continues. Both women may be unaware that they do not make as much as their male counterparts because their employers do not allow them to discuss their wages with other employees. If they change jobs a new employer may ask for salary history, perpetuating the wage gap.

Hopefully neither of them will encounter any long-term illness or the need to care for an elderly parent, a partner, or child who is ill. While they can take unpaid family leave, it again means losing

wages. If the caregiving need arises at a time when they have changed jobs, they may not even qualify for unpaid leave meaning their jobs are not guaranteed.

Hopefully neither of them will face other problems such as domestic violence or divorce. This can often mean changing jobs with employers again asking salary history to decide on salary and perpetuating the wage gap.

Finally, the kids are grown, and it is time to retire. Our low-income worker has only Social Security for support while our other worker has a pension. Unfortunately, both pension and social security are based on income throughout the working years. Both women will retire with less money than they could have had if they had been paid equally.