



# Advocacy Update

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## Equal Pay Day Anniversary

Last week marked fifty years since President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law, yet women still continue to earn 77 cents, on average, for every dollar earned by men. The [Paycheck Fairness Act \(S. 84/H.R. 377\)](#) would address this inequity by closing loopholes in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and barring retaliation against workers who disclose their wages. This bill would strengthen President Kennedy's Equal Pay Act to ensure it provides effective protection against gender-based pay discrimination, allowing women to receive the same remedies in court for pay discrimination as those subjected to discrimination based on race or national origin.

WRJ has been [advocating for equal pay for equal work](#) for the last fifty years, and will continue to be involved in this issue moving forward. You, too, can become involved in many different ways. Women in the U.S. can call or [send an email](#) to their Member of Congress asking them to vote for the Paycheck Fairness Act. You can also raise awareness about this issue by sharing [fact sheets](#) and raising awareness about the pay gap within your community. Finally, women can take matters into their own hands and learn how to negotiate fair salaries, and start to close the wage gap one woman, one paycheck, at a time. AAUW, for example, [hosts workshops](#) to teach negotiating skills to college graduations. Consider hosting a sisterhood event where you talk about the difficulties in such conversations, and help younger women learn tips for having these important discussions with their supervisors and employers.

## Supreme Court Gene Patenting Decision

A few months ago, [we told you](#) about the Supreme Court case *Association for Molecular Pathology v. Myriad Genetics*. The case concerns Myriad Genetics, a company that, over the last several years, has developed breakthrough and potentially life-saving technology regarding cancer research. In particular, it discovered that there are certain genes known as "BRCA1" and "BRCA2" that, when isolated, can be used as predictors of breast cancer. Having invested large amounts of time and money in this research, Myriad wanted to now patent their "invention" in order to receive the monetary benefits from any clinical test that could result from the scientific advancement.

In a notably unanimous ruling, however, the Court sided with the opposing side represented by the ACLU, which argued that things occurring in nature, such as genes, cannot be patented, and worried about the precedent the Court could set by allowing a private company to stake a claim on a part of the human body. The ACLU also argued that, without the patent, other researchers can utilize the knowledge gleaned by Myriad to competitively drive further breakthroughs – and that a Myriad monopoly on this information could prevent others from doing future, potentially life-saving research in an effort to protect their own profits.

It is still too early to tell what exactly all of the effects of this ruling will be. Some predict that by prohibiting a monopoly over the gene research, the life-saving technology to detect breast cancer (that [Angelina Jolie](#) famously used recently) will now become cheaper and more readily available to all women. WRJ will continue to monitor these and similar issues that are so important to women in our communities.

## Israeli Rabbinical Judge Selection Committee

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)

According to [a recent JTA article](#), under a new Israeli law, the committee that appoints religious judges in Israel will now include women! The law states that four spots on the Selection Committee for Rabbinical Judges will be reserved for women. According to the rule, these judges will come from a combination of the government, the Knesset and the Israeli Bar Association, and one will be appointed by the justice minister and will be an expert on religious law. This will be a change from the current status quo in which no women are on the committee.

This is simply the most recent in a series of exciting steps for religious pluralism and women's equality in Israel. Earlier this month, Religious Services Minister Naftali Bennett announced that non-Orthodox community rabbis would receive salaries from the state. Communities will also now be given the power to choose who they want to serve them. Finally, we have seen recent movement regarding equality at the Kotel - a [key social justice issue of concern to WRJ](#) and our affiliates around the world.