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Stronger enforcement of gender equality at work will create more opportunities for women: unions

New requirements for employers to report on the complete remuneration packages of male and female employees represent a practical breakthrough on the path to equal opportunity for women in the workplace, say unions.

Employers have failed to genuinely deliver on equality in workplaces, and the new reforms will force employers to do more than pay lip service to equal opportunity.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said the gender pay gap of almost 18% remained far too wide, and women still faced barriers to full participation in the workforce.

The reforms are contained in the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill, which was introduced into Parliament today.

“These reforms, which will enforce minimum standards and performance benchmarks for gender equality in the workplace, will make it harder for employers to hide from their responsibilities,” Ms Kearney said.

“Employers have had three decades to get their act together but have failed to do it and these reforms will pull them into line. With a gender pay gap of 17.6%, the evidence speaks for itself and it is time for action, so we congratulate the Labor Government for its determination to address the issue.

“These reforms following the recent pay equity win for social and community sector workers are further evidence that the Gillard Government has a genuine commitment to gender equality and workforce participation for women.

“There is no reason for women to be paid less than men for doing the same or equal work, there is no reason to shut them out of opportunities for promotion and there is no justification for continued discrimination, yet it goes on each day in workplaces around Australia.”

Ms Kearney said employers would have to report on pay data but the new Act included simplified and streamlined reporting requirements, removing any excuse from bosses that compliance was too difficult.

“For the first time, there will be real transparency in Australian workplaces and we will finally be able to expose bad behaviour for what it is,” Ms Kearney said. “On the flipside, those employers who do the right thing and provide equal opportunity will also be noticed.

“It is well recognised that women have as much to offer in senior roles as men, but it is also well known that employers continue to leave in place barriers to women’s advancement simply because they don’t have to change.

“Well time is up and they will now have to join the modern era and give hard-working and talented women the opportunity and recognition they deserve.”

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