AN ACT Relating to enacting the equal pay opportunity act by amending and enhancing enforcement of the equal pay act and protecting worker communications about wages and employment opportunities; amending RCW 49.12.175; recodifying RCW 49.12.175; and adding a new chapter to Title 49 RCW.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. INTENT. The legislature finds that despite existing equal pay laws, there continues to be an unfair gap and inequality in wages among workers in Washington, especially women. Women working full-time in Washington earn eighty cents for every dollar earned by a man working the same job. The gap in earnings is even more disparate for women of color.

According to census bureau data, forty percent of households in the United States rely on a woman as the leading or sole breadwinner. In addition, women hold a significant percentage of minimum wage jobs. Income disparities limit the ability of women to provide for their families, leading to higher rates of poverty among women and children.

The legislature finds that in order to establish equality among workers, men and women in the same job must be compensated as equals. The legislature finds that gaps in employee wages is a form of gender discrimination.
discrimination. Policies that encourage retaliation or discipline towards workers who discuss or inquire about compensation prevents workers from moving forward.

The legislature intends to update the existing Washington state equal pay act, not modified since 1943, to address income disparities, employer discrimination, and retaliation practices, and to reflect the equal status of all workers in Washington state.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. DEFINITIONS. The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Compensation" means discretionary and nondiscretionary wages and benefits provided by an employer to an employee as a result of the employment relationship.

(2) "Department," "director," "employee," and "employer" have the same meaning as defined in RCW 49.12.005.

Sec. 3. RCW 49.12.175 and 1943 c 254 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

EQUAL PAY OPPORTUNITY. (1) Any employer in this state Росси, employing both males and females, who shall discriminate in any way in the payment of wages as between sexes or who shall pay any female a less wage, be it time or piece work, or salary, than is being paid to males) who discriminates in providing compensation based on gender between similarly employed(, or in any employment formerly performed by males, shall be)) individuals is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(2)(a) If any (female) employee (shall) receives less compensation because of being discriminated against on account of (her sex, and) gender in violation of this section, (she shall be) or if any employee receives less favorable employment opportunities because of being discriminated against on account of gender, that employee is entitled to recover in a civil action the full amount of compensation that (she) the employee would have received had (she) the employee not been discriminated against. An employee is entitled to recover any actual damages; statutory damages of twice the actual damages or five thousand dollars, whichever is greater; interest of one percent per month on all compensation owed; and costs and reasonable attorneys' fees. In addition, the court may order injunctive relief. In such action, however, the employer shall
be credited with any compensation which has been paid to ((her)) the employee upon account.

(b) A differential in ((wages between employees)) compensation or employment opportunities based in good faith on a bona fide job-related factor or factors ((other than sex shall)), including education, training, or experience, that is not based on gender, unless the differential is otherwise permitted by law, does not constitute discrimination within the meaning of ((RCW 49.12.010 through 49.12.180)) this section.

(3) For purposes of this section, "less favorable employment opportunities" means assigning or directing the employee into a less favorable career track or position based on gender. Factors to be considered include, but are not limited to, failing to use reasonable means to provide the employee information about advancement in their career tracks or positions, including but not limited to posting information on internal and external web sites, in employee common areas, or at the employer's human resource office.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 4. WORKPLACE PRACTICES. (1) An employer may not:

(a) Require nondisclosure by an employee of his or her wages as a condition of employment; or

(b) Require an employee to sign a waiver or other document that prevents the employee from disclosing the amount of the employee's wages.

(2) An employer may not discharge or in any other manner retaliate against an employee for:

(a) Inquiring about, disclosing, comparing, or otherwise discussing the employee's wages or the wages of any other employee;

(b) Asking the employer to provide a reason for the employee's wages or reasons for a lack of employment advancement available to the employee; or

(c) Aiding or encouraging an employee to exercise their rights under this section.

(3) An employer may prohibit a human resources manager from disclosing the wages of other employees unless the disclosure is otherwise required by law.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. NO RETALIATION. An employer may not discharge or otherwise discriminate against an employee because the
employee has filed any complaint, or instituted or caused to be
instituted any proceeding under this chapter, or testified or is
about to testify in any such proceeding, or because of the exercise
by such employee on behalf of himself or herself or others of any
right afforded by this chapter.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 6. CAUSE OF ACTION. An employee may bring a
civil action against an employer for violation of section 4 or 5 of
this act for actual damages; statutory damages of twice the actual
damages or five thousand dollars, whichever is greater; interest of
one percent per month on all compensation owed, and costs and
reasonable attorneys' fees. The court may also order reinstatement
and injunctive relief.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 7. NOTICE. The department may include notice
of the provisions of this chapter in the next reprinting of
employment posters.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 8. RULE MAKING. The department may adopt
rules to implement sections 1 through 5 of this act.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 9. SHORT TITLE. This chapter shall be known
and cited as the "equal pay opportunity act."

NEW SECTION. Sec. 10. CODIFICATION. (1) Sections 1, 2, and 4
through 9 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 49 RCW.
(2) RCW 49.12.175 is recodified as a section in chapter 49.---
RCW (the new chapter created in this section).

--- END ---