

Minnesota Expected to Pass Work Equity Bill Benefiting Women

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The Minnesota Legislature has approved a major piece of legislation aimed at improving working conditions for women that will have a significant impact on **Minnesota businesses**. The [Women's Economic Security Act \(the "Act"\)](#), a combination of at least nine different bills, is intended to reduce the gender pay gap and to provide greater workplace protections for pregnant women and nursing mothers, among other things. The Act cleared both the Minnesota House and Senate, and Governor Mark Dayton is expected to sign it into law soon.

Some of the major anticipated changes include the following:

1. **Add a protected class under the Minnesota Human Rights Act:** The Act expands the list of protected classes under the Minnesota Human Rights Act to include "familial status."
2. **Pregnancy and parenting leave will be expanded to 12 weeks:** The Act doubles allowable unpaid leave under the Minnesota Parental Leave Act from 6 weeks to 12 weeks and allows employees to use leave for pregnancy-related needs.
3. **Additional protections for pregnant and nursing women:** The Act allows employees to bring a civil action to enforce their right to express breast milk during unpaid break times. In addition, employers with at least 22 employees are required to provide reasonable minor accommodations (e.g., water, food, and a stool) or a reasonable, temporary position transfer for pregnant workers.
4. **Certification for state contracts:** The Act requires businesses with more than 50 employees seeking state contracts worth more than \$500,000 to certify their compliance with existing equal pay laws.
5. **Wage disclosure protection:** The Act creates new Minnesota Statutes Section 181.172 to prohibit an employer from requiring non-disclosure by an employee of his or her wages as a condition of employment or to take any adverse employment action against an employee for disclosing or discussing the employee's own wages or another employee's wages, which have been disclosed voluntarily.

6. ***Protections imposed for victims of stalking and sexual assault:*** The Act expands unemployment insurance eligibility currently available to victims of domestic violence to include victims of stalking and sexual assault.

7. ***Expanded allowances for sick leave:*** The Act likely will expand allowances for employees to use existing earned sick leave under certain circumstances related to sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. It also allows grandparents to use existing earned sick leave to care for an ill or injured grandchild.

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