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Teresa Bill, right, spoke yesterday as part of "Equal Pay Day" events in the state and around the nation. A measure moving through the state Legislature aims to reaffirm provisions of the 1963 federal Equal Pay Act.

## Women's groups target pay disparity

By B.J. Reyes  
 Associated Press

Employers would be required to pay men and women equal pay for equal work under a bill working through the Legislature that aims to strengthen provisions of the 1963 federal Equal Pay Act in Hawaii's

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state law.

The bill also would create a four-year task force to study pay disparity and make recommendations to correct any gender-based inequities.

"It makes a very strong statement that we in Hawaii want to do something about equal pay," Rep. Cindy Evans, who introduced the bill, said yesterday.

Lawmakers and women's organizations brought attention to the bill as part of "Equal Pay Day" events in Hawaii and across the country.

Advocates say Equal Pay Day marks the point in the current year at which the average woman's salary for all of last year and this year so far equals what the average man made in 2003 alone.

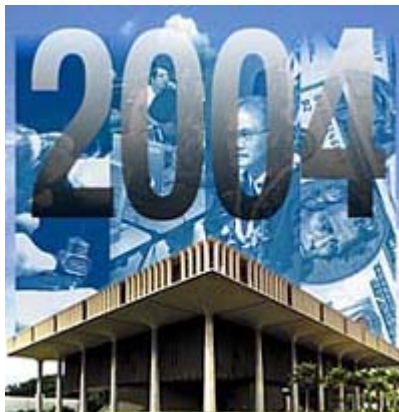
Officials say Hawaii's working women on average earn about 84 cents for every dollar earned by men. Nationwide, the average is about 77 cents to the dollar.

The federal Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from paying men more than women for the same or similar work, except when the wage difference is based on seniority, merit or factors other than gender.

Evans, (D, Makalawena-Waimea), said the proposed Hawaii legislation would create a separate section of state law to reinforce the federal act.

The legislation is important, she added, to reaffirm the state's commitment to equal pay and to raise awareness of the issue among younger generations.

"In 1963 they made strong statement," Evans said. "Well, you know what, that was 40 years ago. I think we need to make that strong statement again."



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The House and Senate each approved a version of the equal pay bill. A hearing to work out differences in each side's bill has not been scheduled. Evans said she would lobby leadership to advance the measure and prevent it from dying in committee before the session ends May 6.

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