



## DecaturDaily.com: Alabama's Equal Pay Law Goes Into Effect Today

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09.05.2019

Alabama today becomes the 49th state with its own pay equity law, though the legislation's sponsor doubts state courts will be inundated with lawsuits and Decatur-area employers say they're already careful not to discriminate.

"I don't think it will open up the floodgates," said Rep. Adline Clarke, D-Mobile, who sponsored the legislation. "I have to believe in my heart of hearts that most companies do the right thing, that they do provide equal pay for equal work.

"I do believe most companies are in compliance, but I do hear from people occasionally that they are not receiving equal pay for equal work."

Though there are federal laws prohibiting discrimination in employees' compensation, "this state law gives them an opportunity to seek a resolution to a pay discrimination case in state court," Clarke said.

Alabama lawmakers in May approved legislation prohibiting employers, including public entities, from paying workers less than employees of another race or sex for the same work at the same establishment. The exceptions for a different payment: a seniority system, a merit system or a system that measures earnings by quantity or quality of production.

The bill was signed into law by Gov. Kay Ivey.

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A partner in the law firm Burr & Forman said she believes there will be an increase in lawsuits, at least initially.

"I do think employers should expect an uptick (in litigation) just because the issue has been in the news," said Amy Jordan Wilkes, a Birmingham attorney whose focus is employment law.

"It's on the forefront, and employees are going to be looking at their paychecks more closely. I definitely expect to see some lawsuits filed."

Wilkes said it's a good idea for employers not only to look at their pay practices — how they're awarding promotions and raises — but also to review their hiring practices.

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