



Program on Gender, Work & Family

*"Reshaping the workplace
around the values people hold
in family life."*

SENIORS WILL BENEFIT FROM PART-TIME PARITY

Seniors are a growing constituency in America and in the workforce. By 2030, the number of Americans over 65 will be 70 million – double today's 35 million. In the next ten years, the number of labor force participants over age 55 will increase by 46 percent. And the majority of seniors who work do so part-time: after age 65 the number of part-time workers skyrockets to nearly half of employed men and 60 percent of employed women.

Health concerns make part-time work an important option for seniors. Older workers are more likely to have health problems that limit their ability to work full-time. Many of these individuals, however, may be able to continue working in part-time positions or in positions with flexible schedules.

Unfair treatment of part-time workers unfairly penalizes seniors. Part-time workers not only tend to earn lower wages than full-time workers, but are also deprived of important benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and unemployment insurance. For seniors, these hidden penalties are particularly costly, forcing some to stay in full-time positions in order to maintain insurance and pension benefits while ironically risking their health and safety in the process.

Parity for part-time workers would offer important benefits to seniors. Part-time parity would guarantee that someone who works 75 percent of a full schedule would earn 75 percent of the pay provided to a full-time worker, as well as pro-rated benefits. Not only do the earnings associated with work keep seniors economically secure, but the benefits such as maintaining health insurance and a pension provide security for seniors as they head towards retirement.

Part-time parity also is beneficial for family members who provide elder care. Nearly one in four households provides care for ^{elderly} relatives, and in the next twenty years, nearly 40 percent of the workforce will be caring for the elderly. Many of these caregivers must work part-time in order to balance work with caregiving responsibilities. Part-time parity would eliminate the hidden penalties faced by those who need to provide care to older family members.

THE PROGRAM ON GENDER, WORK & FAMILY is a research and advocacy organization, based at American University, Washington College of Law, that seeks to restructure the workplace around the values held in family life. Please visit our website at <http://www.wcl.american.edu/gender/workfamily> for more information about the program.

¹ National Partnership for Women and Families, "Family Leave Benefits: Essential to Seniors Receiving the Care They Need," (2002), <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/Content.cfm?L1=202&TypeID=1&NewsItemID=361>.

² Sarah E. Rix, "Update on the Older Worker: 2001" (AARP Public Policy Institute, April 2002).

³ American Association of Retired Persons, "Beyond 50: Report to the Nation on Economic Security" (May 2001) <http://www.aarp.org/beyond50/2001home.html>.

⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office Report, "Older Workers: Demographic Trends Pose Challenges for Employers and Workers" (November 2001).

⁵ Supra. n. 1.

