Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)
House Committee on Education and Labor
Rebuild America's Schools Act & Paycheck Fairness Act
Full Committee Markup
Tuesday, February 26, 2019 | 10:15am

Today, the Committee is considering two legislative proposals: H.R. 865, the *Rebuild America's Schools Act*, and H.R. 7, the *Paycheck Fairness Act.* Both of these proposals reflect our commitment to ensuring all Americans have access to a quality education, financial security, and the opportunity to reach full potential.

The first bill before us today is a critical step toward re-investing in America's public schools. For far too long, students, parents, and teachers have felt the consequences of our chronic failure to prioritize funding for public education. The *Rebuild America's Schools Act* would provide targeted support to improve unsafe and under-resourced schools across the country.

Despite the evidence linking well-resourced facilities and healthy buildings to better academic and life outcomes, the federal government dedicates no money to public school infrastructure improvements.

The lack of federal support has exacerbated the issues caused by the underfunding of public education funding at the state level.

Today, despite the growing list of school building failures that have endangered students and educators, twelve states contribute no money to public school facilities, and an additional 13 states cover between one and nine percent of school facility costs.

The combination of chronic federal and state underfunding has left many public schools, particularly in low-income school districts, at a literal breaking point. Research shows that:
- Public K-12 school facilities are, on average, underfunded by $46 billion every year, and that
- Repairing all public schools into good condition would cost about $197 billion.

Congress's repeated failure to address this issue is all the more frustrating because, at a time of extreme polarization, support for public education is a rare bridge across the political and cultural divide.

During the 2018 midterm elections, the overwhelming majority of voters, both Democrats and Republicans, were found to support increased K-12 funding as an 'extremely important priority' for the 116th Congress.

The *Rebuild America's Schools Act* would answer that call and invest $100 billion to improve the physical and digital infrastructure at high-poverty schools.

In doing so, the bill would also create roughly 1.9 million good-paying jobs. In fact, the *Rebuild America's Schools Act* would create more jobs than the recent Republican $1.5 trillion tax bill, at just 5 percent of the cost. This legislation is good for students, good for educators, good for our communities, and good for the economy.

I encourage all Members of the committee to support it.

The second bill under consideration will be the *Paycheck Fairness Act*, which also provides a significant boost to our economy.

The *Equal Pay Act* and *Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* have been the law for over 50 years, but loopholes and insufficient enforcement have prevented equal pay for equal work from becoming a reality.

Today, women earn, on average, 80 cents on the dollar compared to white men in similar jobs. The wage gap is even worse for women of color, particularly black women, and persists in nearly every line of work, regardless of education, experience, occupation, industry, or job title.

This inequity has severe consequences for the lives of working women. Drawn out over a lifetime, a woman could lose anywhere from $400,000 to as much as $2 million dollars in reduced pay.

The gender wage gap, which collectively withholds up to $500 billion from women's paychecks each year, also undermines the financial stability of families, children, and our economy.

Working women make up the largest share of family breadwinners. In fact, sixty-four percent of mothers are either the sole family breadwinner or the co-breadwinner.

In other words, when women are shortchanged our children, families, and our economy are also shortchanged.

Despite current protections, the lack of wage data transparency makes discrimination difficult to detect, let alone prevent. Even when wage discrimination is discovered, workplace rules that restrict information about wages and pay raises often keep working women from holding employers accountable for discrimination.

The *Paycheck Fairness Act* would combat gender-based wage disparities by strengthening enforcement provisions in the *Equal Pay Act of 1963*.

It does so by requiring employers to prove that gender-based pay disparities are based on bona fide job-related factors such as education, training, or experience that is consistent with business necessity, rather than on unrelated factors that mask discrimination.

It eliminates barriers that prohibit workers from discussing their wage or salary levels.

And finally, it strengthens the ability of women to take collective legal action against systemic pay discrimination, improves wage data transparency, and helps businesses improve equal pay practices.

And while gender-based discrimination is already illegal, women in the workplace do not enjoy the same protections from workplace discrimination as other protected classes. This legislation simply aligns our treatment of gender with other established anti-discrimination practices.

The law should treat workers who suffer discrimination based on gender similar to how it treats workers who suffer discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin. That is not a radical idea, and this is what the *Paycheck Fairness Act* would accomplish.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure that all Americans have access to a quality education and an opportunity to reach their full potential. The two pieces of legislation before us today would advance those goals, and I encourage all Members of the Committee to support them."