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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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MEMORANDUM

May 17, 2022

To: Members, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis

Fr: Majority Staff

Re: New Finding of Disproportionate Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic on Working Women

This staff memorandum describes the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis' finding that women on hourly pay schedules disproportionately experienced negative employment outcomes compared to men on hourly pay schedules during the pandemic-induced economic downturn in 2020. This finding comes from the Select Subcommittee's survey of 12 large private employers regarding the composition of their workforces and their employment practices during the coronavirus crisis.

I. BACKGROUND

The coronavirus crisis caused significant economic hardship—in 2020, tens of millions of Americans lost their jobs. This hardship fell disproportionately on women, who continue to lag behind, accounting for nearly 70% of the net jobs lost since February 2020 and 100% of net labor force leavers.[1]

The majority of these job losses have been concentrated in industries that tend to pay low average wages and compensate workers by the hour, such as retail, hospitality, and other parts of the service sector that were immediately impacted by the pandemic.[2] Women are more likely than men to hold these jobs. 2018 data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey indicates that prior to the pandemic, 46% of working women worked in jobs paying low wages,

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[1] National Women's Law Center, *Women Gain 65% of Jobs Added in April While 181,000 Women Leave Labor Force* (May 6, 2022) (online at https://nwlc.org/resource/women-gain-65-of-jobs-added-in-april-while-181000-women-leave-labor-force/).

[2] *Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?*, Brookings (Oct. 2020) (online at www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/); Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Tracking the COVID-19 Economy's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships* (Feb. 10, 2022) (online at www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-economys-effects-on-food-housing-and).

with median earnings of $10.93 per hour.[3] For Black and Hispanic women, the share of workers earning low wages was significantly higher—at 54% and 64% respectively—compared to 40% of white women.[4] A March 2022 analysis by the National Women's Law Center found that 45% of women workers are paid $15 per hour or less, compared to only 23% of male workers.[5]

The women holding these jobs are extremely vulnerable to economic downturns. Studies show that 15% of women in low-paying jobs are single parents, and 57% work full time year-round, indicating that they are essential breadwinners for their family. More than a quarter of these workers receive public assistance.[6] A February 2022 national survey by the National Women's Law Center found that the women holding jobs paying $15 per hour or less are also more likely to lack key benefits that would help them navigate pandemic-related illness or childcare disruptions while retaining their jobs. Fifty-eight percent of women in these jobs reported not receiving paid family or medical leave, paid sick days, or paid time off, compared to 38% of women overall and 22% of men.[7]

II. THE SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

In order to better understand the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on American workers, including any disproportionate impact on women, the Select Subcommittee surveyed 12 of the nation's largest private companies, each of which had reportedly laid off over 1,000 workers during the pandemic-induced economic downturn.[8] These companies were AT&T, Berkshire Hathaway, Boeing, Chevron, Cisco, Citigroup, Comcast, Exxon Mobil, Oracle, Salesforce, Walmart, and the Walt Disney Company.

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[3] *Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?*, Brookings (Oct. 2020) (online at www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/); Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Tracking the COVID-19 Economy's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships* (Feb. 10, 2022) (online at www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-economys-effects-on-food-housing-and).

[4] *Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?*, Brookings (Oct. 2020) (online at www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/).

[5] National Women's Law Center, *New NWLC National Poll and Report Show That Despite Improving Economy, Women Still Lag Far Behind Men* (Mar. 31, 2022) (online at https://nwlc.org/press-release/new-nwlc-national-poll-and-report-show-that-despite-improving-economy-women-still-lag-far-behind-men/). Data was based on February 2022 polling.

[6] *Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?*, Brookings (Oct. 2020) (online at www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/). While this Brookings essay does not define low-paying job, a 2019 Brookings report "use[s] the often-employed threshold of two-thirds median wages for full-time/full-year workers, with slight modification." *Meet the Low-Wage Workforce*, Brookings (Nov. 2019) (online at www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/201911_Brookings-Metro_low-wage-workforce_Ross-Bateman.pdf).

[7] National Women's Law Center, *Women and Work Two Years into the Pandemic* (Mar. 31, 2022) (online at https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-GQR-NWLC-survey-slides-3.29.22.pdf).

[8] Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Press Release: Select Subcommittee to Examine Economic Impact of Pandemic on Working Women* (Dec. 13, 2021) (online at https://coronavirus.house.gov/news/letters/select-subcommittee-examine-economic-impact-pandemic-working-women).

Among other requests, the companies were asked to complete an employment data survey. The survey requested information designed to enable the Select Subcommittee to understand how employees' gender and pay schedule (*i.e.*, hourly or salaried) impacted employment outcomes during the coronavirus crisis.[9] Among other items, the Select Subcommittee requested data on furloughs, layoffs, terminations, voluntary departures, hourly wage reductions, hourly wage increases, and promotions for each of 2019, 2020, and 2021.[10]

Each of the 12 companies produced documents and information in response to the Select Subcommittee's requests. However, one company informed the Select Subcommittee that it keeps employment records for one component of its organization separately from the rest of the organization, and data submitted to the Select Subcommittee reflected this division. Therefore, the analysis in this memorandum treats the two components of this company as if they were separate employers. Another company only provided data for one of its many subsidiary companies, which, according to company counsel, accounted for nearly all of the company's pandemic layoffs. Therefore, the analysis in this memorandum only accounts for the subsidiary, not the company as a whole. Finally, one company primarily employed salaried workers and did not have a meaningful number of employees working for an hourly wage (less than 50 each year), so data for that company are not included in this analysis. Given all of the above, the analysis in this memorandum draws on data for 12 companies (technically 11 companies, one of which has two components considered separately). Because the Select Subcommittee's investigation is ongoing, and because this analysis is focused on overarching trends rather than individual corporate conduct, the Select Subcommittee is not identifying companies by name in this analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

To determine how gender has impacted employment outcomes during the coronavirus pandemic, the Select Subcommittee calculated the percentages of women and men working for hourly wages who experienced each of the seven key employment outcomes at each company in each year (*e.g.*, percentage of women working for an hourly wage at Company A that Company A laid off in 2019), as shown in Appendix I. This controlled for the (often large) differences in absolute numbers of female and male employees at surveyed companies and allowed for the analysis to assess outcomes as a proportion of each group's share of the workforce. The Select Subcommittee then assessed the difference in the percentages of women and men experiencing each outcome to determine whether a disparity was present. For example, the percentage of

[9] Companies were asked to provide data in four gender categories—male, female, other, and unknown. However, because companies generally either did not have data on employees classified as "other" or "unknown" or the number of such employees was extremely small, this memorandum only refers to data for male and female employees. While companies were asked to divide data between hourly and salaried employees, one company also provided data on its drivers separately from hourly and salaried employees because these employees are paid as a function of how many miles they drive.

[10] There may be some variance in the definitions companies used for responding to the Select Subcommittee's employment data survey. For example, although the Select Subcommittee requested data on hourly wage increases other than those required by law, one company noted that their method of data maintenance required them to provide data on all wage increases regardless of reason. Some companies also included voluntary layoffs (*e.g.*, when an employee is offered a buyout) in the voluntary departures category, choosing to define layoffs as only "involuntary" layoffs.

women working for an hourly wage laid off at Company B in each year was compared to the percentage of men working for an hourly wage that were laid off at Company B in the same year. Because some variation between employee groups is expected and inevitable, this analysis defines gender disparities as differences of at least one percentage point between women's and men's outcomes. In other words, if 3.5% of women and 3% of men working for an hourly wage at the same company were laid off, that difference would not be deemed a disparity.

Gender disparities were calculated for both positive and negative employment outcomes. For negative employment outcomes (furloughs, layoffs, terminations, voluntary departures, and wage and salary reductions), a disparity was considered to negatively impact the employee group experiencing the outcome at a *greater* rate. For example, if 5% of women working for an hourly wage at a company were laid off but only 3% of men working for an hourly wage at that same company were laid off, that would be considered a disparity negatively impacting women for purposes of this analysis. For positive employment outcomes (wage increases, salary increases, and promotions), a disparity was considered to negatively impact the employee group experiencing the outcome at a *lesser* rate. For example, if 6% of men paid by the hour and 7% of women paid by the hour at the same company received promotions, that would be considered a disparity negatively impacting men for purposes of this analysis.

Not all of the companies surveyed tracked data sufficient to respond to all aspects of the Select Subcommittee's survey, which in some cases limited possible findings. The number of female/male comparisons that could be made for each year differed depending on which companies had tracked or retained data for that year and on which companies did not engage in certain employment practices in that year. For example, some companies did not furlough any employees or reduce wages in certain years, meaning that comparisons were not made for those outcomes at those companies. The Select Subcommittee was ultimately able to make 49 comparisons between women's and men's employment outcomes for 2019, 61 for 2020, and 60 for 2021. These numbers equate to the total potential number of gender disparities each year. The raw data underlying these comparisons is presented in Appendix I.

IV. FINDINGS

A. In 2020, Women Working for Hourly Wages at Companies Surveyed by the Select Subcommittee Disproportionately Experienced Worse Employment Outcomes than Their Male Hourly Coworkers

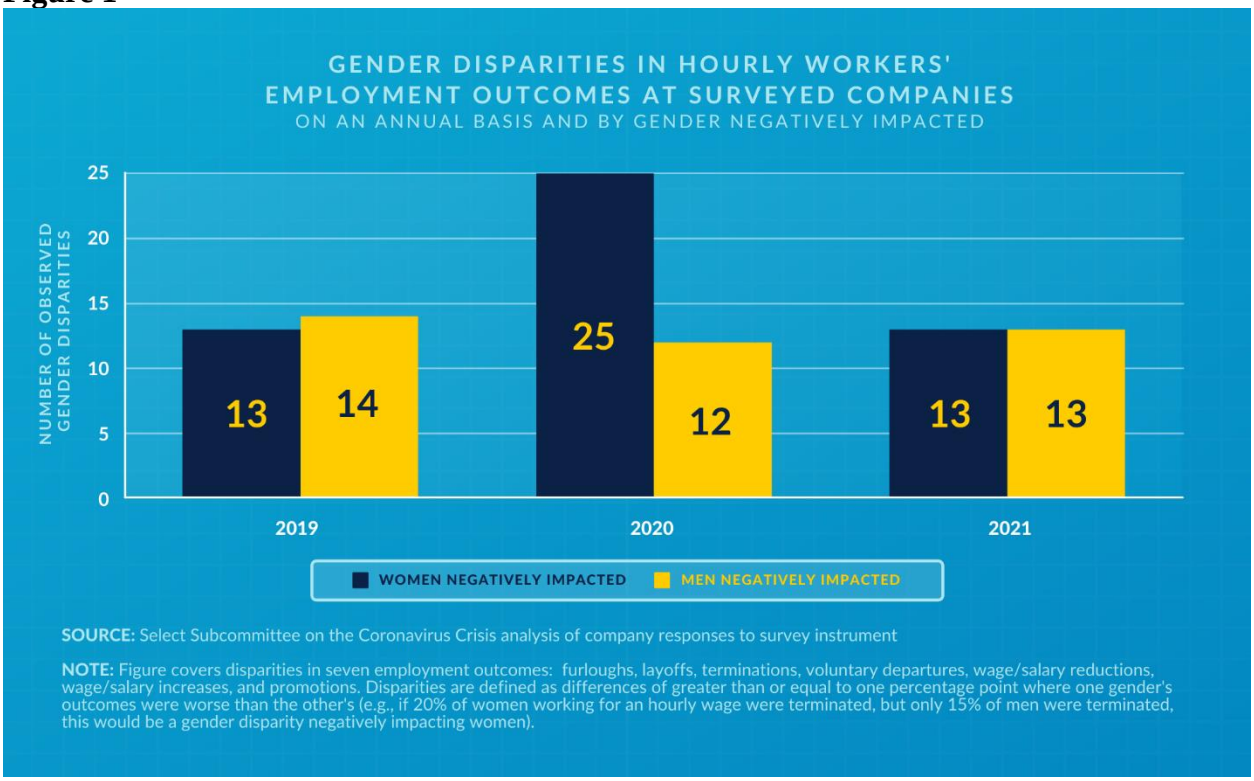
This analysis showed that in 2020—the year of massive job losses caused by the coronavirus crisis—women working for hourly wages experienced disproportionate harm. For that year, out of 61 employment outcomes analyzed by the Select Subcommittee where gender disparities were possible, survey results revealed 25 such disparities (41%) that negatively impacted women—in other words, 25 instances in which a company's female hourly workforce disproportionately experienced a negative employment outcome (a higher percentage of furloughs, layoffs, terminations, voluntary departures, or wage reductions, or a lower percentage

of wage increases or promotions) compared to the company's male hourly workforce.[11] By comparison, men were only negatively impacted by 12 gender disparities (20%) across surveyed companies in 2020 (and no disparity was found in 24 employment outcomes, or 39%).

This gap in disparate employment outcomes was only found by the survey to be present in 2020. In both 2019 and 2021, women working for an hourly wage at the surveyed companies experienced similar numbers of negative gender disparities as men working for an hourly wage. (See Figure 1.) Of course, parity in this metric does not demonstrate gender workplace parity at the surveyed companies in those years. The outcomes analyzed did not include or take into account the difference in overall numbers of male and female employees, the relative amount of baseline salaries or wages prior to pay increases or decreases, or the nature of the positions held by workers prior to promotions.

While these outcomes do not mean that 2020 was the only year in which women experienced inequity in the workplace, the disproportionate rate at which women working for hourly wages at surveyed companies suffered negative employment outcomes during the year of the pandemic-induced economic downturn does suggest that the crisis was uniquely harmful to this group of Americans. The Select Subcommittee plans to further examine the nature of company policies that may account for these differing employment outcomes.

Figure 1



[11] The Select Subcommittee uses terms like "at least" in this analysis to signal that these should be considered minimum numbers of gender disparities negatively impacting women. There may have been additional gender disparities in the employment outcomes for which companies did not provide data.

Appendix I – Table of Key Employment Outcomes for Workers Earning an Hourly Wage, 2019-2021, by Employee Gender

Legend – Dark blue fill indicates gender disparities negatively impacting women. Yellow fill indicates gender disparities negatively impacting men.

			Percentage (%)						
Company[a]	**Year**	**Gender[b]**	**Furloughed**	**Laid off**	**Terminated**	**Voluntarily Departed[c]**	**Hourly Wage Reduced**	**Hourly Wage Increased**	**Promoted**
A	2019	Male	-	1.9	1.2	13.7	20.6	68.7	9.0
		Female	-	1.9	0.9	14.6	21.0	71.8	10.4
	2020	Male	-	7.1	1.5	11.2	19.3	80.1	6.9
		Female	-	5.6	0.7	12.5	17.6	81.6	8.7
	2021	Male	-	0.7	1.2	18.0	35.6	63.8	12.9
		Female	-	0.9	0.5	18.9	29.6	69.6	15.3
B	2019	Male	-	0.5	0.6	2.9	-	96.0	4.7
		Female	-	0.0	0.8	4.6	-	94.6	5.8
	2020	Male	-	2.7	0.9	3.4	-	93.0	22.5
		Female	-	3.6	2.0	6.3	-	88.1	26.6
	2021	Male	-	2.3	1.0	4.2	-	92.4	17.2
		Female	-	2.0	0.8	7.2	-	90.0	23.3
C	2019	Male	-	0.4	13.5	24.0	-	64.7	7.1
		Female	-	0.6	10.6	22.0	-	67.7	8.7
	2020	Male	-	0.2	14.5	26.1	-	56.4	9.0
		Female	-	0.3	11.7	24.8	-	59.4	11.4
	2021	Male	-	0.1	15.2	28.4	-	60.7	4.8
		Female	-	0.3	13.1	29.0	-	59.7	4.5

			Percentage (%)						
Company[a]	**Year**	**Gender[b]**	**Furloughed**	**Laid off**	**Terminated**	**Voluntarily Departed[c]**	**Hourly Wage Reduced**	**Hourly Wage Increased**	**Promoted**
D	2019	Male	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
		Female	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	2020	Male	ND	31.4	18.4	ND	ND	ND	2.2
		Female	ND	38.1	24.8	ND	ND	ND	1.4
	2021	Male	ND	10.1	15.4	ND	ND	ND	7.0
		Female	ND	9.5	20.2	ND	ND	ND	4.9
E	2019	Male	-	-	0.8	4.3	-	95.0	ND
		Female	-	-	1.4	3.7	-	87.2	ND
	2020	Male	-	-	0.7	3.3	-	90.0	ND
		Female	-	-	0.3	4.5	-	83.6	ND
	2021	Male	-	-	0.8	6.8	-	78.4	ND
		Female	-	-	0.9	7.5	-	70.1	ND
F	2019	Male	-	0.8	4.6	11.1	-	85.0	11.7
		Female	-	1.3	5.9	16.4	-	75.8	10.0
	2020	Male	0.4	1.9	4.1	8.4	1.4	89.6	9.4
		Female	1.1	3.7	5.2	12.4	4.2	81.9	8.3
	2021	Male	0.1	0.5	5.4	10.6	-	87.7	10.1
		Female	0.3	1.0	6.4	16.5	-	78.4	10.0
G	2019	Male	-	1.0	2.2	16.7	-	11.7	11.2
		Female	-	2.7	2.1	11.0	-	8.8	9.6
	2020	Male	-	0.8	0.7	14.4	-	1.8	10.5
		Female	-	1.7	0.5	11.8	-	0.5	8.8
	2021	Male	-	0.2	0.7	12.7	-	45.8	15.5
		Female	-	0.4	0.2	9.2	-	51.2	15.6

Company[a]	Year	Gender[b]	Percentage (%)						
			Furloughed	Laid off	Terminated	Voluntarily Departed[c]	Hourly Wage Reduced	Hourly Wage Increased	Promoted
H	2019	Male	-	0.0	4.1	28.2	-	100.0	ND
		Female	-	0.0	3.0	28.7	-	100.0	ND
	2020	Male	-	0.4	2.6	30.7	-	100.0	1.3
		Female	-	0.1	2.9	31.6	-	100.0	1.8
	2021	Male	-	0.0	9.9	23.7	-	100.0	3.0
		Female	-	0.0	7.9	22.5	-	100.0	2.9
I[d]	2019	Male	-	ND	16.5	ND	0.5	86.4	2.7
		Female	-	ND	21.8	ND	1.2	83.7	2.8
	2020	Male	-	ND	15.5	ND	0.3	88.2	2.0
		Female	-	ND	20.0	ND	0.2	84.7	1.9
	2021	Male	-	ND	16.2	ND	0.7	86.1	4.7
		Female	-	ND	27.2	ND	0.6	81.2	4.1
J	2019	Male	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
		Female	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
	2020	Male	0.0	9.3	1.2	9.3	ND	ND	1.7
		Female	0.0	14.8	0.8	10.7	ND	ND	1.8
	2021	Male	0.0	0.8	1.4	5.0	ND	ND	3.4
		Female	0.0	1.2	0.8	4.1	ND	ND	3.4
K	2019	Male	-	0.7	2.6	18.2	0.8	22.2	0.5
		Female	-	0.6	1.4	16.2	0.7	24.6	0.6
	2020	Male	-	1.7	2.0	14.2	0.9	18.4	0.8
		Female	-	1.4	1.1	13.5	1.4	19.7	1.2
	2021	Male	-	1.0	1.8	18.1	0.9	19.4	0.7
		Female	-	0.8	0.8	17.6	1.2	22.9	1.0

			Percentage (%)						
Company[a]	**Year**	**Gender[b]**	**Furloughed**	**Laid off**	**Terminated**	**Voluntarily Departed[c]**	**Hourly Wage Reduced**	**Hourly Wage Increased**	**Promoted**
L	2019	Male	-	0.2	5.4	10.7	2.0	80.5	6.1
		Female	-	0.2	4.6	13.2	2.1	81.6	9.0
	2020	Male	82.6	16.8	1.9	11.2	3.9	80.3	2.8
		Female	86.0	20.1	1.5	13.4	5.2	76.2	4.3
	2021	Male	19.7	1.1	3.5	14.8	2.0	67.9	4.3
		Female	19.5	2.8	2.6	17.8	2.1	72.5	5.7

Source: Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis analysis of company responses to survey instrument.
Note: A hyphen ("-") indicates that the company that the company did not engage in the indicated practice during that year (*e.g.*, did not furlough employees or reduce wages). An "ND" indicates that the company was unable to provide data on the indicated outcome. Cells with a dark blue fill indicate gender disparities negatively impacting women. Cells with a yellow fill indicate gender disparities negatively impacting men.

[a]Because the Select Subcommittee's investigation is ongoing, and because this analysis is focused on overarching trends rather than individual corporate conduct, the Select Subcommittee is not identifying companies by name in this analysis.

[b]Companies were also asked to provide data on employees whose gender was tracked as "Other" or "Unknown." Because several companies did not track data on their employees' gender in this way and because such employees were typically a small percentage of companies' overall workforce, this table only includes data for male and female employees.

[c]Voluntary departures were defined as quits and retirements. However, some companies also included voluntary layoffs (*e.g.*, when an employee is offered a buyout) in this category, choosing to define layoffs as only "involuntary" layoffs.

[d]This company provided the Select Subcommittee with terminations data that included all employee departures from the company (both voluntary and involuntary), but did not break these data out into layoffs, voluntary departures, and other terminations.