

**Testimony of ReShonda Young**  
**Operations Manager and Corporate VP, Alpha Express, Inc**  
**Founder and Owner, Popcorn Heaven**  
**Waterloo, Iowa**

**Before the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions**

**Hearing titled: "Access to Justice: Ensuring Equal Pay with the Paycheck Fairness Act"**

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## **Testimony of ReShonda Young, Alpha Express, Inc, Waterloo, Iowa**

Chair Mikulski, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to share my perspective on pay equity issues and the Paycheck Fairness Act as a small business manager and owner.

My name is ReShonda Young. I serve as Operations Manager and Corporate Vice President for two family businesses based in Waterloo, Iowa. Alpha Express is a transportation and delivery company that hauls parts all across the U.S. and into Canada. Alpha Services is a contracting business that provides maintenance services to companies like John Deere.

Our business is a true family business. My father started the company 25 years ago. Back then, it was just him and one partner. Now we employ about 50 people.

I've also recently started a new venture of my own, a popcorn shop called Popcorn Heaven in Waterloo. We started in February and already have 10 employees.

I hold a degree in Business Management. I worked in Iowa's insurance sector for more than 10 years, but entrepreneurship is my passion. I guess you could say small business runs in my blood.

### **Paycheck Fairness at Alpha Express, Inc**

I want to share with you the story of what happened when I left corporate America and joined my dad's business eight years ago. With the company starting to expand and evolve, I started taking on more HR responsibilities at Alpha Express. In the process, I found an issue with our paychecks.

There was a discrepancy in what women employees in the business were being paid. We had a woman who had been with us for 16 years. She was the one who kept everything in order. Yet, she was only getting paid a little more than half of what male employees were making, although she had a lot more responsibilities than the male employees.

I knew I had to do something. For my dad and me to be able to work together, and make his company into what he dreamed it could be, things had to change.

I believe people should be paid according to the job they're doing and the value they bring to a company – nothing less. I refuse to allow myself – or other women workers – to be paid less than the value we bring to our company because of our gender.

So, I stuck my neck out: when my concerns weren't immediately addressed, I called our accountant and raised the pay of our women workers... without authorization. There are some things you just do. If you get in trouble, you deal with it because it's the right thing to do.

Let me be clear, I love my dad. He is an amazing man and I've learned a lot from working with him these past eight years. I am most grateful for that, but when I started working with him he was 65 years old and had an "old school" mentality about women in the workplace.

In the end, my father came around to see things as I see them. Equal pay for equal work is one of the commitments we make to our employees. My dad recognizes that the women on our team keep the business afloat. It wouldn't survive without us. Our pay scales were adjusted and two-thirds of our female employees received pay raises to be in line with their male counterparts (the rest worked in areas with pre-set wages and pay raises).

I'm proud of the decisions we've made in our business, and I'm committed to continuing to offer fair wages and equal pay for equal work. We think of our employees as family, and at the end of the day I have to be able to sleep at night. Knowing I'm doing right by them, I can.

But offering equal pay for equal work isn't just about doing the right thing – it has a positive impact on our business, too.

Our commitment to pay equity boosts our employees' morale and their respect for the business. It feels good for our women employees to know they're taking home a fair paycheck. They're happier to come in to work and more productive. They're willing to give more of themselves when they know the business is giving them a fair shake in return.

Our commitment to pay equity also boosts employee retention. Turnover has major costs for businesses, both in terms of lost productivity and the upfront costs of advertising, hiring, and training new employees. And, as someone who's had to run the dispatch and pick up other responsibilities in times of transition, while continuing to carry out all my other regular job responsibilities, I know turnover takes a toll on small business owners and managers, too. We're the last line of defense and the ones who have to pick up anything that isn't getting done at the end of the day. Cutting down on turnover saves us money and it also saves us all that extra stress.

For these reasons, I know offering equal pay for equal work is good business for Alpha Express.

### **Committing to Pay Equity in a Small Business Start-Up**

In February, I launched my new business, a popcorn shop called Popcorn Heaven in Waterloo. We offer more than 50 flavors of gourmet popcorn in a happy and upbeat environment. So far, the customer response has been great – you could say business is popping. We just did the Cedar Valley Baconfest this past weekend.

One of my goals for starting this business was to offer job opportunities in downtown Waterloo, and we've already got 10 full-time and part-time employees. And I'm carrying forward the same commitments to decent wages and pay equity that we've made in my dad's business.

I know that the opponents of things like pay equity are often big corporations. But if we, as a start-up small business, can commit to pay equity and make it work for our business, then I believe the bigger companies out there can, too.

### **Small Business Support for the Paycheck Fairness Act**

As a small business owner and manager, I support the Paycheck Fairness Act.

I support it because it's in line with my values as a business owner. I'm committed to pay equity for my employees so I have nothing to fear from the Paycheck Fairness Act. If other businesses are truly committed to pay equity, they'll have nothing to fear, either.

I support it because it will be good for our local economy. Ensuring pay equity for women workers will put more money in their pockets to spend in local businesses – like taking their kids out to experience a little taste of heaven... Popcorn Heaven, that is. This will help businesses like mine and boost local economies.

And I support it because it levels the playing field in terms of business competition, supporting responsible businesses that treat our employees fairly. Small business owners don't like being forced into a race to the bottom by big box stores and chain operations that threaten to undercut us by underpaying their women workers. Making a national commitment to equal pay for equal work will allow small business owners to pay our workers fair wages without fear of being undercut by low-road competitors.

As a small business owner and manager, I urge your support for the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Thank you.