APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit

Aileen RIZO, Plaintiff-Appellee,
v.
Jim YOVINO, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Erroneously Sued Herein as Fresno County Office of Education, Defendant-Appellant.

No. 16-15372
|
Resubmitted En Banc September 24, 2019* San Francisco, California
|
Filed February 27, 2020

OPINION

CHRISTEN, Circuit Judge:

In 1963, Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act with a mandate as simple as it was profound: equal pay for equal work. The question we consider today is whether Aileen Rizo's prior rate of pay is a "factor other than sex" that allows Fresno County's Office of Education to pay her less than male employees who perform the same work. 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1)(iv). We conclude it is not.

* The panel unanimously concluded this case was suitable for decision without oral argument. See Fed. R. App. P. 34(a)(2).

Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act (EPA) to combat pay disparities caused by sex discrimination, but it allowed employers to justify different pay for employees of the opposite sex based on three enumerated affirmative defenses, or "any *other* factor other than sex." *Id.* (emphasis added). Contrary to Fresno County's argument, we conclude that only job-related factors may serve as affirmative defenses to EPA claims.

The express purpose of the Act was to eradicate the practice of paying women less simply because they are women. Allowing employers to escape liability by relying on employees' prior pay would defeat the purpose of the Act and perpetuate the very discrimination the EPA aims to eliminate. Accordingly, we hold that an employee's prior pay cannot serve as an affirmative defense to a prima facie showing of an EPA violation.

I. Background

The Fresno County Office of Education hired Aileen Rizo as a math consultant in October 2009. She held two master's degrees when she was hired: one in educational technology and one in mathematics education. She began teaching middle and high school math in 1996. Her employment experience included three years as head of the math department for an online school and designer of the school's math curriculum. Rizo worked at this position while earning her first master's degree. She taught middle school math for six more years, and then she was hired by Fresno County.

The County set its new employees' salaries according to a pay schedule governed by Standard

Operating Procedure 1440 (SOP 1440). The schedule designated 12 salary levels. Each level corresponded to different job classifications and had up to 10 steps. To calculate a new employee's pay, the County started with the employee's prior wages, increased the wages by 5%, and placed the employee at the corresponding step on its pay schedule. Rizo's prior employer paid her $50,630 for 206 days of work, plus an additional $1,200 because she had a master's degree. Based on her prior wages, the County placed Rizo at Step 1, Level 1 on its pay schedule. Her starting wage at Fresno County was $62,133 for 196 days of work, plus an additional $600 for holding a master's degree.

While having lunch with colleagues in 2012, Rizo learned that a newly hired male math consultant had been placed at Level 1, Step 9. That put the new consultant's starting pay at $79,088, significantly more than Rizo was paid after working three years for the County. Rizo realized that she was the only female math consultant at Fresno County, and that all of her male colleagues were paid more than she was, even though she had more education and experience. She expressed concern about this pay disparity to the Human Resources department, and an administrator gave her a copy of SOP 1440. The administrator assured Rizo that the policy was applied across the board, regardless of the employee's sex.

In February 2014, Rizo filed a complaint in Fresno County Superior Court against the Superintendent of Fresno County's Office of Education.[1] The complaint

---

[1] Because Yovino is sued in his official capacity as Superintendent, we refer to the appellant as "Fresno County" or "the County" throughout this opinion.

alleged that the County violated the Equal Pay Act, 29 U.S.C. § 206(d), and included claims for sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e *et seq.*; sex discrimination under California's Fair Employment and Housing Act, § 12940(a); and failure to prevent discrimination under California's Fair Employment and Housing Act, § 12940(k).

Fresno County removed the complaint to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California, and in June 2015 it moved for summary judgment. The County's motion did not contest that Rizo was paid less than her male counterparts or that Rizo established a prima facie EPA violation. Instead, the County argued that Rizo's pay was the result of SOP 1440, and that this pay policy, which was based solely on its employees' prior pay, was a "factor other than sex" that defeated Rizo's EPA claim.

In the district court, both parties argued that *Kouba v. Allstate Insurance Co.*, 691 F.2d 873 (9th Cir. 1982), supported their positions. *Kouba* considered whether an employee's prior pay, in combination with other factors, justified a pay differential between two workers of the opposite sex. *Id.* at 875. We held that the EPA "does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary," so long as employers consider prior pay "reasonably" to advance "an acceptable business reason." *Id.* at 876–77, 878. The district court concluded that *Kouba* did not resolve whether the pay disparity in Rizo's case violated the EPA because the differential resulted solely from Rizo's prior rate of pay, not from her prior pay in combination with other factors. *See Rizo v. Yovino*, No. 1:14-cv-0423-MJS, 2015 WL 13236875, 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS

163849 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 4, 2015). The court held that "a pay structure based exclusively on prior wages is so inherently fraught with the risk—indeed, here, the virtual certainty—that it will perpetuate a discriminatory wage disparity between men and women that it cannot stand, even if motivated by a legitimate non-discriminatory business purpose." *Id.* at *9, 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 163849 at *26. The court concluded that the County's "SOP 1440 necessarily and unavoidably conflicts with" the EPA, and it denied the County's motion for summary judgment. *Id.*

The district court certified its order for interlocutory appeal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). A three-judge panel reversed and held that the district court was bound by *Kouba*. *See Rizo v. Yovino*, 854 F.3d 1161 (9th Cir. 2017), *reh'g en banc granted*, 869 F.3d 1004 (9th Cir. 2017). A majority of the active members of our court voted to hear the County's appeal en banc, *see Rizo v. Yovino*, 869 F.3d 1004 (9th Cir. 2017), and the en banc court issued an opinion on April 9, 2018. *See Rizo v. Yovino*, 887 2020 WL 946053, 20 Cal. Daily Op. Serv. 1776 F.3d 453 (9th Cir. 2018). The Supreme Court subsequently vacated our decision on a procedural issue.[2] The parties submitted

[2] The author of the majority opinion, Judge Stephen Reinhardt, died eleven days before the en banc opinion issued. Fresno County petitioned for certiorari on the merits and also argued the opinion should not have been issued after Judge Reinhardt died. See Pet. for Writ of Cert., *Yovino v. Rizo*, —— U.S. ——, 139 S. Ct. 706, 203 L.Ed.2d 38 (2019) (per curiam). The Supreme Court granted the petition and held that it was error to issue the opinion after Judge Reinhardt's death. *Yovino*, 139 S. Ct. at 710. On remand from the Supreme Court, another judge was selected at random to participate on the en banc panel.

supplemental briefing after the case was remanded from the Supreme Court, and we reconsidered the County's appeal. We have jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b), and we affirm the district court's order denying the County's motion for summary judgment.

II. Standard of Review

We review the district court's order denying summary judgment *de novo*. *See Evon v. Law Offices of Sidney Mickell*, 688 F.3d 1015, 1023 (9th Cir. 2012). "We adopt the same standard used by the district court and 'view the evidence in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, determine whether there are any genuine issues of material fact, and decide whether the district court correctly applied the relevant substantive law.'" *Booth v. United States*, 914 F.3d 1199, 1203 (9th Cir. 2019) (quoting *Animal Legal Def. Fund v. U.S. Food & Drug Admin.*, 836 F.3d 987, 989 (9th Cir. 2016)).

III. Discussion

We took this case en banc to reconsider *Kouba*'s rule that prior pay can qualify as an affirmative defense to an EPA claim if the employer considers prior pay in combination with other factors and uses it reasonably to effectuate a business policy. On appeal, the County contends that its policy of setting employees' wages based on their prior pay is premised on a factor other than sex. Therefore, the County argues, its use of prior pay is a valid affirmative defense. The County concedes that it has no other defense to Rizo's claim.

Rizo responds that the use of prior pay to set prospective wages, by its nature, would perpetuate the gender-based pay gap indefinitely. She argues that

because Congress aimed to eliminate deeply rooted pay discrimination between male and female employees who perform the same work, employers are not allowed to rely on prior pay to justify wage disparities for employees of the opposite sex. We agree with Rizo.

The Equal Pay Act was enacted as an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act. *See Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 190, 94 S.Ct. 2223, 41 L.Ed.2d 1 (1974). In *Corning Glass*, the Supreme Court observed, "Congress' purpose in enacting the Equal Pay Act was to remedy what was perceived to be a serious and endemic problem of employment discrimination in private industry." *Id.* at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The EPA was described as "a very simple piece of legislation" establishing that "equal work will be rewarded by equal wages." S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 1 (1963); *Equal Pay Act of 1963, S. Comm. on Labor*, 88th Cong. 12 (1963) (statement of Sen. Clifford P. Case). The EPA provides:

> No employer ... shall discriminate ... between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees ... at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex ... for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions ....

29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). The statute identifies four exceptions to its equal-pay mandate:

> except where such payment is made pursuant to (i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or

> quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on *any other factor other than sex* ...."

Id. (emphasis added).

The EPA's four exceptions operate as affirmative defenses. *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 196–97, 94 S.Ct. 2223; *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 875. As the Supreme Court has explained, the Act's structure is straightforward. *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223. An employee bears the burden of establishing a prima facie case of wage discrimination by showing that "the employer pays different wages to employees of the opposite sex for substantially equal work." *Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 446 (9th Cir. 1986). If the plaintiff puts forth a prima facie case of an EPA violation, "the burden shifts to the employer to show that the differential is justified under one of the Act's four exceptions." *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223. To counter a prima facie case, an employer must prove "not simply that the employer's proffered reasons *could* explain the wage disparity, but that the proffered reasons *do in fact* explain the wage disparity." *EEOC v. Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d 114, 121 (4th Cir. 2018) (emphasis in original) (citing *Stanziale v. Jargowsky*, 200 F.3d 101, 107–08 (3d Cir. 2000)); *see also Mickelson v. N.Y. Life Ins. Co.*, 460 F.3d 1304, 1312 (10th Cir. 2006).

A wage differential arose in *Corning Glass* because male employees were not willing to work for the low wages paid to women. *Corning Glass* rejected what was later called the "market force theory," holding that the EPA did not permit Corning Glass to pay women less simply because they were willing to work for less. *See* 417 U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The Court

explained that although it may have been "understandable as a matter of economics" that the company took advantage of these market conditions, "its [wage] differential nevertheless became illegal once Congress enacted into law the principle of equal pay for equal work." *Id.*

Unlike Title VII, the EPA does not require proof of discriminatory intent. *See Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 550 U.S. 618, 640, 127 S.Ct. 2162, 167 L.Ed.2d 982 (2007) (stating that "the EPA and Title VII are not the same," in part because "the EPA does not require proof of intentional discrimination"), *superseded by statute*, Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, Pub. L. No. 111-2, 123 Stat. 5 (2009); *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446 (observing the EPA "creates a type of strict liability" and "no intent to discriminate need be shown"). For that reason, the familiar three-step *McDonnell Douglas* framework that applies to Title VII claims is not used in EPA cases. *See Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 195–96, 94 S.Ct. 2223; *see also* 6 Larson on Emp't Discrimination § 108.10 (2019) ("Note that the *McDonnell* [*Douglas*]-*Burdine* burden-shifting framework does not apply to Equal Pay Act discrimination claims, since there is no need for the EPA plaintiff to show discriminatory animus."); 1 Sex-Based Emp't Discrimination § 7:1 (Oct. 2019) (citing *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792, 93 S.Ct. 1817, 36 L.Ed.2d 668 (1973)).

The EEOC's amicus brief observes that some of our prior case law "could be read to blur the line between Title VII and the EPA" by incorrectly suggesting that the third step of the *McDonnell Douglas* test applies to EPA claims. We agree that our case law has confused this point. Likely because of dicta in our previous

cases,[3] the district court suggested that Rizo would bear the burden of showing pretext if the County demonstrated that a factor other than sex accounted for Rizo's pay. This is not correct. To clear up any confusion, we reiterate that EPA claims do not require proof of discriminatory intent. *See Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446; *see also Ledbetter*, 550 U.S. at 640, 127 S.Ct. 2162. EPA claims have just two steps: (1) the plaintiff bears the burden to establish a prima facie showing of a sex-based wage differential; (2) if the plaintiff is successful, the burden shifts to the employer to show an affirmative defense. No showing of pretext is required.[4]

---

[3] *See, e.g.*, *Stanley v. Univ. of S. Cal.*, 178 F.3d 1069, 1076 (9th Cir. 1999) (suggesting that the EPA plaintiff *bore the burden* of demonstrating a material factual dispute regarding pretext in order to survive summary judgment); *see also Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446.

[4] *Accord Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 120 n.6 ("The EPA burden-shifting framework is distinct from the *McDonnell Douglas* burden-shifting framework that we apply when reviewing claims brought under Title VII."); *Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 716 (8th Cir. 2003) (the EPA's "analytical framework differs from the [*McDonnell Douglas*] burden shifting analysis"); *Stanziale*, 200 F.3d at 107 ("[C]laims based upon the Equal Pay Act do not follow the three-step burden-shifting framework of [*McDonnell Douglas*]; rather, they follow a two-step burden-shifting paradigm." (internal citation omitted)); *see also Buntin v. Breathitt Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 134 F.3d 796, 799 & n.6 (6th Cir. 1998); *McMillan v. Mass. SPCA*, 140 F.3d 288, 298 (1st Cir. 1998). *But see Wernsing v. Dep't of Human Servs.*, 427 F.3d 466, 469 (7th Cir. 2005); *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 954 (11th Cir. 1995) (applying the *McDonnell Douglas* framework to an EPA claim and requiring "the plaintiff must rebut the explanation [for the differential] by showing with affirmative evidence that it is

A.

This appeal requires that we consider the scope of the EPA's fourth exception. The County contends that the fourth exception allows any factor that is not sex itself to serve as an affirmative defense. We conclude otherwise. As we recognized in *Kouba*, and as the Second, Fourth, Sixth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits have ruled, the scope of the fourth exception is limited. *See Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876; *see also Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 122–23; *Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1198 (10th Cir. 2015); *Aldrich v. Randolph Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 963 F.2d 520, 525 (2d Cir. 1992); *Glenn v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567, 1570–71 (11th Cir. 1988); *EEOC v. J.C. Penney Co., Inc.*, 843 F.2d 249, 253 (6th Cir. 1988) ("[T]he 'factor other than sex' defense does not include literally *any* other factor "). Based on the text and purpose of the Act, we conclude that the fourth affirmative defense comprises only job-related factors, not sex.

To define the scope of the EPA's fourth exception, we begin with the language of the statute and apply familiar principles of statutory construction. Congress first defined the protection afforded by the statute in job-related terms—equal pay for "equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). It then specifically enumerated three exceptions to the prohibition of sex-based distinctions for such work, but described the fourth generally as "any other factor other than sex." The fourth exception is often

---

pretextual or offered as a post-event justification for a gender-based differential.").

shortened to "any factor other than sex," but here we are called upon to define its precise contours and we examine every word: "any *other* factor other than sex." *Id.* § 206(d)(1)(iv) (emphasis added). Giving meaning to each word by its context, the phrase "any other factor other than sex" requires that the fourth exception be read in relation to the three exceptions that precede it, as well as in relation to the "equal work" principle to which it is an exception. *See* Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner, *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts* 56 (2012); *see also* William N. Eskridge Jr., *Interpreting Law: A Primer on How to Read Statutes and the Constitution* 113 (2016). If *any* factor other than sex could defeat an EPA claim, the first "other" in the phrase "any other factor other than sex" would be rendered meaningless, as would the three enumerated exceptions. *See* Norman J. Singer & Shambie Singer, 2A *Sutherland Statutory Construction* § 46:6 (7th ed.) ("It is an elementary rule of construction that effect must be given, if possible, to every word, clause and sentence of a statute."). Because the three enumerated exceptions are all job-related, and the elements of the "equal work" principle are job-related, Congress' use of the phrase "any *other* factor other than sex" (emphasis added) signals that the fourth exception is also limited to job-related factors.

Other well-settled rules of statutory construction reinforce the conclusion that the fourth affirmative defense includes factors of the same type as the ones Congress specifically identified. The first is the *noscitur a sociis* canon—a word is known by the company it keeps. *See Sutherland*, § 47:16 ("[A] word is given more precise content by the neighboring words

with which it is associated."). This rule provides that words grouped together should be given similar or related meaning to avoid "giving unintended breadth to the Acts of Congress." *See, e.g.*, *Yates v. United States*, 574 U.S. 528, 135 S. Ct. 1074, 1085, 191 L.Ed.2d 64 (2015) (plurality opinion) (quoting *Gustafson v. Alloyd Co.*, 513 U.S. 561, 575, 115 S.Ct. 1061, 131 L.Ed.2d 1 (1995)). In the EPA, the first three exceptions—seniority systems, merit systems, and productivity systems—relate to job experience, job qualifications, and job performance. Because the enumerated exceptions are all job-related, the more general exception that follows them refers to job-related factors too.[5] *See, e.g.*, Eskridge at 77.

Relatedly, the EPA's list of specific exceptions is followed by a general exception and this calls for application of the *ejusdem generis* canon. *See Epic Sys. Corp. v. Lewis*, —— U.S. ——, 138 S. Ct. 1612, 1625, 200 L.Ed.2d 889 (2018) ("[W]here ... a more general term follows more specific terms in a list, the general term is usually understood to 'embrace only objects similar in nature to those objects enumerated by the preceding specific words.' ") (quoting *Circuit City Stores, Inc. v. Adams*, 532 U.S. 105, 115, 121 S.Ct. 1302, 149 L.Ed.2d 234 (2001)). The *ejusdem generis* canon provides that the EPA's three specific exceptions cabin the scope of the general exception. *See Sutherland*, § 47:17. "The principle of *ejusdem generis* essentially ... implies the addition of *similar* after the word *other*." Scalia & Garner at 199 (emphasis in original). Thus, "any other factor other

[5] Contrary to our concurring colleague's assertion, seniority systems reward job experience and are plainly job-related.

than sex" implicitly refers to "any other *similar* factor other than sex." *See Circuit City*, 532 U.S. at 114–15, 121 S.Ct. 1302 (holding that the phrase "any other class of workers engaged in ... commerce," following the specific examples of seamen and railroad employees, includes only "transportation workers," because construing it to include all other workers "fails to give independent effect to the statute's enumeration of the specific categories of workers" that precede it).

Applying the *ejusdem generis* canon to the EPA's fourth exception, we consider the scope of the category implied by the three enumerated exceptions and "ask what category would come into the reasonable person's mind." Scalia & Garner at 208; *see also* Eskridge at 78. Here, the obvious category is job-relatedness. Because all of the enumerated exceptions are job-related, the general exception that follows—"any other factor other than sex"—is limited to job-related factors.

B.

As the Supreme Court did in *Corning Glass*, we also look to the EPA's history and purpose. 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223. Both confirm the scope of the Act's fourth exception.

The Supreme Court emphasized in *Corning Glass* that the EPA was intended to address "the fact that the wage structure of 'many segments of American industry [had] been based on an ancient but outmoded belief that a man, because of his role in society, should be paid more than a woman even though his duties are the same.' " *Id.* (quoting S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 1). The problem of wage discrimination was "overwhelmingly

apparent" to Congress when it passed the EPA in 1963. S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 3. Congress heard testimony that women in the workplace were no longer a novelty. One in three workers were women, yet sex-based wage discrimination remained overt and widely accepted. President's Comm'n on the Status of Women, *American Women*, at 27 (1963).[6] Among other things, Congress considered a survey of 1,900 employers that showed one in three used entirely separate pay scales for female employees who performed similar jobs to male employees.[7] Congress also considered that, in 1963, American women could expect to earn only about 60% of the wages paid to their male colleagues. *Id.*

The County's suggestion that the EPA's legislative history supports an expansive reading of the fourth exception is unavailing. The House Report provided several examples that it anticipated would qualify as exceptions to the equal pay mandate, and all were job related: shift differentials, differences based on time of day worked, hours of work, lifting or moving heavy

---

[6] *Available at* https://www.dol.gov/wb/American%20Women%20Report.pdf; *see also* Staff of H. Comm. on Educ. & Labor, 88th Cong., Legis. Hist. of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 4, 27 (Comm. Print 1963); *Equal Pay Act of 1963: Hearings on S. 882 and S. 910 Before the Subcomm. on Labor of the S. Comm. on Labor & Pub. Welfare*, 88th Cong. 13–14 (1963) (statement of Sen. Maurine B. Neuberger); *id.* at 16 (statement of W. Willard Wirtz, Sec'y of Labor).

[7] *See* 109 Cong. Rec. 8688 (1963) (statement of Rep. Edith Green); *Equal Pay Act of 1963: Hearings on S. 882 and S. 910 Before the Subcomm. on Labor of the S. Comm. on Labor & Pub. Welfare*, 88th Cong. 14 (1963) (statement of Sen. Maurine B. Neuberger).

objects, and differences based on experience, training, or ability. H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3 (1963); *see also* 109 Cong. Rec. 8683 (1963) (statement of Rep. Adam Powell) (rejecting "[t]he payment of wages on a basis other than that of the job performed"); *id.* at 8694 (statement of Rep. Edith Green) (speaking against a proposal to allow higher wages for heads of household with more dependents, because "[t]his [Act] is based on merit, on work that is performed, rather than on other factors"). The equal-pay-for-equal-work mandate would mean little if employers were free to justify paying an employee of one sex less than an employee of the opposite sex for reasons unrelated to their jobs. *See, e.g.*, Scalia & Garner at 20 ("The evident purpose of what a text seeks to achieve is an essential element of context that gives meaning to words."); *see also Dig. Realty Tr., Inc. v. Somers*, —— U.S. ——, 138 S. Ct. 767, 777, 200 L.Ed.2d 15 (2018) (explaining that the relevant statute's "purpose and design corroborate ... comprehension" of a specific provision).

C.

Other circuits agree that only job-related factors provide affirmative defenses to EPA claims. In *Aldrich v. Randolph Central School District*, the Second Circuit reasoned, "[w]ithout a job-relatedness requirement, the factor-other-than-sex defense would provide a gaping loophole in the statute through which many pretexts for discrimination would be sanctioned." 963 F.2d at 525; *see also Tomka v. Seiler Corp.*, 66 F.3d 1295, 1312 (2d Cir. 1995), *abrogated on other grounds by Burlington Indus., Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742, 118 S.Ct. 2257, 141 L.Ed.2d 633 (1998).

The Fourth and Tenth Circuits followed the Second Circuit's lead. Both have ruled that pay classification systems must be rooted in legitimate differences in responsibilities or qualifications for specific jobs. *See Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 123 ("[W]hile MIA uses a facially gender-neutral compensation system, MIA still must present evidence that the *job-related distinctions* underlying the salary plan ... *in fact* motivated MIA to place the claimants and the comparators on different steps of the pay scale at different starting salaries." (first emphasis added)); *Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1198; *see also Balmer v. HCA, Inc.*, 423 F.3d 606, 612 (6th Cir. 2005), *abrogated on other grounds by Fox v. Vice*, 563 U.S. 826, 131 S.Ct. 2205, 180 L.Ed.2d 45 (2011).

Only the Seventh Circuit has held that the scope of the fourth exception "embraces an almost limitless number of factors, so long as they do not involve sex." *Fallon v. Illinois*, 882 F.2d 1206, 1211 (7th Cir. 1989). The Seventh Circuit has not required that those factors be related "to the requirements of the particular position in question." *Id.* The Seventh Circuit's opinion is an outlier, and we cannot reconcile it with either well-settled rules of statutory construction or the "broadly remedial" purpose of the EPA. *See Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

The Eighth Circuit has not established a bright-line rule defining factors other than sex. It requires a case-by-case analysis of the proffered factor to "preserve[ ] the business freedoms Congress intended to protect." *Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 720 (8th Cir. 2003). We are not persuaded to follow this approach because "business freedoms" is broad enough to accommodate

circumstances that run afoul of the Supreme Court's admonition in *Corning Glass* that market forces cannot justify unequal pay for comparable work.

A significant majority of the circuit courts agree that the scope of the EPA's fourth exception is not unlimited. Rather, the text of the Act and canons of construction, and the EPA's history and clear purpose, all point to the conclusion that the fourth exception is limited to job-related factors only.

D.

Having determined that the fourth affirmative defense encompasses only job-related factors other than sex, we next consider whether prior pay qualifies as a job-related factor that can defeat a prima facie EPA claim. The answer to this question is compelled by the EPA's narrow focus on the purest form of sex-based wage discrimination and the statute's two-step framework. Prior pay—pay received for a different job—is necessarily not a factor related to the job for which an EPA plaintiff must demonstrate unequal pay for equal work.

In 1963, Congress not only knew that wages earned by America's workforce were infused with the legacy of sex discrimination, that legacy motivated Congress to act. *See, e.g.*, S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 2–3. The Assistant Secretary of Labor testified that women on average earned only about 59% of what their male colleagues earned,[8] but Congress recognized that

---

[8] *Equal Pay Act of 1963: Hearings on S. 882 and S. 910 Before the Subcomm. on Labor of the S. Comm. on Labor & Pub. Welfare*, 88th Cong. 68 (1963) (statement of Esther Peterson, Assistant Sec'y of Labor).

America's pay gap was not entirely attributable to sex-based wage discrimination. The gap was also due to circumstances that caused women to be less prepared to enter the workforce, such as fewer opportunities for training, education, skills development, and experience. *See Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876. Though Congress knew the cause of America's earnings gap was multi-factorial, it kept its solution simple.[9] The EPA did not raise women's wages nor create remedial education or training opportunities. The Act's limited goal was to eliminate only the purest form of sex-based wage discrimination: paying women less *because* they are women.

The precise and focused goal of the EPA is evidenced by the exceptions built into it that expressly allow employers to pay different wages to employees of the opposite sex if the differences are caused by job-related factors other than sex. H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3. As the Supreme Court explained in *County of Washington v. Gunther*, the EPA's fourth exception was intended "to confine the application of the Act to wage differentials attributable to sex discrimination." 452 U.S. 161, 170, 101 S.Ct. 2242, 68 L.Ed.2d 751 (1981). The EPA's limited aim at just one of the many causes of the wage gap reinforces our conclusion that allowing prior pay to serve as an affirmative defense would undermine the Act's promise of equal pay for equal work. Our interpretation, that only job-related factors come within the "any other factor" rubric and do not

---

[9] *Equal Pay Act of 1963: Hearings on S. 882 and S. 910 Before the Subcomm. on Labor of the S. Comm. on Labor & Pub. Welfare*, 88th Cong. 68 (1963) (statement of Esther Peterson, Assistant Sec'y of Labor).

include prior pay, is consistent with the Supreme Court's guidance in *Corning Glass* that "[t]he Equal Pay Act is broadly remedial, and it should be construed and applied so as to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve." 417 U.S. at 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

The County argues that Rizo presumes the use of past wages perpetuates historical pay discrimination, and that Rizo impermissibly shifts the burden to the County to disprove the influence of wage discrimination on her prior pay. The County's argument reflects its confusion about the EPA's burden-shifting framework, which we have now clarified. We agree the EPA does not require employers to prove that the wages paid to their employees at prior jobs were unaffected by wage discrimination. But if called upon to defend against a prima facie showing, the EPA requires employers to demonstrate that only job-related factors, not sex, caused any wage disparities that exist between employees of the opposite sex who perform equal work. Accordingly, what the County considers to be an impermissible shift is actually the burden-shift *required* by the EPA's two-step framework. After Rizo established a prima facie showing, the County had the burden of proving that "sex provide[d] *no* part of the basis for the wage differential." *Balmer*, 423 F.3d at 612 (quoting *Timmer v. Mich. Dep't of Commerce*, 104 F.3d 833, 844 (6th Cir. 1997)) (emphasis in original); *see also Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 121 (citing *Stanziale*, 200 F.3d at 107–08); *Mickelson*, 460 F.3d at 1312.

We do not presume that any particular employee's prior wages were depressed as a result of sex

discrimination. But the history of pervasive wage discrimination in the American workforce prevents prior pay from satisfying the employer's burden to show that sex played no role in wage disparities between employees of the opposite sex. And allowing prior pay to serve as an affirmative defense would frustrate the EPA's purpose as well as its language and structure by perpetuating sex-based wage disparities.

We acknowledge that prior pay could be viewed as a *proxy* for job-related factors such as education, skills, or experience related to an employee's prior job, and that prior pay can be a *function* of factors related to an employee's prior job. But prior pay itself is not a factor related to the work an employee is currently performing, nor is it probative of whether sex played any role in establishing an employee's pay. Here, the County has not explained why or how prior pay is indicative of Rizo's ability to perform the job she was hired to do. An employer may counter a prima facie EPA claim by pointing to legitimate job-related factors, if they exist. Accordingly, using the heuristic of an employee's prior pay, rather than relying on job-related factors actually associated with an employee's present position, does not suffice to defeat an EPA claim.

We agree with Rizo and the EEOC that setting wages based on prior pay risks perpetuating the history of sex-based wage discrimination. The Supreme Court recognized as much in *Corning Glass*. There, the Court held that a sex-based pay disparity violated the EPA. 417 U.S. at 209–10, 94 S.Ct. 2223. After Corning Glass administered a uniform wage increase to the men and women who worked pursuant

to its prior discriminatory pay structure, Corning Glass argued that the continuing wage differential was due to a "factor other than sex" because it resulted from the prior disparity in the employees' base wages. *Id.* The Court ruled that Corning Glass's across-the-board wage increase did not remedy the EPA violation, it merely perpetuated the differential. *Id.*

Hopefully, we have moved past the days when employers maintained separate pay scales that explicitly condoned paying women less than men for comparable work, but the wage gap that so concerned Congress in 1963 has only narrowed, not closed. The wage gap persists across nearly all occupations and industries, regardless of education, experience, or job title.[10] In 2017, women on average earned 82% of men's earnings. *See* U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Rep. 1075, *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2017*, 1–2 (Aug. 2018).[11] These differences are even more pronounced among women of color. *Id.* at 3–4.[12]

---

[10] *See* U.S. Census Bureau, *Women's Earnings Lower in Most Occupations* (May 22, 2018), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/05/gender-pay-gap-in-finance-sales.html; *see also* Inst. for Women's Pol'y Res., *The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation 2018 and by Race and Ethnicity* (April 2, 2019) (citing U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey* (2018)), https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/C480_The-Gender-Wage-Gap-by- Occupation-2018-1.pdf.

[11] https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2017/pdf/ home.pdf.

[12] *See also* Nat'l Women's L. Ctr., *The Wage Gap: The Who, How, Why, and What to Do* (Sept. 2019) (citing U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey*, 2019 Ann. Soc. & Econ. Supp., Table PINC-05), https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-the-who-how-why-and-what-todo/.

Women of all races and ethnicities earn less than men of the same group, *id.* at 4, and economic literature suggests that even after accounting for certain observable characteristics—such as education and experience—an unexplained disparity largely persists. *See, e.g.*, Francine D. Blau & Lawrence M. Kahn, *The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations*, 55 J. Econ. Literature 789, 790, 852–55 (2017).

To the extent the present-day pay gap is the product of historical wage discrimination based on sex—rather than different pay due to unequal qualifications, effort, productivity, regional cost of living, or other factors other than sex—the gap is a continuation of the very discrimination Congress sought to end. In *Kouba*, we cautioned that the use of prior pay to defend against equal- pay violations "can easily be used to capitalize on the unfairly low salaries historically paid to women." 691 F.2d at 876. Other circuits have made the same observation. *See, e.g.*, *Taylor*, 321 F.3d at 718 (cautioning that prior pay may be used as "a means to perpetuate historically lower wages"); *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 955 (11th Cir. 1995) (stating that allowing prior pay as an affirmative defense "would swallow up the rule and inequality in pay among genders would be perpetuated."). We agree with *Kouba*'s early warning, and with the observations of our sister circuits.

The EPA's fourth exception allows employers to justify wage disparities between employees of the opposite sex based on any job-related factor other than sex. Because prior pay may carry with it the effects of sex-based pay discrimination, and because sex-based pay discrimination was the precise target of the EPA, an employer may not rely on prior pay to meet its

burden of showing that sex played no part in its pay decision. For purposes of the fourth exception, we conclude that the wage associated with an employee's prior job does not qualify as a factor other than sex that can defeat a prima facie EPA claim.

E.

Having reconsidered *Kouba*, we are persuaded that it must be overruled. *Kouba* recognized that allowing prior pay to serve as an affirmative defense to an EPA claim could perpetuate wage discrimination, but it ultimately held that the EPA "does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary," so long as employers considered prior pay reasonably to advance an acceptable business reason. 691 F.2d at 876–77, 878. *Kouba*'s holding that prior pay in combination with other factors may serve as an affirmative defense is inconsistent with the EPA's text, purpose, and burden-shifting framework for the same reasons the use of prior pay alone is inconsistent with the EPA's text, purpose, and burden-shifting framework. At best, requiring the use of other factors in combination with prior pay waters down the influence of whatever historical wage discrimination remains.

Kouba's consideration of whether the employer used prior pay reasonably is also in tension with the EPA's strict liability framework, in which intent to discriminate plays no role. 691 F.2d at 876. As the EEOC's brief diplomatically puts it, our case law "could be read to blur the line" between the *McDonnell Douglas* three-step test for Title VII claims and the two-step test applicable to the EPA. *See Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876, 878; *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446; *Stanley*,

178 F.3d at 1076. Having recognized these errors, we have an obligation to correct our case law.

Finally, *Kouba*'s reliance on "business reasons" and "business policy," 691 F.2d at 876, provides little guidance to district courts, and cannot be squared with the Supreme Court's rejection of the market force theory. *See Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223. "Business reasons" is a category so capacious that it can accommodate factors entirely unrelated to the work employees actually perform. The phrase sweeps in what *Corning Glass* described as business decisions that "may be understandable as a matter of economics," but which nonetheless "became illegal once Congress enacted into law the principle of equal pay for equal work." *Id.* For these reasons, we narrow our definition of the scope of the fourth exception to job-related factors other than sex and clarify that prior pay, alone or in combination with other factors, is not one of them.[13]

Despite our concurring colleagues' agreement that prior pay alone cannot serve as an affirmative defense to a prima facie EPA claim, they abruptly shift gears when it comes to consideration of prior pay in combination with other factors. For the concurring

---

[13] Some circuits have nominally adopted *Kouba*'s "business-related" rule, but even these circuits clearly examine the specific requirements of the job at issue. *See Aldrich*, 963 F.2d at 525 (explaining that the fourth affirmative defense imposes a "job-relatedness requirement" and that employers must prove that the pay differential is "rooted in legitimate business-related differences in work responsibilities and qualifications *for the particular positions at issue*" (emphasis added)); *see also Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 123 (following *Aldrich*); *Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1198 (same).

members of our panel, prior pay—a factor they agree risks perpetuating baked-in sex discrimination—becomes palatable if it is considered along with other factors. Yet they never explain why this is so.

Some case law from other circuits suggests that prior pay may serve as an affirmative defense if it is considered in combination with other factors, but these cases uniformly rely on those other factors to excuse wage differentials. *See, e.g.*, *Irby*, 44 F.3d at 955, 957 (allowing "prior salary *and* experience" as an affirmative defense, but relying on the co-employee's "[u]nique, long-term experience as an investigator" to justify a pay difference under the EPA's "any other factor other than sex" exception); *Balmer*, 423 F.3d at 612–13 (allowing consideration of prior pay along with prior relevant work experience because "[a] wage differential based on education or experience is a factor other than sex for purposes of the Equal Pay Act" and "*most importantly*, the ultimate decision maker at [the employer] determined that [the male employee] had greater relevant industry experience than Plaintiff." (emphasis added)); *see also Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1199 (approving an EPA defense based on an employee's prior salary, qualifications, *and* experience). None of these cases suggests that the use of prior pay is acceptable, so long as it is sufficiently diluted by other considerations.

Citing these cases, our concurring colleagues insist that prior pay is a valid affirmative defense if considered with other factors. But they overlook that using the proxy of prior pay, rather than relying on the factors actually related to the job being performed, adds nothing to the employer's defense because any legitimate job-related factors can themselves defeat a

prima facie EPA showing. Nor is it correct to say that we deepen a circuit split. Only the Seventh Circuit has conclusively relied on prior pay as an affirmative defense to a prima facie EPA claim.[14] *Wernsing*, 427 F.3d at 469. Following *Kouba*, the Sixth, Tenth, and Eleventh Circuits articulated rules purporting to allow prior pay to serve as an affirmative defense if considered with other factors, but they have substantively relied on the "other factors" to justify the challenged pay differentials.[15]

Our holding prevents employers from relying on prior pay to defeat EPA claims, but the EPA does not prevent employers from considering prior pay for other purposes. For example, it is not unusual for employers and prospective employees to discuss prior pay in the course of negotiating job offers, and the EPA does not

---

[14] The Fourth Circuit has suggested it may share this view, but only in dicta. *See Spencer v. Virginia State Univ.*, 919 F.3d 199, 206 (4th Cir. 2019).

[15] Our concurring colleagues imply that the EEOC advocates a rule that allows consideration of prior pay along with other factors. They rely on a statement from the EEOC Compliance Manual that prior pay may succeed as an affirmative defense when "other factors [are] also considered." *See* U.S. Equal Emp't Opportunity Comm'n, Compliance Manual § 10-IV(F)(2)(g) (2000). This merely reflects the EEOC's understanding of current case law. *See id.* § 10-II. Setting aside the Supreme Court's direction that the Compliance Manual is not entitled to deference, *Ledbetter*, 550 U.S. at 642 n.11, 127 S.Ct. 2162, the Compliance Manual's sole support for this statement is its citation to our opinion in *Kouba* and the Eleventh Circuit's decision in *Irby*. EEOC Compliance Manual § 10-IV(F)(2)(g). But the EEOC urged us to take this case en banc to reconsider *Kouba*, which we did, and for the reasons we explain here, we conclude that neither *Kouba* nor *Irby* can be reconciled with Supreme Court precedent.

prohibit this practice.[16] Certainly, our opinion does not prohibit this practice. But whatever factors an employer considers, if called upon to defend against a prima facie showing of sex-based wage discrimination, the employer must demonstrate that any wage differential was in fact justified by job-related factors other than sex. Prior pay, alone or in combination with other factors, cannot serve as a defense.

The concurring members of our panel repeatedly incant that our opinion prohibits any consideration of prior pay. But this is just not so. The disconnect appears to be the result of overlooking the difference between *considering prior pay when setting a salary*—which the EPA does not address, much less prohibit—and *relying on prior pay to defend an EPA violation*. Our statement that "prior pay, alone or in combination with other factors, is not [a job-related factor]" addresses the use of prior pay as an affirmative defense, not the consideration of prior pay to make a competitive job offer, to negotiate higher pay, or to set a salary. And there is no basis for concern that our opinion will prevent employers from considering prior pay when employees disclose it.

We recognize there may seem to be tension between allowing employers to consider prior salary in setting wages on the one hand, and requiring that they defend an EPA claim without relying on prior pay on the other. But this is inherent in the terms of the EPA itself. The statute places no limit on the factors an employer may consider in setting employees' wages,

---

[16] In this way, the EPA is less stringent than California's pay privacy law, which does not allow employers to inquire about prior pay. *See* Cal. Lab. Code § 432.3.

but it places on employers the burden of demonstrating that sex played no role in causing wage differentials. To meet this burden, employers may rely on any bona fide job-related factor other than sex. But relying on the heuristic of prior pay, rather than the actual factors associated with employees' current work, risks perpetuating historical sex discrimination.

F.

Applying the rule that only job-related factors qualify under the EPA's fourth affirmative defense and that prior pay is not one of them, resolution of Rizo's case is straightforward. The district court ruled that Rizo satisfied her prima facie burden. Fresno County relied on Rizo's prior pay to justify paying her less than male colleagues who performed the same work. For the reasons we have explained, Rizo's prior wages do not qualify as "any other factor other than sex," and the County cannot use this factor to defeat Rizo's prima facie case. The County cites no other reason for paying Rizo less. We therefore affirm the district court's order denying Fresno County's motion for summary judgment and remand for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

AFFIRMED.

McKEOWN, Circuit Judge, with whom Judge TALLMAN and Judge MURGUIA, Circuit Judges, join, concurring:

The majority embraces a rule not adopted by any other circuit—prior salary may never be used, even in combination with other factors, as a defense under the Equal Pay Act. The circuits that have considered this important issue have either outright rejected the majority's approach or declined to adopt it. I see no reason to deepen the circuit split. What's more, the majority's position is at odds with the view of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC"), the agency charged with administering the Act. And, perhaps most troubling, the majority fails to account for the realities of today's dynamic workforce, choosing instead to view the workplace in a vacuum. In doing so, it betrays the promise of equal pay for equal work and disadvantages workers regardless of gender identity.

I agree with much of the majority opinion—particularly the observation that past salary can reflect historical sex discrimination. For decade after decade, gender discrimination has been baked into our pay scales, with the result that women still earn only 80 percent of what men make. As the majority notes, this pay gap is "even more pronounced among women of color." Unfortunately, women employed in certain sectors face an even larger gap. This disparity is exacerbated when a woman is paid less than a man for a comparable job solely because she earned less at her last job. The Equal Pay Act prohibits precisely this kind of "piling on," whereby women can never overcome the historical inequality.

I welcome the day when this would no longer be so because women have achieved parity in the workplace. But the majority goes too far in holding that any consideration of prior pay is "inconsistent" with the Equal Pay Act, even when it is assessed alongside other job-related factors such as experience, education, past performance, and training. This declaration may in fact disadvantage job applicants, whether female, male, or non-binary. For this reason, I concur in the result but not in the majority's rationale. In my view, prior salary alone is not a defense to unequal pay for equal work. If an employer's only justification for paying men and women unequally is that the men had higher prior salaries, odds are that the one-and-only "factor" causing the difference is sex. However, employers do not necessarily violate the Equal Pay Act when they consider prior salary among other factors when setting initial wages. As always, the employer has the burden to show that any pay differential is based on a valid factor other than sex.

To be sure, the majority correctly decides the only issue squarely before the court: whether the Fresno County Office of Education was permitted to base Aileen Rizo's starting salary solely on her prior salary. The answer is no. But regrettably, the majority goes further and effectively bars any consideration of prior salary in setting a salary. Not only does Rizo's case not present this issue, but this approach is unsupported by the statute, is unrealistic, and may work to applicants' disadvantage.

Rizo's case is an easy one. After she was hired as a math consultant, she learned that male colleagues in the same job were being hired at a higher salary. The

only rationale offered by the County was that Rizo's salary was lower at a prior job. In effect, the County "was still taking advantage of the availability of female labor to fill its [position] at a differentially low wage rate not justified by any factor other than sex"—a practice long held unlawful. *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223, 41 L.Ed.2d 1 (1974); *see Glenn v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567, 1570 (11th Cir. 1988) ("[T]he argument that supply and demand dictates that women *qua* women may be paid less is exactly the kind of evil that the [Equal Pay] Act was designed to eliminate, and has been rejected."); *Drum v. Leeson Elec. Corp.*, 565 F.3d 1071, 1073 (8th Cir. 2009) (It is "prohibited" to rely on the " 'market force theory' to justify lower wages for female employees simply because the market might bear such wages").

This scenario provides a textbook violation of the "equal pay for equal work" mantra of the Equal Pay Act. Prior salary level created the only differential between Rizo and her male colleagues. In setting her initial wage, the County did not, for example, consider Rizo's two advanced degrees or her prior experience. This historical imbalance entrenched unequal pay for equal work based on sex—end of story. The County cannot mount a defense on past salary alone.

Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act to root out historical sex discrimination, declaring it the "policy" of the Act "to correct the conditions" of "wage differentials based on sex." Pub. L. No. 88-38, 77 Stat. 56 (1963). At the signing ceremony, President John F. Kennedy called the Act "a first step" in "achiev[ing] full equality of economic opportunity—for the average woman worker earns only 60 percent of the average

wage for men." President John F. Kennedy, Remarks Upon Signing the Equal Pay Act (June 10, 1963), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9267. The unqualified goal of the statute was to "eliminate wage discrimination based upon sex." H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 1 (1963). Sadly, that gap remains today. *See* Nat'l P'ship For Women & Families, America's Women And The Wage Gap 1 (2017), https://goo.gl/SLEcd8.

Given the stated goal of the Equal Pay Act to erase the gender wage gap, it beggars belief that Congress intended for historical pay discrepancies like Rizo's to justify pay inequity. *See Corning*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 ("Congress' purpose in enacting the Equal Pay Act was to remedy ... [an] endemic problem of employment discrimination ... based on an ancient but outmoded belief that a man ... should be paid more than a woman even though his duties are the same."). Congress recently noted that the existence of gender-based pay disparities "has been spread and perpetuated" since the passage of the Act and "many women continue to earn significantly lower than men for equal work." H.R. Rep. No. 110-783, at 1–2 (2008). "In many instances, the pay disparities can only be due to continued intentional discrimination *or the lingering effects of past discrimination." Id.* (emphasis added). Because past pay can reflect the very discrimination Congress sought to eradicate in the statute, allowing employers to defend unequal pay for equal work on that basis alone risks perpetuating unlawful inequity. *C.f. Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 550 U.S. 618, 647, 127 S.Ct. 2162, 167 L.Ed.2d 982 (2007) (Ginsburg, J., dissenting), *dissenting position adopted by legislative action* (Jan. 29, 2009) ("Paychecks perpetuating past

discrimination ... are actionable ... because they discriminate anew each time they issue."). That danger is best avoided by construing the Equal Pay Act "to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve" and rejecting prior salary as its own "factor other than sex" defense. *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

Yet I differ with the majority in one key respect. Merely because prior pay is unavailable as a standalone defense does not mean that employers should be barred from using past pay as a factor in setting an initial salary. Contrary to the majority's assertion, it is wholly consistent to forbid employers from baldly asserting prior salary as a defense—without determining whether it accurately measures experience, education, training or other lawful factors not based on sex—but to permit consideration of prior salary along with those valid factors. Using prior salary along with valid job-related factors such as education, past performance and training may provide a lawful benchmark for starting salary in appropriate cases. But "wage differentials based *solely* on the sex of the employee are an unfair labor standard." H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3 (emphasis added). This interpretation of the statute still places the burden on the employer to justify that salary is determined on the basis of "any other factor other than sex." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). And, as Congress observed, "there are many factors which may be used to measure the relationships between jobs and which establish a valid basis for a difference in pay." H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3 (1963).

My views align with those of the EEOC and most of our sister circuits that have addressed the question. The EEOC's Compliance Manual states:

> [A]n employer may consider prior salary as part of a mix of factors—as, for example, where the employer also considers education and experience and concludes that the employee's prior salary accurately reflects ability, based on job-related qualifications. But because "prior salaries of job candidates can reflect sex-based compensation discrimination," "[p]rior salary cannot, by itself, justify a compensation disparity."

EEOC Compliance Manual, Compensation Discrimination § 10-IV.F.2.g (Dec. 5, 2000), *available at* https://www.eeoc.gov/ policy/docs/compensation. html. The EEOC's pragmatic approach accounts for realities in the workplace while preserving the promise of equal pay for equal work. Because many job-related factors, such as education and experience, are not gender-based and "applicants rarely have 'identical education and experience'... [i]f an employer sincerely weighs such factors with prior salary, there is no reason to think the resulting pay decisions would perpetuate the gender pay gap."

The Tenth and Eleventh Circuits reached the same conclusion, holding that prior pay *alone* cannot justify a compensation disparity. *See Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1199 (10th Cir. 2015) (an employer may decide to pay an elevated salary to an applicant who rejects a lower offer, but the Act "precludes an employer from relying solely upon a prior salary to justify pay disparity"); *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 955

(11th Cir. 1995) ("This court has not held that prior salary can never be used by an employer to establish pay, just that such a justification cannot solely carry the affirmative defense."). The Eighth Circuit adopted a similar approach, permitting the use of prior salary as a defense, but "carefully examin[ing] the record to ensure that an employer does not rely on the prohibited 'market force theory' to justify lower wages" for women based solely on sex. *Drum*, 565 F.3d at 1073. The Second Circuit likewise allows the prior-salary defense, but places the burden on an employer to prove that a "bona fide business-related reason exists" for a wage differential—*i.e.*, one that is "rooted in legitimate business- related differences in work responsibilities and qualifications for the particular positions at issue." *Aldrich v. Randolph Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 963 F.2d 520, 525–26 (1992). The more nuanced holding adopted by our sister circuits better accords with common sense and the statutory text. The Equal Pay Act provides an affirmative defense for "*any* other factor other than sex." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1) (emphasis added).

Meanwhile, the Fourth and Seventh Circuits have veered off course, holding that prior salary is *always* a "factor other than sex." *See Spencer v. Virginia State Univ.*, 919 F.3d 199, 206 (4th Cir. 2019); *Wernsing v. Dep't of Human Servs., State of Ill.*, 427 F.3d 466, 468–70 (7th Cir. 2005). But this conclusion—that a "factor other than sex" need not be "related to the requirements of the particular position" or even "business-related"—contravenes the Act's purpose of ensuring women and men earn equal pay for equal work. *Wernsing*, 427 F.3d. at 470. After all, inherent in the Act is an understanding that compensation

should mirror one's "skill, effort, and responsibility." *See Corning*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1)); *see also Glenn*, 841 F.2d at 1571. Because we know that historical sex discrimination persists, it cannot be that prior salary always reflects a factor other than sex. I fear, however, that the majority makes the same categorical error as the Fourth and Seventh Circuits, but in the opposite direction: it announces that prior salary is *never* a "factor other than sex." By forbidding consideration of prior salary altogether, the majority extends the scope of the statute and risks imposing Equal Pay Act liability on employers for using prior salary as *any* part of the calculus in making wage-setting decisions. That, too, is a drastic holding, particularly because companies and institutions often consider prior salary in making offers to lure away top talent from their competitors or to attract employees with specific skills. In unpacking what goes into the calculation, it may well be that past salary accurately gauges a prospective employee's "skill, effort, and responsibility," as the Equal Pay Act envisions—in addition to her education, training, and past performance—and a new employer wants to exceed that benchmark.

The Equal Pay Act should not be an impediment for employees seeking a brighter future and a higher salary at a new job. *See generally* Orly Lobel, Talent Wants to Be Free 49–75 (Yale Univ. Press 2013) (concluding that employee mobility between competitors promotes innovation and job growth); Cade Metz, *Tech Giants Are Paying Huge Salaries for Scarce A.I. Talent*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 23, 2017, at B1

(noting that employers pay a premium to hire top engineering talent).

On that front, states and cities have begun passing statutes[1] that prohibit employers from asking employees about their prior salaries.[2] These laws represent creative efforts to narrow the gender wage gap. But they also provide important exemptions for employees who wish to disclose prior salaries as part of a salary negotiation. *See, e.g.*, Cal. Labor Code § 432.3(g); Del. Code Ann. Tit. 19, § 709B(d).

The majority's holding may reach beyond these state statutes by making it a violation of federal antidiscrimination law to consider prior salary, even when an employee chooses to provide this information as a bargaining chip for higher wages. I am concerned about chilling such voluntary discussions. The majority handcuffs employers from relying on past salary information —but in doing so, equally shackles women from using prior salary in their favor. Indeed, the result may disadvantage rather than advantage women.

To avoid these consequences, the majority endeavors to limit its decision by announcing that

---

[1] *See, e.g.*, Cal. Labor Code § 432.3; Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 659A.357; San Francisco Ordinance 142-17 (2017); Del. Code Ann. tit. 19, § 709B (2017); Mass. Acts ch. 177 (2016); N.Y.C. Local Law No. 67 (2017).

[2] A bill was introduced in Congress to enact a federal prohibition on "requiring" or "requesting" that prospective employees disclose previous wages or salary history. *See* H.R. 2418, 115th Cong. (2017). Like its state counterparts, this bill does not seek to outlaw salary negotiations initiated by an employee.

neither its holding nor the Equal Pay Act prevents employers from "consider[ing] prior pay for other purposes." But the majority's vague disclaimer hardly dilutes the practical effects of the holding's broad sweep. In the same breath, the majority states that its holding both "prevents employers from relying on prior pay to defeat EPA claims" and that it does not reach the "discuss[ion of] prior pay in the course of negotiating job offers." But an Equal Pay Act claim could include violations arising from negotiated salaries. And, because the majority bars the use of prior salary to set initial wages under the Act, it has left little daylight for arguing that negotiated starting salaries should be treated differently. In the real world, an employer might consider prior salary—disclosed voluntarily by an employee during negotiations—to offer a pay bump above that prior salary. Permitting prior pay in setting salary but not as an affirmative defense to the Equal Pay Act results in an indefensible contradiction. The "tension" highlighted by the majority is precisely the reason that prior pay cannot be relegated to the dust bin.

The majority states that other circuits merely "suggest[ ] that prior pay may serve as an affirmative defense if it is considered in combination with other factors." But our sister circuits do much more. They affirmatively permit the use of prior salary in wage setting so long as it is considered in tandem with a permissible job-related factor, a far cry from concluding that watered down discrimination is acceptable. *See Irby*, 44 F.3d at 954 ("This court has not held that prior salary can never be used by an employer to establish pay, just that such a justification cannot *solely* carry the affirmative defense.")

(emphasis added); *Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1198–99 (holding that the EPA precludes an employer from relying solely upon a prior salary for justification of a pay disparity). The majority also avoids grappling with the EEOC's guidance, which permits employers to consider prior salary, so long as it is considered as part of a mix of permissible factors such as education or experience.

I agree with the majority that the three-step *McDonnell Douglas* test does not apply to Equal Pay Act claims. However, neither *Corning* nor the facts of this case compel the majority to go so far as to conclude that employers may not rely on prior pay in combination with other factors as an affirmative defense.

The majority's rule does not just function as a one-way ratchet to protect women from discrimination. Instead, based on a myopic view of the workplace, it creates a regime that prevents all employees from seeking fair compensation, regardless of gender. This is particularly true when an employee's total salary includes incentive, performance, or commission-based pay. Imagine a stockbroker who receives 50 percent of his salary as a bonus for stellar performance, or a manager who, over five years, receives periodic raises based on her extraordinary contributions and performance. In both situations, past pay serves as a surrogate for achievement and helps the employees quantify their worth to potential employers. Excluding reliance on salary when it is considered with other job-related factors makes no sense.

The majority recognizes that legitimate, job-related factors such as a prospective employee's "education,

skills, or experience" operate as affirmative defenses. But the majority nonetheless renders those valid, job-related factors nugatory when an employer also considers prior salary. That is a puzzling outcome that does not square with the statute, common sense, the contemporary workplace, the EEOC, or other circuits.

For these reasons, I concur only in the result.

CALLAHAN, Circuit Judge, with whom TALLMAN and BEA, Circuit Judges, join, concurring:

We all agree that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work. Indeed, we agree that the purpose of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was to change "should receive equal pay" to "must receive equal pay." However, I write separately because in holding that "wages associated with an employee's prior job" can never be considered as a factor in determining pay under 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1)(iv), the majority fails to appreciate Supreme Court precedent and creates an amorphous and unnecessary new standard for interpreting that subsection, which ignores the realities and dynamic nature of business. In doing so, the majority may hinder rather than promote equal pay for equal work.

I

As required by the Equal Pay Act, Rizo made a prima facie case of pay discrimination by showing that (1) she performed substantially equal work to that of her male colleagues; (2) the work conditions were basically the same; and (3) the male employees were paid more. *See Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1196 (10th Cir. 2015).

The County does not contest the prima facie case but argues that Rizo's salary was exempt from Equal Pay Act coverage under the fourth exception in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). Subsection (d)(1) reads:

> No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate, within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in

> such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions, except where such payment is made pursuant to (i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex.

We agree that this suit turns on our interpretation of the fourth exception in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1): "a differential based on any other factor other than sex."

II

"The Equal Pay Act is broadly remedial and it should be construed and applied so as to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve." *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223, 41 L.Ed.2d 1 (1974). The majority struggles mightily and unnecessarily to couple the fourth exception—despite its clear language—so closely with the other three exceptions that it loses independent meaning.

The majority suggests that the first three exceptions are all "job-related." This is not an unreasonable observation, but it does not support creating a definition of "job-related" that includes "a seniority system" but excludes "prior salary." Indeed, the sole purpose of the majority's parsing of the statute appears to be to exclude "prior salary" from its common sense inclusion in subsection (iv)—"a differential based on any other factor other than sex."

In its approach, the majority conveniently overlooks the differences within the three specific exceptions. While merit systems and measuring earnings by quantity and quality of production are specifically job-related, that is not true of seniority systems, which are often unrelated to performance. Indeed, at the time of the passage of the Equal Pay Act, if not today, seniority systems accounted for a fair amount of pay inequality.[1]

The majority's insistence that the fourth exception is limited to its narrow definition of "job-related" is therefore flawed because the term "job-related" is a poor descriptor of the prior three exceptions. And the majority's reliance on *noscitur a sociis* and *ejusdem generis* to define the fourth exception as encompassing only "job-related" factors is also incorrect. The Supreme Court has called the fourth exception a "general catchall provision," *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223, that "was designed differently, to confine the application of the Act to wage differentials attributable to sex discrimination," *Washington County v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161, 170, 101 S.Ct. 2242, 68 L.Ed.2d 751 (1981). The canons of statutory interpretation that the majority employs are of no use where a catchall provision is meant to contrast with specific exceptions, not reflect them. The *Gunther* Court explained that Equal Pay Act

---

[1] For example, one-quarter of the complaints filed in the year after the passage of the Equal Pay Act concerned complaints by women who were excluded from jobs because of seniority rules or because men were preferred over women after layoffs. Vicki Lens, *Supreme Court Narratives on Equality and Gender Discrimination in Employment: 1971–2002*, 10 Cardozo Women's L.J. 501, 507 (2004).

litigation "has been structured to permit employers to defend against charges of discrimination where their pay differentials are based on a bona fide use of 'other factors other than sex.'" *Id.* The Court cautioned that courts and administrative agencies "were not permitted to substitute their judgment for the judgment of the employer ... so long as it does not discriminate on the basis of sex." *Id.* at 171, 101 S.Ct. 2242. Thus, the standard is not whether a factor is "job-related," but whether regardless of its "job-relatedness," the factor promotes or perpetuates gender discrimination.

This conclusion is further supported by a footnote in *Gunther*, which states:

> The legislative history of the Equal Pay Act was examined by this Court in *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 198–201 [94 S.Ct. 2223, 41 L.Ed.2d 1] (1974). The Court observed that earlier versions of the Equal Pay bill were amended to define equal work and to add the fourth affirmative defense because of a concern that bona fide job-evaluation systems used by American businesses would otherwise be disrupted. *Id.*, at 199–201 [94 S.Ct. 2223]. This concern is evident in the remarks of many legislators. Representative Griffin, for example, explained that the fourth affirmative defense is a "broad principle," which "makes clear and explicitly states that a differential based on any factor or factors other than sex would not violate this legislation." 109 Cong. Rec. 9203 (1963).

Id. at 170 n.11, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (parallel citations omitted).

III

I agree that, based on the history of pay discrimination and the broad purpose of the Equal Pay Act, prior salary by itself does not qualify as a "factor other than sex." As the Eleventh Circuit has noted, "if prior salary alone were a justification, the exception would swallow up the rule and inequality in pay among genders would be perpetuated." *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 955 (11th Cir. 1995). However, the Eleventh Circuit continued:

> an Equal Pay Act defendant may successfully raise the affirmative defense of "any other factor other than sex" if he proves that he relied on prior salary *and* experience in setting a "new" employee's salary. While an employer may not overcome the burden of proof on the affirmative defense of relying on "any other factor other than sex" by resting on prior pay alone, as the district court correctly found, there is no prohibition on utilizing prior pay as part of a mixed-motive, such as prior pay *and* more experience. This court has not held that prior salary can never be used by an employer to establish pay, just that such a justification cannot solely carry the affirmative defense.

Id.

Indeed, our Court has previously suggested that prior pay may be considered among "other available predictors of the new employee's performance." *Kouba v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 691 F.2d 873, 878 (9th Cir. 1982). And there is general agreement in our sister circuits that there is "no prohibition on utilizing prior pay as part of a mixed-motive." *Irby*, 44 F.3d at 955. The

Tenth Circuit has held that "an individual's former salary can be considered in determining whether pay disparity is based on a factor other than sex," but that "the EPA 'precludes an employer from relying solely upon a prior salary to justify pay disparity.' " *Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1199 (citing *Angove v. Williams–Sonoma, Inc.*, 70 Fed. App'x. 500, 508 (10th Cir. 2003) (unpublished)). The Sixth Circuit is basically in agreement. *See EEOC v. J.C. Penney Co. Inc.*, 843 F.2d 249, 253 (6th Cir. 1988) (holding that "the legitimate business reason standard is the appropriate benchmark against which to measure the 'factor other than sex' defense"). The Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Circuits prefer even broader definitions for "factor other than sex." *See Spencer v. Virginia State University*, 919 F.3d 199, 206–07 (4th Cir. 2019) (concluding that a program whereby faculty are paid 9/12ths of their previous administrator salary provided a "non-sex-based explanation for the pay disparity"); *Covington v. S. Ill. Univ.*, 816 F.2d 317, 321–22 (7th Cir. 1987) (holding that the EPA does not preclude "an employer from carrying out a policy which, although not based on employee performance, has in no way been shown to undermine the goals of the EPA"); *Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 720 (8th Cir. 2003) (stating that "a case-by-case analysis of reliance on prior salary or salary retention policies with careful attention to alleged gender-based practices preserves the business freedoms Congress intended to protect when it adopted the catch-all 'factor other than sex' affirmative defense").

Contrary to the majority's suggestion, the Second Circuit has not adopted its narrow definition of "job-related." In *Aldrich v. Randolph Central School*

District, 963 F.2d 520, 525 (2d Cir. 1992), the Second Circuit did state that "[w]ithout a job- relatedness requirement, the factor-other-than-sex defense would provide a gaping loophole in the statute through which many pretexts for discrimination would be sanctioned," but it further held that "an employer bears the burden of proving that a bona fide business-related reason exists for using the gender-neutral factor that results in a wage differential in order to establish the factor-other-than-sex defense." *Id.* at 526. In *Tomka v. Seiler Corp.*, 66 F.3d 1295, 1312 (2d Cir. 1995), *abrogated on other grounds by Burlington Indus. Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U.S. 742, 118 S.Ct. 2257, 141 L.Ed.2d 633 (1998), the Second Circuit, addressing a claim that higher salary resulted from a male employee's over ten years of experience, stated that while the experience might explain the discrepancy, the employer "has the burden of persuasion to show both that it based [the male employee's] higher salary on this factor and that experience is a job-related qualification for the position in question." *Id.* In holding that the employer has the burden, the court implicitly recognized that prior salary can be job related and thus can come within the fourth exception. *See also Belfi v. Prendergast*, 191 F.3d 129, 136 (2d Cir. 1999) (noting that "to successfully establish the 'factor other than sex' defense, an employer must also demonstrate that it had a legitimate business reason for implementing the gender-neutral factor that brought about the wage differential").

IV

There is no need for the majority's approach to the fourth exception, which the Supreme Court has noted was intended to be broad. Rather, while a pay system

that relies exclusively on prior salary is conclusively presumed to be gender-based—to perpetuate gender-based inequality—a pay system that uses prior pay as one of several factors deserves to be considered on its own merits. When a plaintiff makes a prima facie case of pay inequality based on gender, the burden of showing that the difference is not based on gender shifts to the employer. In other words, the prima facie case creates a presumption that the pay inequality arising from the employer's pay system is gender-based and hence is not a "factor other than sex." In *Corning Glass*, the Supreme Court explained that the Equal Pay Act's

> structure and history also suggest that once the Secretary has carried his burden of showing that the employer pays workers of one sex more than workers of the opposite sex for equal work, the burden shifts to the employer to show that the differential is justified under one of the Act's four exceptions.

Corning Glass, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223; *see also Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 445–46 (9th Cir. 1986) (stating that once the plaintiff establishes a prima facie case, "the burden of persuasion shifts to the employer to show that the wage disparity is permitted by one of the four statutory exceptions to the Equal Pay Act").

There is no need or justification for holding that an employer could, as a matter of law, justify a differential in salary under one of the first three exceptions, but not the fourth exception. Accordingly, I agree with our sister circuits, that when salary is established based on a multi-factor salary system that

includes prior salary, the presumption that the system is based on gender is rebuttable.[2] Critically, as noted, the burden is on the employer to show that the use of prior salary as part of a multi-factor salary system does not reflect, perpetuate, or in any way encourage gender discrimination.

This is also the position of the EEOC, the agency charged with enforcing the EPA. In its amicus brief, the EEOC states that in its view because prior salaries "can reflect sex-based compensation discrimination," a prior salary "cannot by itself justify a compensation disparity," but "an employer may consider prior salary as part of a mix of factors."[3] This approach to a multi-factor formula for pay accords with the purpose of the Equal Pay Act and the Supreme Court's approach to

---

[2] I agree with the majority that the market force theory for paying women less was discredited by the Supreme Court in *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223, and that the notion that an employer may pay women less because women allegedly cost more to employ than men was discredited in *City of Los Angeles, Department of Water & Power v. Manhart*, 435 U.S. 702, 98 S.Ct. 1370, 55 L.Ed.2d 657 (1978).

[3] In EEOC Notice Number 915.002 (Oct. 29, 1997), "Enforcement Guidance on Sex Discrimination in the Compensation of Sports Coaches in Educational Institutions," the EEOC advised:

> Thus, if the employer asserts prior salary as a factor other than sex, evidence should be obtained as to whether the employer: 1) consulted with the employee's previous employer to determine the basis for the employee's starting and final salaries; 2) determined that the prior salary was an accurate indication of the employee's ability based on education, experience, or other relevant factors; and 3) considered the prior salary, but did not rely solely on it in setting the employee's current salary.

the Equal Pay Act, as well as a common sense reading of its language. To impose obligations on employers that conflict with guidance from the agency administering the statute, as the majority opinion does, is to sow confusion.

In reality, "prior pay" is not inherently a reflection of gender discrimination. Certainly our history of gender discrimination fully supports a presumption that the use of prior pay perpetuates discrimination. But differences in prior pay may also be based on other factors such as differences in the costs of living and in available resources in various parts of the country. Moreover, I agree with the majority in hoping that we are progressing "past the days when employers maintain separate pay scales," Majority at 25, and that it will become the norm that a prior employer will have adjusted its pay system to be gender neutral. Nonetheless, consistent with the intent of the EPA, I agree that where prior pay is the exclusive determinant of pay, the employer cannot carry its burden of showing that it is a "factor other than sex."[4]

---

[4] We read the EPA to place the burden on the employer to demonstrate that the pay differential falls within the fourth exception; that it is indeed not based on gender. An employer cannot meet this burden where the pay system is based solely on prior pay because by blindly accepting the prior pay, it cannot rebut the presumption that using the prior pay perpetuates the inequality of pay based on gender that the EPA seeks to correct. If, instead, as suggested by the EEOC's Notice Number 915.002, an employer not only looked to prior pay but also researched whether the applicant's prior pay reflected gender-based inequality, and made adjustments if it did, the employer would no longer be relying exclusively on prior pay. Thus, in such a situation, an employer might be able to overcome the

However, neither Congress's intent nor the language of the Equal Pay Act requires, or justifies, the conclusion that a pay system that includes prior pay as one of several considerations can never constitute a "factor other than sex."

V

In this case, the County based pay only on prior salary, and accordingly the district court properly denied it summary judgment. Nonetheless, the majority goes beyond what is necessary to resolve this appeal and mistakenly proclaims that prior salary can never be considered as coming within the fourth exception to the Equal Pay Act. I strongly disagree. Following the Supreme Court's guidance, I agree with our sister circuit courts, as well as the EEOC, the agency charged with enforcing the EPA, that prior pay may be a component of a pay system that comes within the fourth exception recognized in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). However, the employer has the burden of overcoming the presumption of gender discrimination and showing that its pay formula does not perpetuate or create a pay differential based on sex. We can and should require that men and women receive equal pay for equal work, but we can do so without making what is in reality a presumption an absolute rule.

For these reasons, I concur in the result, but not the majority's rationale.

---

presumption and show that its pay system was a "factor other than sex."

APPENDIX B

Aileen RIZO, Plaintiff-Appellee,

v.

Jim YOVINO, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Erroneously Sued Herein as Fresno County Office of Education, Defendant-Appellant.

No. 16-15372

United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.

Argued and Submitted *En Banc* December 12, 2017, San Francisco, California

Filed April 9, 2018

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California, Michael J. Seng, Magistrate Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 1:14-cv-00423-MJS

Before: Sidney R. Thomas, Chief Judge, and Stephen Reinhardt*, M. Margaret McKeown, William A. Fletcher, Richard A. Paez, Marsha S. Berzon,

* Prior to his death, Judge Reinhardt fully participated in this case and authored this opinion. The majority opinion and all concurrences were final, and voting was completed by the en banc court prior to his death.

Richard C. Tallman, Consuelo M. Callahan, Mary H. Murguia, Morgan Christen and Paul J. Watford, Circuit Judges.

OPINION

REINHARDT, Circuit Judge:

The Equal Pay Act stands for a principle as simple as it is just: men and women should receive equal pay for equal work regardless of sex. The question before us is also simple: can an employer justify a wage differential between male and female employees by relying on prior salary? Based on the text, history, and purpose of the Equal Pay Act, the answer is clear: No. Congress recognized in 1963 that the Equal Pay Act was long overdue: "Justice and fair play speak so eloquently [on] behalf of the equal pay for women bill that it seems unnecessary to belabor the point. We can only marvel that it has taken us so long to recognize the fact that equity and economic soundness support this legislation."[1] Salaries speak louder than words, however. Although the Act has prohibited sex-based wage discrimination for more than fifty years, the financial exploitation of working women embodied by the gender pay gap continues to be an embarrassing reality of our economy.

Prior to this decision, our law was unclear whether an employer could consider prior salary, either alone or in combination with other factors, when setting its employees' salaries. We took this case en banc in order to clarify the law, and we now hold that prior salary alone or in combination with other factors cannot justify a wage differential. To hold otherwise—to

---

[1] 109 Cong. Rec. 8916 (1963) (statement of Sen. Hart).

allow employers to capitalize on the persistence of the wage gap and perpetuate that gap ad infinitum—would be contrary to the text and history of the Equal Pay Act, and would vitiate the very purpose for which the Act stands.

Fresno County Office of Education ("the County")[2] does not dispute that it pays Aileen Rizo ("Rizo") less than comparable male employees for the same work. However, it argues that this wage differential is lawful under the Equal Pay Act. In relevant part, the Act provides,

> No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate, within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions, except where such payment is made pursuant to (i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) *a differential based on any other factor other than sex.*

29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1) (emphasis added). The County contends that that the wage differential is based on the fourth exception—the catchall exception: a "factor

---

[2] The defendant is Jim Yovino, the Superintendent of the Fresno County Office of Education. Because he is sued in his official capacity, we refer to the defendant as the County.

other than sex." It argues that an employee's prior salary can constitute a "factor other than sex" within the meaning of the catch all exception. However, this would allow the County to defend a sex based salary differential on the basis of the very sex-based salary differentials the Equal Pay Act was designed to cure. Because we conclude that prior salary does not constitute a "factor other than sex," the County fails as a matter of law to set forth an affirmative defense. We affirm the district court's denial of summary judgment to the County and remand for proceedings consistent with this opinion.[3]

Background

Aileen Rizo was hired as a math consultant by the Fresno County Office of Education in October 2009. Previously, she was employed in Maricopa County, Arizona as a middle and high school math teacher. In her prior position, Rizo earned an annual salary of $50,630 for 206 working days. She also received an educational stipend of $1,200 per year for her master's degrees in educational technology and mathematics education.

Rizo's new salary upon joining the County was determined in accordance with the County's Standard Operating Procedure 1440 ("SOP 1440"), informally adopted in 1998 and formally adopted in 2004. The

---

[3] We leave to the district court the question whether Rizo is entitled to summary judgment on her Equal Pay Act claim. *See Albino v. Baca*, 747 F.3d 1162, 1176 (9th Cir. 2014) (*en banc*) ("We have long recognized that, where the party moving for summary judgment has had a full and fair opportunity to prove its case, but has not succeeded in doing so, a court may enter summary judgment sua sponte for the nonmoving party.").

County's hiring schedule consists of 10 stepped salary levels, each level containing 10 salary steps within it. SOP 1440 dictates that a new hire's salary is to be determined by taking the hired individual's prior salary, adding 5%, and placing the new employee on the corresponding step of the salary schedule. Unlike the County's previous hiring schedule, SOP 1440 does not rely on experience to set an employee's initial salary. SOP 1440 dictated that Rizo be placed at step 1 of level 1 of the hiring schedule, corresponding to a salary of $62,133 for 196 days of work plus a master's degree stipend of $600.

During a lunch with colleagues in 2012, Rizo learned that her male colleagues had been subsequently hired as math consultants at higher salary steps. In August 2012, she filed a complaint about the pay disparity with the County, which responded that all salaries had been set in accordance with SOP 1440. The County claimed to have reviewed salary-step placements of male and female management employees for the past 25 years (so including before the policy was even informally adopted), finding that SOP 1440 placed more women at higher compensation steps than males. Rizo disputes this analysis and claims that the data show men were placed at a higher average salary step.

Rizo sued Jim Yovino in his official capacity as the Superintendent of the Fresno County Office of Education in February 2014. She claimed a violation of the Equal Pay Act, 29 U.S.C. § 206(d); sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq. ("Title VII"); sex discrimination under California Government Code § 12940(a); and failure to prevent discrimination

under California Government Code § 12940(k). *Rizo v. Yovino*, No. 1:14-cv-0423-MJS, 2015 WL 9260587, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2015), *vacated*, 854 F.3d 1161 (9th Cir.), *reh'g en banc granted*, 869 F.3d 1004 (9th Cir. 2017).

In June 2015, the County moved for summary judgment. It asserted that, although Rizo was paid less than her male counterparts for the same work, the discrepancy was based on Rizo's prior salary. The County contended that her prior salary was a permissible affirmative defense to her concededly lower salary than her male counterparts under the fourth, catchall clause, a "factor other than sex." *Rizo*, 2015 WL 9260587, at *7. The district court denied summary judgment, reasoning that SOP 1440 "necessarily and unavoidably conflicts with the EPA" because "a pay structure based exclusively on prior wages is so inherently fraught with the risk— indeed, here, the virtual certainty—that it will perpetuate a discriminatory wage disparity between men and women that it cannot stand." *Id.* at *9. It certified the legal question for interlocutory appeal, recognizing that denying summary judgment for the County "effectively resolves the issue of liability on Plaintiff's claims in her favor." *Id.* at *12.[4]

This Court granted the County's petition for permission to file an interlocutory appeal. The three-judge panel vacated the denial of summary judgment and remanded. *Rizo v. Yovino*, 854 F.3d 1161, 1167

[4] The certified question was "whether, as a matter of law under the EPA, 29 U.S.C. § 206(d), an employer subject to the EPA may rely on prior salary alone when setting an employee's starting salary." *Id.* at *13.

(9th Cir.), *reh'g en banc granted*, 869 F.3d 1004 (9th Cir. 2017). The panel concluded that *Kouba v. Allstate Insurance Co.*, 691 F.2d 873 (9th Cir. 1982) was controlling and that it permits prior salary alone to constitute a "factor other than sex" under the Equal Pay Act. In *Kouba*, the employer considered prior salary along with other factors, "including 'ability, education, [and] experience,'" in setting employees' salaries. *Rizo*, 854 F.3d at 1166 (quoting *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 874). The panel concluded, however, that because *Kouba* "did not attribute any significance to Allstate's use of these other factors," that case permits consideration of prior salary alone, as long as use of that factor "was reasonable and effectuated some business policy." *Id.* Because it believed it was compelled to follow *Kouba*, the panel directed the district court on remand to consider the reasonableness of the County's proffered business reasons for its reliance on prior salary.

We granted the petition for rehearing *en banc* in order to clarify the law, including the vitality and effect of *Kouba*.

Standard of Review

We review the district court's denial of summary judgment *de novo*. *Diaz v. Eagle Produce Ltd. P'ship*, 521 F.3d 1201, 1207 (9th Cir. 2008). Summary judgment is available only when there are no genuine disputes of material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. *Id.*

Discussion

Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act in 1963 to put an end to the "serious and endemic problem of employment discrimination in private industry" and to

carry out a broad mandate of equal pay for equal work regardless of sex. *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (1974). It set forth a simple structure to carry out this simple principle. *See* 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). A plaintiff must show that her employer has paid male and female employees different wages for substantially equal work. Not all differentials in pay for equal work violate the Equal Pay Act, however. The Act includes four statutory exceptions—"(i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex"—which operate as affirmative defenses. *Id.*; *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223; *Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 446 (9th Cir. 1986). "[A]n employer [must] submit evidence from which a reasonable factfinder *could* conclude not simply that the employer's proffered reasons *could* explain the wage disparity, but that the proffered reasons do in *fact* explain the wage disparity." *EEOC v. Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d 114, 121 (4th Cir. 2018) (first citing *Stanziale v. Jargowsky*, 200 F.3d 101, 107–08 (3d Cir. 2000); and then citing *Mickelson v. N.Y. Life Ins. Co.*, 460 F.3d 1304, 1312 (10th Cir. 2006)); *see also* 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1) (exempting from liability wage differentials only where payment of which was "*made pursuant to*" an enumerated exception (emphasis added)).

The Equal Pay Act "creates a type of strict liability" for employers who pay men and women different wages for the same work: once a plaintiff demonstrates a wage disparity, she is *not* required to prove discriminatory intent. *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446 (quoting *Strecker v. Grand Forks Cty. Social Serv. Bd.*,

640 F.2d 96, 99 n.1 (8th Cir. 1980) (en banc)). The County and Amicus Center for Workplace Compliance contend that the Supreme Court in *Washington County v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161, 101 S.Ct. 2242, 68 L.Ed.2d 751 (1981), infused into Equal Pay Act law Title VII's disparate treatment analysis. This is clearly wrong. In *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., Inc.*, the Supreme Court stated, "the EPA does not require...proof of intentional discrimination." 550 U.S. 618, 641, 127 S.Ct. 2162, 167 L.Ed.2d 982 (2007).[5] More recently, the Fourth Circuit reaffirmed that "[a]n EPA plaintiff need not prove that the employer acted with discriminatory intent to obtain a remedy under the statute." *Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 120 (collecting cases). Accordingly, pretext as it is understood in the Title VII context plays no role in Equal Pay Act claims.[6]

Here, the County does not dispute that Rizo established a prima facie case and that none of the three specific statutory exceptions applies. The County urges instead that the fourth catchall exception, "any other factor other than sex," includes an employee's prior salary and applies when her starting salary is based on her prior salary. It

---

[5] *Superseded on other grounds by statute*, Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-2, 123 Stat. 5.

[6] Because the issue in this case is one of law, we do not have occasion to address the burden-shifting framework applicable to Equal Pay Act as opposed to Title VII claims. *Maryland Insurance Administration*, however, sets forth the standards to apply when there are factual, rather than legal, disputes. *Id.* at 120 21, 120 n.6, 120 n.7.

acknowledges that if it is wrong, it has no defense to Rizo's Equal Pay Act claim.

The question in this case is the meaning of the catchall exception. This is purely a question of law. We conclude, unhesitatingly, that "any other factor other than sex" is limited to legitimate, job-related factors such as a prospective employee's experience, educational background, ability, or prior job performance. It is inconceivable that Congress, in an Act the primary purpose of which was to eliminate long-existing "endemic" sex-based wage disparities, would create an exception for basing new hires' salaries on those very disparities—disparities that Congress declared are not only related to sex but caused by sex. To accept the County's argument would be to perpetuate rather than eliminate the pervasive discrimination at which the Act was aimed. As explained later in this opinion, the language, legislative history, and purpose of the Act make it clear that Congress was not so benighted. Prior salary, whether considered alone or with other factors, is not job related and thus does not fall within an exception to the Act that allows employers to pay disparate wages. Reflecting the very essence of the Act, we hold that by relying on prior salary, the County fails as a matter of law to set forth an affirmative defense.

A.

Allowing an employer to justify a wage differential between men and women on the basis of prior salary is wholly inconsistent with the provisions of the Equal

Pay Act.[7] As the Supreme Court has emphasized, "[t]he Equal Pay Act is broadly remedial, and it should be construed and applied so as to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve." *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The remedial purpose of the Act is clear: to put an end to historical wage discrimination against women. Representative Florence Dwyer said in support of the bill: "The issue here is really a very simple one—the *elimination* of one of the most persistent and obnoxious forms of discrimination which is still practiced in this enlightened society."[8] Representative Harold Donohue in his comments on the bill stressed a similar point: "[T]his measure represents the *correction* of basic injustice being visited upon women in many fields of endeavor. . . ."[9] In other words, the Equal Pay Act was not intended to be a passive measure but a proactive one designed to correct salary structures based on the "outmoded belief" that women should be paid less than men. *See Corning*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (quoting S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 1 (1963)).

In light of the clear intent and purpose of the Equal Pay Act, it is equally clear that we cannot construe the catchall exception as justifying setting employees' starting salaries on the basis of their prior pay. At the

---

[7] This case arose in the context of initial wage-setting. By failing to address compensation for employees seeking promotions or changes in status within the same organization, we do not imply that the Equal Pay Act is inapplicable to these situations.

[8] 109 Cong. Rec. 9200 (1963) (statement of Rep. Dwyer) (emphasis added).

[9] *Id*. at 9212 (statement of Rep. Donohue) (emphasis added).

time of the passage of the Act, an employee's prior pay would have reflected a discriminatory marketplace that valued the equal work of one sex over the other. Congress simply could not have intended to allow employers to rely on these discriminatory wages as a justification for continuing to perpetuate wage differentials.

Today we express a general rule and do not attempt to resolve its applications under all circumstances. We do not decide, for example, whether or under what circumstances, past salary may play a role in the course of an individualized salary negotiation. We prefer to reserve all questions relating to individualized negotiations for decision in subsequent cases. Our opinion should in no way be taken as barring or posing any obstacle to whatever resolution future panels may reach regarding questions relating to such negotiations.[10]

B.

Basic principles of statutory interpretation also establish that prior salary is not a permissible "factor other than sex" within the meaning of the Equal Pay Act. The County maintains that the catchall exception unambiguously provides that any facially neutral factor constitutes an affirmative defense to liability under the Equal Pay Act. It is incorrect. The Supreme Court in *Corning* did not find the Act clear on its face. Rather, that decision applied an analytical framework similar to the one we use here by looking to the history of the legislative process of the Equal Pay Act as well

[10] Accordingly, Judge McKeown's and Judge Callahan's complaints regarding our opinion's effect upon the setting of pay on an individualized basis are meritless.

as the context in which the Act was adopted. 417 U.S. at 198–203, 94 S.Ct. 2223. Following a similar method of analysis, it is clear that when the catchall exception is read in light of its surrounding context and legislative history, a legitimate "factor other than sex" must be job related and that prior salary cannot justify paying one gender less if equal work is performed.

1.

The Act "establishes four exceptions—three specific and one a general catchall provision." *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223. Where, as here, a statute contains a catchall term at the end of a list, we rely on the related principles of *noscitur a sociis* and *ejusdem generis* to "cabin the contextual meaning" of the term, and to "avoid ascribing to [that term] a meaning so broad that it is inconsistent with its accompanying words, thus giving unintended breadth to the Acts of Congress." *Yates v. United States*, —— U.S. ——, 135 S.Ct. 1074, 1085–86, 191 L.Ed.2d 64 (2015) (plurality opinion) (quoting *Gustafson v. Alloyd Co.*, 513 U.S. 561, 575, 115 S.Ct. 1061, 131 L.Ed.2d 1 (1995)); *id*. at 1089 (Alito, J., concurring in judgment) (applying *noscitur a sociis* and *ejusdem generis*).

The canon *noscitur a sociis*—"a word is known by the company it keeps"— provides that words grouped together should be given related meaning. *Id.* at 1085 (plurality opinion). Here, the catchall phrase is grouped with three specific exceptions based on systems of seniority, merit, and productivity. These specific systems share more in common than mere gender neutrality; all three relate to job qualifications, performance, and/or experience. It follows that the

more general exception should be limited to legitimate, job-related reasons as well.

A related canon, *ejusdem generis*, likewise supports our interpretation of the catchall term. We apply this canon when interpreting general terms at the end of a list of more specific ones. *Id.* at 1086. In such a case, "the general words are construed to embrace only objects similar in nature to those objects enumerated by the preceding specific words." *Circuit City Stores, Inc. v. Adams*, 532 U.S. 105, 109, 114–15, 121 S.Ct. 1302, 149 L.Ed.2d 234 (2001) (quoting 2A Norman J. Singer, *Sutherland on Statutes and Statutory Construction* § 47.17 (1991)). The inclusion of the word "other" before the general provision in the Equal Pay Act makes its meaning all the more clear: "[T]he principle of *ejusdem generis* . . . implies the addition of *similar* after the word *other*." Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner, *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts* 199 (2012). Here, we read the statutory exceptions as: "(i) a seniority system, (ii) a merit system, (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other [*similar*] factor other than sex." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). A similar factor would have to be one similar to the other legitimate, job-related reasons.

The presence of the word "any"—which the County contends indicates the expansive reach of the fourth statutory exception—does not counsel against our interpretation. In *Circuit City Stores*, for example, the Supreme Court interpreted § 1 of the Federal Arbitration Act, which lists "seamen, railroad employees, or *any other* class of workers engaged in foreign or interstate commerce" to include only

transportation workers, not workers in literally any industry. 532 U.S. at 109, 114–15, 121 S.Ct. 1302 (emphasis added) (quoting 9 U.S.C. § 1); *see also, e.g., In re Indian Gaming Related Cases*, 331 F.3d 1094, 1113–14 (9th Cir. 2003) (adopting district court's use of *ejusdem generis* to interpret the phrase "any other purposes specified by the legislature" as being limited to purposes directly related to gaming).

2.

Although "the authoritative statement is the statutory text," the legislative history of the Equal Pay Act further supports our interpretation that the catchall exception is limited to job-related factors. *See Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Allapattah Servs., Inc.*, 545 U.S. 546, 568, 125 S.Ct. 2611, 162 L.Ed.2d 502 (2005). "[T]he way in which Congress arrived at the statutory language" can provide "a better understanding of the [statutory] phrase" in question than "trying to reconcile or establish preferences between the conflicting interpretations of the Act by individual legislators or the committee reports." *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 198, 94 S.Ct. 2223. In *Corning*, the Supreme Court relied heavily on the history of the legislative process in interpreting the term "similar working conditions," a factor in determining whether employees perform "equal work" under the Equal Pay Act. *Id.* at 199–201, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The Court explained that "[a]s originally introduced," the Equal Pay bills considered in the House and Senate "required equal pay for 'equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skills'" and included "only two exceptions—for differentials 'made pursuant to a seniority or merit increase system which does not discriminate on the basis of sex.'" *Id.* at 199,

94 S.Ct. 2223; S. 882, 88th Cong. § 4 (1963); S. 910, 88th Cong. § 4(a) (1963); H.R. 3861, 88th Cong. § 4(a) (1963); H.R. 4269, 88th Cong. § 4(a) (1963). Industry representatives during the House and Senate hearings were "highly critical of the Act's definition of equal work and of its exemptions." *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 199, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The *Corning* Court compared the original language in the House and Senate bills to that in the final Act and thought "it plain that in amending the bill's definition of equal work to its present form, the Congress acted in direct response to these pleas" for a more definite standard for equal work based on bona fide job evaluation plans. *Id.* at 200, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The Court then used that context to interpret "similar working conditions." *Id.* at 200–01, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

We, too, look to the history of the legislative process and draw a similar conclusion that the inclusion of the catchall provision in the final bill was in direct response to the entreaties of industry witnesses. Industry representatives testified at the congressional subcommittee hearings that the two exceptions in the bills that had been introduced in the House and Senate were too specific and under inclusive, and "evidence[d] . . . a lack of understanding of industrial reality." *Equal Pay Act: Hearings Before the H. Special Subcomm. on Labor of the H. Comm. on Educ. & Labor on H.R. 3861, 4269, and Related Bills*, 88th Cong. 135 (1963) [hereinafter *House Hearing*] (statement of the American Retail Federation). The witnesses were concerned that companies would no longer be able to rely on the wide variety of factors used across industries to measure the value of a particular job. Accordingly, the witnesses proposed a

series of job-related exceptions in addition to the two original exceptions that had covered only seniority and merit systems.

Chief among those was an exception for job classification programs. The Vice President of Owens-Illinois Glass Co. testified: "Job classification and wage incentive programs are so widely accepted…in American industry that there seems little need to set forth a lengthy list of reasons why they should be excepted from the present bill." *Id.* at 101 (statement of W. Boyd Owen, Vice President of Personnel Administration, Owens-Illinois Glass Co.). Bona fide job classification programs were necessarily job related because they were used to "establish relative job worth" in diverse industries, "each [of which] has its own peculiarities and its own customs." *Id.* at 238 (statement of E.G. Hester, Director of Industrial Relations Research, Corning Glass Works). Using factors like skill and responsibility, these classification programs were "a yardstick against which [employers] can measure work performance and consequently pay." *Id.* at 146 (statement of John G. Wayman, Partner, Reed, Smith, Shaw & McClay). The Owens-Illinois Glass representative, Mr. Owen, explained that his proposed exceptions based on job classification and wage incentive programs would "merely parallel" the existing exceptions for seniority and merit systems, *id.* at 101, both of which were themselves job related.

Most of the other exceptions urged by industry witnesses were also job related. Mr. Owen, for example, explained that there are "countless reasons for wage variations . . . which are not discriminatory in nature," including differences in "the shift or time

of day worked, in the regularity of performing duties, [and] in training." *Id. a*t 100. The statement of the American Retail Federation likewise explained: "It is a wholly justifiable fact that in retailing there are many situations where there are differentials in wage scales based on experience, hours worked (day or evening), job hazards, physical requirements, and the like." *Id.* at 135.

We think it plain that the catchall exception was added to the final Equal Pay Act in direct response to these employers' concerns that their legitimate, job-related means of setting pay would not be covered under the two exceptions already included in the bill.[11] Following the hearings, Representative Edith Green introduced H.R. 6060, which added the exceptions for "a differential based on any other factor other than sex" as well as "a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production." H.R. 6060, 88th Cong. § 2(d)(1) (1963). In its report discussing H.R. 6060, the House Committee explained that "a bona fide job classification program that does not discriminate on the basis of sex will serve as a valid defense to a charge of discrimination." H.R. Rep. No.

---

[11] While the third exception under the Equal Pay Act—"a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production"—is not at issue in this case, we note that this exception was also added following the hearings and that the exception roughly corresponds to the "wage incentive programs" discussed by the Owens-Illinois Glass representative. *See House Hearing* at 99, 101 (statement of W. Boyd Owen, Vice President, Owens-Illinois Glass Co.); *Equal Pay Act of 1963: Hearings Before the S. Subcomm. on Labor of the S. Comm. on Labor & Pub. Welfare on S. 882 and S. 910*, 88th Cong. 138 (1963) (statement of W. Boyd Owen, Vice President of Personnel Administration, Owens-Illinois Glass Co.).

88-309, at 3 (1963), *as reprinted in* 1963 U.S.C.C.A.N. 687, 689. The Committee also provided an illustrative list of other factors in addition to job classification programs which would be covered under the fourth exception, the catchall provision: "[A]mong other things, shift differentials, restrictions on or differences based on time of day worked, hours of work, lifting or moving heavy objects, differences based on experience, training, or ability would also be excluded." *Id.* In the end, Representative Robert Griffin, author of the Landrum-Griffin Act, the landmark labor relations legislation, put it best. Describing the catchall exception, he said, "Roman numeral iv is a broad principle, and those preceding it are really examples."[12]

The Senate Committee Report likewise confirms that Congress intended the catchall exception to cover factors other than sex only insofar as they were job related. Following the hearings, Senator Patrick McNamara introduced S. 1409, which removed reference to seniority and merit systems and instead included just one statutory exception that was virtually identical to the Act's catchall exception. S. 1409, 88th Cong. § 2(d)(1) (1963). That exception read, "except where such a wage differential is based on any factor or factors other than sex." *Id.* In its report, the Senate Committee provided illustrative examples of what this general exception would cover: "seniority systems . . . based on tenure," "merit system[s]," "piecework system[s] which measure[ ] either the quantity or quality of production or performance," and "[w]ithout question," "other valid classification

[12] 109 Cong. Rec. 9203 (1963) (statement of Rep. Griffin).

programs. . . .” S. Rep. No. 88-176, at 4 (1963). Ultimately, the House version of the bill prevailed, with the House passing H.R. 6060 on May 23, 1963, *see* 109 Cong. Rec. 9217, and the Senate agreeing by a voice vote to the House amendments on May 28, 1963, see *id.* at 9761–62. In other words, the Senate contemplated from the start that the factors ultimately exempted by the House bill would be covered by a catchall provision identical in substance to the fourth exception and that it would cover only job-related factors.

Contrary to the County's assertion, *Washington County v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (1981), supports the concept of a catchall provision limited to job-related factors. The Court commented in *Gunther* that "courts and administrative agencies are not permitted to 'substitute their judgment for the judgment of the employer . . who [has] established and applied a bona fide job rating system . . . .'"[13] The predicate for this dictum is that the employer must both establish a bona fide work-related system and apply it in good faith. The Court went on to reiterate its earlier conclusion in *Corning* that "the Equal Pay bill [was] amended . . . to add the fourth affirmative defense because of a concern that bona fide job-evaluation systems used by American businesses would otherwise be disrupted." *Id.* at 170 n.11, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (citing *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 199–201, 94 S.Ct. 2223). In sum, so long as the employer proves that it is using a bona fide job classification system or otherwise relying on bona fide job related factors to set

---

[13] 452 U.S. at 171, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (alterations in the original) (quoting 109 Cong. Rec. 9209 (1963) (statement of Rep. Goodell)).

pay, courts will not second guess the merits of the particular method used. Courts have followed the *Gunther* mandate. They have not held, for example, that it would be more appropriate to value educational background over years of experience when setting salaries or that job training should outweigh demonstrated ability to do the job. *Gunther* thus implicitly endorsed the bargain struck in the Equal Pay Act: employers may continue to use their legitimate, job-related means of setting pay but may not use sex directly or indirectly as a basis for establishing employees' wages.[14]

3.

We are not the only federal court of appeals to construe the catchall exception as limited to job-related factors.[15] The Eleventh Circuit, for example, has concluded that "the 'factor other than sex' exception applies when the disparity results from unique characteristics of the same job; from an individual's experience, training, or ability . . ." —in

---

[14] When there is a factual dispute over whether the Equal Pay Act was violated, courts have established a procedure for resolving such disputes which differs somewhat from the Title VII format. *See supra* note 6; *see also Md. Ins. Admin.*, 879 F.3d at 120.

[15] *See Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1198 (10th Cir. 2015); *Aldrich v. Randolph Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 963 F.2d 520, 526 (2d Cir. 1992); *EEOC v. J.C. Penney Co.*, 843 F.2d 249, 253 (6th Cir. 1988); *Glenn v. General Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567, 1571 (11th Cir. 1988). *But see Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 717–18 (8th Cir. 2003) ("[W]e are reluctant to establish any per se limitations to the 'factor other than sex' exception. . . ."); *Covington v. S. Ill. Univ.*, 816 F.2d 317, 321–22 (7th Cir. 1987).

other words, job related reasons.[16] *Glenn*, 841 F.2d at 1571. Although some courts occasionally use "job-related" and terminology like "business-related" or "legitimate business reason[s]" interchangeably, we believe that it is neither helpful nor advisable to do so. Terms like "business-related" have been used loosely in a number of cases to refer to factors that are in fact job related. For example, in *Aldrich*, the Second Circuit used interchangeably the terms "job-relatedness requirement," "legitimate business related differences in work responsibilities and qualifications for the particular positions," and "legitimate business-related considerations" to describe "the proper legal standard for the factor-other-than-sex defense." 963 F.2d at 525, 527. Remanding the case to the district court, however, the Second Circuit was clear in its instructions: the employer could justify the wage differential "*only if the employer proves that the [factor relied on] is job-related*." *Id.* at 527 (emphasis added).[17]

---

[16] Although the Eleventh Circuit also listed "special exigent circumstances connected with the business," it did so in reference to "red circle rates." *Glenn*, 841 F.2d at 1571 (quoting H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3). Red circle rates, a term from the War Labor Board, refers to "unusual, higher than normal wage rates" paid when "an employer…must reduce help in a skilled job" so that skilled employees are "available when they are again needed for their former jobs." H.R. Rep. No. 88-309, at 3. In other words, these rates are paid based on the skills and experience of the particular employee who is temporarily transferred to a position requiring fewer skills and normally paying less. In short, red circle rates are indeed job related.

[17] We have been able to find only one circumstance in which the use of the term "business-related" does not refer to a factor that is in fact job related. In *EEOC v. J.C. Penney Co.*, the Sixth

Including "business-related" as a legitimate basis for exceptions under the catchall provision would permit the use of far too many improper justifications for avoiding the strictures of the Act. Not every reason that makes economic sense—in other words, that is business related—constitutes an acceptable factor other than sex. To the contrary, using the word "business" risks conflating a legitimate factor other than sex with any cost-saving mechanism. The Supreme Court and Congress have repeatedly rejected such an interpretation of the fourth exception.

In *Corning*, the Supreme Court readily dismissed the notion that an employer may pay women less under the catchall exception because women cost less to employ, thus saving the employer money. The Court explained that the "market forces theory"—that women will be willing to accept lower salaries because they will not find higher salaries elsewhere—did not constitute a factor other than sex even though such a method of setting salaries could have saved the company a considerable amount and so would have constituted a good "business" reason. *Corning*, 417

Circuit concluded that a health benefits plan that provided spousal coverage only if the employee was the "head of household" (i.e. the higher earner) was justified by the "legitimate business reason" of "minimizing or controlling cost." 843 F.2d 249, 253 (7th Cir. 1988); *see also Wambheim v. J.C. Penney Co.*, 705 F.2d 1492, 1495 (9th Cir. 1983) (same). The EEOC approved the system grudgingly, requiring that any such defense be "closely scrutinized" because it "bears no relationship to the requirements of the job or to the individual's performance on the job." 29 C.F.R. § 1620.21 (2017). In fact, a head-of-household benefits system appears to be in considerable tension with *City of Los Angeles, Department of Water & Power v. Manhart*, 435 U.S. 702, 98 S.Ct. 1370, 55 L.Ed.2d 657 (1978). *See infra.*

U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The Court explained that "Congress declared it to be the policy of the Act to correct" the "unfair employer exploitation of this source of cheap labor." *Id.* at 206, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (quoting *Hodgson v. Corning Glass Works*, 474 F.2d 226, 234 (2d Cir. 1973)). "That the company took advantage of such a situation may be understandable as a matter of economics, but its differential nevertheless became illegal once Congress enacted into law the principle of equal pay for equal work." *Id.* at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

Congress and the Supreme Court have also rejected the notion that an employer may pay women less under the catchall exception because women cost more to employ. In *City of Los Angeles*, *Department of Water & Power v. Manhart*, the Supreme Court considered whether the Department's practice of requiring female employees—who on average lived longer than male employees—to make larger contributions from their paychecks to its pension fund than male employees was a discriminatory employment practice. 435 U.S. at 704–05, 98 S.Ct. 1370.[18] In deciding that this alleged cost difference was not a permissible factor other than sex, the Court explained that Congress had rejected an amendment to the Equal Pay Act "that would have expressly authorized a wage differential tied to the 'ascertainable and specific added cost resulting from employment of the opposite sex.'" *Id.* at

[18] Because the plaintiffs alleged a violation of Title VII based on unequal wages for equal work, the Equal Pay Act's affirmative defenses, including the catchall exception, applied through the Bennett Amendment to Title VII. *Id.* at 707, 712 n.22, 98 S.Ct. 1370 (citing 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(h)).

717 n.32, 98 S.Ct. 1370 (quoting 109 Cong. Rec. 9217 (statement of Rep. Findley)). Acknowledging that the legislative history is inconclusive as to whether a cost-justification exception could constitute a factor other than sex, the Court noted that "[i]t is difficult to find language in the statute supporting even this limited defense." *Id.* The Court also emphasized that the Wage and Hour Administrator, then charged with enforcing the Act, had interpreted that "a wage differential based on differences in the average costs of employing men and women is not based on a factor other than sex.'" *Id.* at 714 n.26, 98 S.Ct. 1370 (quoting 29 C.F.R. § 800.151 (1977)). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency now charged with enforcing the Equal Pay Act, continues to interpret the Act this way. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 1620.22 (2017). Thus, although the catchall exception applies to a wide variety of job-related factors, it does not encompass reasons that are simply good for business. We use "job-related" rather than "business-related" to clarify the scope of the exception.

4.

Prior salary does not fit within the catchall exception because it is not a legitimate measure of work experience, ability, performance, or any other job-related quality. It may bear a rough relationship to legitimate factors other than sex, such as training, education, ability, or experience, but the relationship is attenuated. More important, it may well operate to perpetuate the wage disparities prohibited under the Act. Rather than use a second-rate surrogate that likely masks continuing inequities, the employer must instead point directly to the underlying factors for which prior salary is a rough proxy, at best, if it is to

prove its wage differential is justified under the catchall exception.

C.

We took this case *en banc* to clarify our law and the effect of *Kouba v. Allstate Insurance Co.*, 691 F.2d 873 (9th Cir. 1982). In *Kouba*, we concluded that "the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary." *Id.* at 878. Here, the district court recognized that its holding that prior salary alone cannot justify a wage differential potentially conflicted with *Kouba*, in which the salary structure was based on multiple factors including prior salary. *Rizo*, 2015 WL 9260587, at *12. The three-judge panel concluded that our decision in *Kouba* permits an employer to "maintain a pay differential based on prior salary . . . only if it showed that the factor 'effectuate[s] some business policy' and that the employer 'use[s] the factor reasonably in light of the employer's stated purpose as well as its other practices.'" *Rizo*, 854 F.3d at 1161, 1165 (alterations in original) (quoting *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 878). The panel explained that *Kouba* "did not attribute any significance to [the employer's] use of [ ] other factors"—ability, education, and experience—in addition to prior salary in setting employees' initial salaries. *Id.* at 1166. At the same time, *Kouba* directed the district court on remand to consider the extent to which "the employer also uses other available predictors of the new employee's performance." *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 878.

Because *Kouba*, however construed, is inconsistent with the rule that we have announced in this opinion, it must be overruled. First, a factor other than sex

must be one that is job related, rather than one that "effectuates some business policy." Second, it is impermissible to rely on prior salary to set initial wages. Prior salary is not job related and it perpetuates the very gender-based assumptions about the value of work that the Equal Pay Act was designed to end. This is true whether prior salary is the sole factor or one of several factors considered in establishing employees' wages. Although some federal courts of appeals allow reliance on prior salary along with other factors while barring reliance on prior salary alone, *see, e.g., Glenn*, 841 F.2d at 1571 & n.9, this is a distinction without reason: we cannot reconcile this distinction with the text or purpose of the Equal Pay Act. Although Judges McKeown and Callahan correctly acknowledge in their concurrences that basing initial salary on an employee's prior salary alone violates the Equal Pay Act, neither offers a rational explanation for their incompatible conclusion that relying on prior salary in addition to one or more other factors somehow is consistent with the Act. Declining to explain the inconsistency of their positions, they simply rely on those who came before—the EEOC and other courts of appeals, which also fail to explain how what is impermissible alone somehow becomes permissible when joined with other factors. For obvious reasons, we cannot agree. Reliance on past wages simply perpetuates the past pervasive discrimination that the Equal Pay Act seeks to eradicate. Therefore, we readily reach the conclusion that past salary may not be used as a factor in initial wage setting, alone or in conjunction with less invidious factors.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, over fifty years after the passage of the Equal Pay Act, the wage gap between men and women is not some inert historical relic of bygone assumptions and sex-based oppression. Although it may have improved since the passage of the Equal Pay Act, the gap persists today: women continue to receive lower earnings than men "across industries, occupations, and education levels."[19] "Collectively, the gender wage gap costs women in the U.S. over $840 billion a year."[20] If money talks, the message to women costs more than "just" billions: women are told they are not worth as much as men. Allowing prior salary to justify a wage differential perpetuates this message, entrenching in salary systems an obvious means of discrimination—the very discrimination that the Act was designed to prohibit and rectify.

AFFIRMED AND REMANDED.

McKEOWN, Circuit Judge, with whom MURGUIA, Circuit Judge, joins, concurring:

---

[19] Equal Rights Advocates Amicus Br. at 12 (footnotes omitted) (first citing Nat'l P'ship for Women & Families, *America's Women and the Wage Gap 2* (2017), http://www.nationalpartnership.org/researchlibrary/workplacefairness/fair-pay/americas-women-and-thewage-gap.pdf; and then citing Francine D. Blau & Lawrence M. Kahn, *The Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations*, (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Research, Working Paper No. 21913, 2016), http://www.nber.org/papers/w21913.pdf).

[20] *Id*. at 11 (citing Nat'l P'ship for Women & Families, *supra* note 19, at 1).

For decade after decade, gender discrimination has been baked into our pay scales, with the result that women still earn only 80 percent of what men make. Unfortunately, women employed in certain sectors face an even larger gap. This disparity is exacerbated when a woman is paid less than a man for a comparable job solely because she earned less at her last job. The Equal Pay Act prohibits precisely this kind of "piling on," where women can never overcome the historical inequality.

I agree with most of the majority opinion—particularly its observation that past salary can reflect historical sex discrimination. But the majority goes too far in holding that any consideration of prior pay is "impermissible" under the Equal Pay Act, even when it is assessed with other job-related factors such as experience, education, past performance and training. In my view, prior salary alone is not a defense to unequal pay for equal work. If an employer's only justification for paying men and women unequally is that the men had higher prior salaries, odds are that the one-and-only "factor" causing the difference is sex. However, employers do not necessarily violate the Equal Pay Act when they consider prior salary among other factors when setting initial wages. To the extent salary is considered with other factors, the burden is on the employer to show that any pay differential is based on a valid job-related factor other than sex.

To be sure, the majority correctly decides the only issue squarely before the court: whether the Fresno County Office of Education was permitted to base Aileen Rizo's starting salary solely on her prior salary. The answer is no. But regrettably, the majority goes

further and effectively bars any consideration of prior salary in setting a new salary. Not only does Rizo's case not present this issue, but this approach is unsupported by the statute, is unrealistic, and may work to women's disadvantage.

Rizo's case is an easy one. After she was hired as a math consultant, she learned that male colleagues in the same job were being hired at a higher salary. The only rationale offered by the County was that Rizo's salary was lower at a prior job. In effect, the County "was still taking advantage of the availability of female labor to fill its [position] at a differentially low wage rate not justified by any factor other than sex"—a practice long held unlawful. *See Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (1974); *Glenn v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567, 1570 (11th Cir. 1988) ("[T]he argument that supply and demand dictates that women *qua* women may be paid less is exactly the kind of evil that the [Equal Pay] Act was designed to eliminate, and has been rejected."); *Drum v. Leeson Elec. Corp.*, 565 F.3d 1071, 1073 (8th Cir. 2009) (It is "prohibited" to rely on the "'market force theory' to justify lower wages for female employees simply because the market might bear such wages.").

This scenario provides a textbook violation of the "equal pay for equal work" mantra of the Equal Pay Act. Prior salary level created the only differential between Rizo and her male colleagues. The County did not, for example, consider Rizo's two advanced degrees or her prior experience in setting her initial salary. This historical imbalance entrenched unequal pay for equal work based on sex—end of story. The County cannot mount a defense on past salary alone.

Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act to root out historical sex discrimination, declaring it the "policy" of the Act "to correct the conditions" of "wage differentials based on sex." Pub. L. No. 88-38, 77 Stat. 56 (1963). At the signing ceremony, President John F. Kennedy called the Act "a first step" in "achiev[ing] full equality of economic opportunity—for the average woman worker earns only 60 percent of the average wage for men." President John F. Kennedy, Remarks Upon Signing the Equal Pay Act (June 10, 1963), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9267. The unqualified goal of the statute was to "eliminate wage discrimination based upon sex." H.R. REP. NO. 88-309, at 1 (1963). Sadly, that gap remains today—with the median salary of a female employee being only 80 percent of that of a male. *See* NAT'L P'SHIP FOR WOMEN & FAMILIES, AMERICA'S WOMEN AND THE WAGE GAP 1 (2017), https://goo.gl/SLEcd8.

Given the stated goal of the Equal Pay Act to erase the gender wage gap, it beggars belief that Congress intended for historical pay discrepancies like Rizo's to justify pay inequity. *See Corning*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 ("Congress' purpose in enacting the Equal Pay Act was to remedy . . . [an] endemic problem of employment discrimination . . . based on an ancient but outmoded belief that a man . . . should be paid more than a woman even though his duties are the same."). Congress recently noted that the existence of gender-based pay disparities "has been spread and perpetuated" since the passage of the Act and "many women continue to earn significantly lower than men for equal work." H.R. REP. No. 110-783, at 1–2 (2008). "In many instances, the pay disparities can only be due to continued intentional discrimination *or the*

lingering effects of past discrimination." *Id.* (emphasis added). Because past pay can reflect the very discrimination Congress sought to eradicate in the statute, allowing employers to defend unequal pay for equal work on that basis alone risks perpetuating unlawful inequity. C.f. *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 550 U.S. 618, 647, 127 S.Ct. 2162 (2007) (Ginsburg, J., dissenting), dissenting position adopted by legislative action (Jan. 29, 2009) ("Paychecks perpetuating past discrimination . . . are actionable . . . because they discriminate anew each time they issue."). That danger is best avoided by construing the Equal Pay Act "to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve" and rejecting prior salary as its own "factor other than sex" defense. *Corning*, 417 U.S. at 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

Yet I differ with the majority in one key respect. Merely because prior pay is unavailable as a standalone defense does not mean that employers may never use past pay as a factor in setting initial wages.[1] Using prior salary along with valid job-related factors such as education, past performance and training may provide a lawful benchmark for starting salary in appropriate cases.[2] This interpretation of the statute

---

[1] Contrary to the majority's assertion, it is wholly consistent to forbid employers from baldly asserting prior salary as a defense— without determining whether it accurately measures experience, education, training or other lawful factors—and to permit consideration of prior salary along with those valid factors.

[2] As Congress observed, "there are many factors which may be used to measure the relationships between jobs and which establish a valid basis for a difference in pay." H.R. REP. NO. 88-309, at 3 (1963). But "wage differentials based *solely* on the sex

still places the burden on the employer to justify that salary is determined on the basis of "any other factor other than sex."

My views align with those of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC"), the agency charged with administering the Act, and most of our sister circuits that have addressed the question. The EEOC's Compliance Manual states:

> [A]n employer may consider prior salary as part of a mix of factors—as, for example, where the employer also considers education and experience and concludes that the employee's prior salary accurately reflects ability, based on job-related qualifications. But because "prior salaries of job candidates can reflect sex-based compensation discrimination," "[p]rior salary cannot, by itself, justify a compensation disparity."

EEOC Amicus Br. 7 (quoting EEOC Compliance Manual, Compensation Discrimination § 10-IV.F.2.g (Dec. 5, 2000), *available at* https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/compensation.html).

The Tenth and Eleventh Circuits reached the same conclusion, holding that prior pay alone cannot justify a compensation disparity. *See Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1199 (10th Cir. 2015) (an employer may decide to pay an elevated salary to an applicant who rejects a lower offer, but the Act "precludes an employer from relying solely upon a prior salary to justify pay disparity"); *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 955

---

of the employee are an unfair labor standard." *Id.* at 2–3 (emphasis added).

(11th Cir. 1995) ("This court has not held that prior salary can never be used by an employer to establish pay, just that such a justification cannot solely carry the affirmative defense."). The Eighth Circuit has adopted a similar approach, permitting the use of prior salary as a defense, but "carefully examin[ing] the record to ensure that an employer does not rely on the prohibited 'market force theory' to justify lower wages" for women based solely on sex. *Drum*, 565 F.3d at 1073. The Second Circuit likewise allows the prior-salary defense, but places the burden on an employer to prove that a "bona fide business-related reason exists" for a wage differential—i.e., one that is "rooted in legitimate business-related differences in work responsibilities and qualifications for the particular positions at issue." *Aldrich v. Randolph Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 963 F.2d 520, 525–26 (1992).

Only the Seventh Circuit has veered far off course, holding that prior salary is *always* a "factor other than sex." *See Wernsing v. Dep't of Human Servs., State of Illinois*, 427 F.3d 466, 468–70 (2005). But its conclusion—that a "factor other than sex" need not be "related to the requirements of the particular position" or even "business related"—contravenes the Act's purpose of ensuring women and men earn equal pay for equal work. *Id.* at 470. After all, inherent in the Act is an understanding that compensation should mirror one's "skill, effort, and responsibility." *See Corning*, 417 U.S. at 195, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1)); *see also* Glenn, 841 F.2d at 1571. Because we know that historical sex discrimination persists, it cannot be that prior salary always reflects a factor other than sex.

I fear, however, that the majority makes the same categorical error as the Seventh Circuit, but in the opposite direction: it announces that prior salary is *never* a "factor other than sex." By forbidding consideration of prior salary altogether, the majority extends the scope of the statute and risks imposing Equal Pay Act liability on employers for using prior salary as *any* part of the calculus in making wage-setting decisions. That, too, is a drastic holding, particularly because companies and institutions often consider prior salary in making offers to lure away top talent from their competitors or to attract employees with specific skills. In unpacking what goes into the calculation, it may well be that salary accurately gauges a prospective employee's "skill, effort, and responsibility," as the Equal Pay Act envisions—in addition to her education, training, and past performance—and a new employer wants to exceed that benchmark. The Equal Pay Act should not be an impediment for employees seeking a brighter future and a higher salary at a new job. *See generally* ORLY LOBEL, TALENT WANTS TO BE FREE 49–75 (Yale Univ. Press 2013) (concluding that employee mobility between competitors promotes innovation and job growth); Cade Metz, *Tech Giants Are Paying Huge Salaries for Scarce A.I. Talent*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 23, 2017, at B1 (noting that employers pay a premium to hire top engineering talent).

On that front, states have begun passing statutes that prohibit employers from asking employees about their prior salaries.[3] California's statute just went

[3] A bill has been introduced in Congress to enact a federal prohibition on "requiring" or "requesting" that prospective

into effect. *See* Cal. Labor Code § 432.3. Those laws represent creative efforts to narrow the gender wage gap. But they also provide important exemptions for employees who wish to disclose prior salaries as part of a salary negotiation. *See, e.g.*, Cal. Labor Code § 432.3(g). Although the majority professes that its decision does not relate to negotiated salaries, the principle of the majority's holding may reach beyond these state statutes by making it a violation of federal antidiscrimination law to consider prior salary, even when an employee chooses to provide it as a bargaining chip for higher wages. I am concerned about chilling such voluntary discussions. Indeed, the result may disadvantage rather than advantage women.

To avoid those consequences, the majority endeavors to limit its decision by announcing that it "express[es] a general rule and do[es] not attempt to resolve its applications under all circumstances." The majority disclaims, for example, deciding "whether or under what circumstances, past salary may play a role in the course of an individualized salary negotiation." *See* Maj. Op. at 461. The majority's disclaimer hardly cushions the practical effect of its "general rule." Because the majority makes it "impermissible to rely on prior salary to set initial wages" under the Act, it has left little daylight for arguing that negotiated starting salaries should be treated differently than established pay scales. *See* Maj. Op. at 468. In the

---

employees disclose previous wages or salary history. *See* H.R. 2418, 115th Cong. (2017). Like its state counterparts, this bill does not seek to outlaw salary negotiations initiated by an employee.

real world, an employer "rel[ies] on prior salary to set initial wages" when it takes the prior salary offered voluntarily by an employee in negotiations and sets a starting salary above those past wages, even if there is an established pay scale.

The more limited holding adopted by our sister circuits better accords with common sense and the statutory text. The Equal Pay Act provides an affirmative defense for "*any* other factor other than sex." *See* 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1) (emphasis added). The majority opinion recognizes that "legitimate, job-related factors such as a prospective employee's experience, educational background, ability, or prior job performance" operate as affirmative defenses. But the majority nonetheless renders those valid, job-related factors nugatory when an employer also considers prior salary. That is a puzzling outcome.

For these reasons, I concur in the result, but not the majority's rationale.

CALLAHAN, Circuit Judge, with whom TALLMAN, Circuit Judge, joins, concurring:

We all agree that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work regardless of gender. Indeed, we agree that the purpose of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was to change "should receive equal pay" to "must receive equal pay." However, I write separately because in holding that prior salary can never be considered, the majority fails to follow Supreme Court precedent, unnecessarily ignores the realities of business and, in doing so, may hinder rather than promote equal pay for equal work.

The factual fallacies of the majority opinion are, first, that prior salary is not generally job-related, and second, that prior salary inherently reflects wage discrepancies based on gender. In fact, prior salary is a prominent consideration for both a job applicant and the potential employer. The applicant presumably seeks a job that will pay her more and the potential employer recognizes that it will have to pay her more if it wants to hire her. Of course, a prior salary might reflect a wage discrepancy based on gender, but this does not justify the majority's absolute position.

Prior salary serves, in combination with other factors, to allow employers to set a competitive salary that will entice potential employees to take the job. The majority's approach ignores these economic incentives and appears to demand a lockstep pay system such as is often used in government service.[1] We allow private industry more flexibility. In the private sector, basing initial salary upon previous salary, plus other factors such as experience and education, encourages hard work and rewards applicants who have stellar credentials. The majority opinion stifles these economic incentives with a flat prohibition on ever considering prior salary, no matter how enlightened or non-discriminatory it may have been.

Second, the assumption that prior salary inherently reflects gender bias is not true. The majority opinion completely ignores economic disparity in pay for the same jobs performed in different parts of the country,

---

[1] *See United States Office of Personnel Management*, https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wagesystem/ (last visited Feb. 21, 2018).

where costs of living are lower and demand for available jobs may exceed the supply of available and highly competitive positions. While there is no question that prior salary in some instances may well reflect gender discrimination, this is not always the case. Historically, differences in prior salaries may simply reflect the differing costs of living in various parts of the country. And the flat prohibition ignores the fact that when the prior salary was set there may well have been more qualified job seekers than there were available jobs to fill.

I

As required by the Equal Pay Act, Rizo, at least for the purposes of a motion for summary judgment, made a prima facie case of pay discrimination by showing that (1) she performed substantially equal work to that of her male colleagues; (2) the work conditions were basically the same; and (3) the male employees were paid more. *See Riser v. QEP Energy*, 776 F.3d 1191, 1196 (10th Cir. 2015).

The County does not contest the prima facie case but argues that Rizo's salary was exempt from Equal Pay Act coverage under the fourth exception in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). Subsection (d)(1) reads:

> No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate, within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill,

> effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions, except where such payment is made pursuant to (i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex.

We agree that this suit turns on our interpretation of the fourth exception in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1): "a differential based on any other factor other than sex."

II

"The Equal Pay Act is broadly remedial and it should be construed and applied so as to fulfill the underlying purposes which Congress sought to achieve." *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 208, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (1974). The majority struggles mightily and unnecessarily to couple the fourth exception—despite its clear language—so closely with the other three exceptions that it loses independent meaning.[2] In doing so, the majority conveniently overlooks the differences within the three specific

---

[2] The majority invokes the old chestnuts of statutory interpretation, *noscitur a sociis* and *ejusdem* generis, but they are not very helpful. The Supreme Court in Corning Glass, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223, recognized that the Equal Pay Act "establishes four exceptions— three specific and one general catchall provision." It follows that *noscitur a sociis*— "a word is known by the company it keeps"— does not aid our interpretation of the statute because the catchall provision is intended to contrast with the specific exceptions, not reflect them. For the same reason, *ejusdem generis* is of little assistance as the "catchall provision" is not intended to be similar to the specific exceptions.

exceptions. While merit systems and measuring earnings by quantity and quality of production are specifically job-related, that is not true of seniority systems. Indeed, at the time of the passage of the Equal Pay Act, if not today, seniority systems accounted for a fair amount of pay inequality.[3] Furthermore, the majority's insistence that the fourth exception is limited to specific job-related qualities is contrary to the Supreme Court's statement that the fourth exception "was designed differently, to confine the application of the Act to wage differentials attributable to sex discrimination." *Washington Cty. v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161, 170, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (1981).[4]

---

[3] For example, one-quarter of the complaints filed in the year after the passage of the Equal Pay Act concerned complaints by women that they were excluded from jobs because of seniority rules or because men were preferred over women after layoffs. Vicki Lens, *Supreme Court Narratives on Equality and Gender Discrimination in Employment*: *1971–2002*, 10 Cardozo Women's L.J. 501, 507 (2004).

[4] The paragraph from which this quote is taken reads in full: More importantly, incorporation of the fourth affirmative defense could have significant consequences for Title VII litigation. Title VII's prohibition of discriminatory employment practices was intended to be broadly inclusive, proscribing "not only overt discrimination but also practices that are fair in form, but discriminatory in operation." *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, 431, 91 S.Ct. 849, 853, 28 L.Ed.2d 158 (1971). The structure of Title VII litigation, including presumptions, burdens of proof, and defenses, has been designed to reflect this approach. The fourth affirmative defense of the Equal Pay Act, however, was designed differently, to confine the application of the Act to wage differentials attributable to sex discrimination. H.R. Rep. No. 309, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 3 (1963), U.S. Code Cong. & Admin. News 1963, p. 687. Equal Pay Act litigation, therefore, has been structured to permit employers to defend against charges of discrimination where their pay differentials are based on a bona

Thus, the Equal Pay Act's fourth exception for any "differential based on any other factor other than sex" allows for reasonable business reasons that extend beyond the narrow definition of job-related.

More importantly, the limitation of "any other factor other than sex" to specific job-related qualities is contrary to the Supreme Court's approach in Washington County. The Court explained that Equal Pay Act litigation "has been structured to permit employers to defend against charges of discrimination where their pay differentials are based on a bona fide use of 'other factors other than sex.'" 452 U.S. at 170, 101 S.Ct. 2242. The Court went on to hold that courts and administrative agencies were not permitted to substitute their judgment for the judgment of the employer "so long as it does not discriminate on the basis of sex." *Id.* at 171, 101 S.Ct. 2242. Thus, we are directed not to look to whether a differential is specifically job-related, but whether regardless of its

---

fide use of "other factors other than sex." Under the Equal Pay Act, the courts and administrative agencies are not permitted to "substitute their judgment for the judgment of the employer . . . who [has] established and applied a bona fide job rating system," so long as it does not discriminate on the basis of sex. 109 Cong.Rec. 9209 (1963) (statement of Rep. Goodell, principal exponent of the Act). Although we do not decide in this case how sex-based wage discrimination litigation under Title VII should be structured to accommodate the fourth affirmative defense of the Equal Pay Act, *see* n.8, supra, we consider it clear that the Bennett Amendment, under this interpretation, is not rendered superfluous.

Washington Cty., 452 U.S. at 170–71, 101 S.Ct. 2242 (footnote omitted).

"job-relatedness," it is attributable to sex discrimination.[5]

III

I agree that based on the history of pay discrimination and the broad purpose of the Equal Pay Act, prior salary by itself is not inherently a "factor other than sex." As the Eleventh Circuit noted, "if prior salary alone were a justification, the exception would swallow up the rule and inequality in pay among genders would be perpetuated." *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 955 (11th Cir. 1995). However, the Eleventh Circuit continued:

---

[5] This conclusion is further supported by a footnote in the Court's decision, which states:

> The legislative history of the Equal Pay Act was examined by this Court in *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 198201, 94 S.Ct. 2223, 2229–2231, 41 L.Ed.2d 1 (1974). The Court observed that earlier versions of the Equal Pay bill were amended to define equal work and to add the fourth affirmative defense because of a concern that bona fide job-evaluation systems used by American businesses would otherwise be disrupted. *Id.*, at 199–201, 94 S.Ct. at 2230–2231. This concern is evident in the remarks of many legislators. Representative Griffin, for example, explained that the fourth affirmative defense is a "broad principle," which "makes clear and explicitly states that a differential based on any factor or factors other than sex would not violate this legislation." 109 Cong.Rec. 9203 (1963). See also *id.*, at 9196 (remarks of Rep. Frelinghuysen); *id.*, at 9197–9198 (remarks of Rep. Griffin); *ibid.*, (remarks of Rep. Thompson); *id.*, at 9198 (remarks of Rep. Goodell); *id.*, at 9202 (remarks of Rep. Kelly); *id.*, at 9209 (remarks of Rep. Goodell); *id.*, at 9217 (remarks of Reps. Pucinski and Thompson).

Washington Cty., 452 U.S. at 170 n.11, 101 S.Ct. 2242.

> an Equal Pay Act defendant may successfully raise the affirmative defense of "any other factor other than sex" if he proves that he relied on prior salary and experience in setting a "new" employee's salary. While an employer may not overcome the burden of proof on the affirmative defense of relying on "any other factor other than sex" by resting on prior pay alone, as the district court correctly found, there is no prohibition on utilizing prior pay as part of a mixed-motive, such as prior pay and more experience. This court has not held that prior salary can never be used by an employer to establish pay, just that such a justification cannot solely carry the affirmative defense.

Id.

Many of our sister circuits are in accord. The Tenth Circuit has held that "an individual's former salary can be considered in determining whether pay disparity is based on a factor other than sex," but that "the EPA 'precludes an employer from relying solely upon a prior salary to justify pay disparity.'" *Riser*, 776 F.3d at 1199 (citing *Angove v. Williams–Sonoma, Inc.*, 70 Fed.Appx. 500, 508, 2003 WL 21529409 (10th Cir. 2003) (unpublished)). The Second and Sixth Circuits are basically in agreement. See *Aldrich v. Randolph Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 963 F.2d 520, 525 (2d Cir. 1992) (recognizing "that job classification systems may qualify under the factor-other than-sex defense only when they are based on legitimate business-related considerations"); *EEOC v. J.C. Penney Co. Inc.*, 843 F.2d 249, 253 (6th Cir. 1988) (holding that "the legitimate business record standard is the appropriate

benchmark against which to measure the 'factor other than sex'".[6]

This approach reflects that the fourth exception was intended to be, and is, broad. Thus, while a pay system that relied exclusively on prior salary is conclusively presumed to be gender based—to perpetuate gender based inequality—a pay system that uses prior pay as one of several factors deserves to be considered on its own merits. When a plaintiff makes a prima facie case of pay inequality based on gender, the burden of showing that the difference is not based on gender shifts to the employer. In other words, the prima facie case creates a presumption that the pay inequality arising from the employer's pay system is gender based and hence is not a "factor other than sex." In *Corning Glass*, the Supreme Court explained that the Equal Pay Act's

> structure and history also suggest that once the Secretary has carried his burden of showing that the employer pays workers of one sex more than workers of the opposite sex for equal work, the burden shifts to the employer to show that the

---

[6] The Seventh and Eighth Circuits prefer an even broader definition for "factor other than sex." *Covington v. S. Ill. Univ.*, 816 F.2d 317, 321–22 (7th Cir. 1987) (holding that the EPA does not preclude "an employer from carrying out a policy which, although not based on employee performance, has in no way been shown to undermine the goals of the EPA"); *Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 720 (8th Cir. 2003) (stating that "a case-by-case analysis of reliance on prior salary or salary retention policies with careful attention to alleged gender-based practices preserves the business freedoms Congress intended to protect when it adopted the catch-all 'factor other than sex' affirmative defense").

differential is justified under one of the Act's four exceptions.

Corning Glass, 417 U.S. at 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223; *see also Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 445–46 (9th Cir. 1986) (stating that once the plaintiff establishes a prima facie case, "the burden shifts to the employer to show that the wage disparity is permitted by one of the four statutory exceptions to the Equal Pay Act"). There is no justification for holding that an employer could, as a matter of law, justify the differential under one of the first three exceptions, but not the fourth exception. Accordingly, I differ from the majority in that I think, as do the majority of our sister circuits, that when salary is established based on a multi-factor salary system that includes prior salary, the presumption that the system is based on gender is rebuttable.[7]

This is also the position of the EEOC, the agency charged with enforcing the EPA. In its amicus brief, the EEOC states that in its view because prior salaries "can reflect sex-based compensation discrimination," a prior salary "cannot by itself justify a compensation disparity," but "an employer may consider prior salary as part of a mix of factors."[8] That seems a reasonable

---

[7] I agree with the majority that the market force theory for paying women less was discredited by the Supreme Court in Corning Glass, 417 U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223, and that the notion that an employer may pay women less because women allegedly cost more to employ than men was discredited in City of Los Angeles, *Department of Water & Power v. Manhart*, 435 U.S. 702, 98 S.Ct. 1370 (1978). *See* Majority Opinion at 466–67.

[8] In EEOC Notice Number 915.002 (Oct. 29, 1997), "Enforcement Guidance on Sex Discrimination in the

approach to a multi-faceted decision to formulate a rate of pay.

In sum, I note that "prior pay" is not inherently a reflection of gender discrimination. Differences in prior pay may well be based on other factors such as the cost of living in different parts of our country. Also, it is possible, and we hope in this day probable, that the prior employer had adjusted its pay system to be gender neutral. Nonetheless, consistent with the intent of the EPA, I agree that where prior pay is the exclusive determinant of pay, the employer cannot carry its burden of showing that it is a "factor other than sex."[9] However, neither Congress's intent, nor

---

Compensation of Sports Coaches in Educational Institutions," the EEOC advised:

> Thus, if the employer asserts prior salary as a factor other than sex, evidence should be obtained as to whether the employer: 1) consulted with the employee's previous employer to determine the basis for the employee's starting and final salaries; 2) determined that the prior salary was an accurate indication of the employee's ability based on education, experience, or other relevant factors; and 3) considered the prior salary, but did not rely solely on it in setting the employee's current salary.

[9] We read the EPA to place the burden on the employer to demonstrate that the pay differential falls within the fourth exception; that it is indeed not based on gender. An employer cannot meet this burden where the pay system is based solely on prior pay because by blindly accepting the prior pay, it cannot rebut the presumption that using the prior pay perpetuates the inequality of pay based on gender that the EPA seeks to correct. If, instead, as suggested by the EEOC's Notice Number 915.002, an employer not only looked to prior pay but also researched whether the applicant's prior pay reflected gender based inequality, and made adjustments if it did, the employer would no longer be relying exclusively on prior pay. Thus, in such a

the language of the Equal Pay Act, nor logic, requires, or justifies, the conclusion that a pay system that includes prior pay as one of several ingredients can never be a "factor other than sex," and thus fails to come within the fourth exception to the Equal Pay Act.

IV

In this case, the County based pay only on prior salary, and accordingly the district court properly denied it summary judgment. Nonetheless, the majority unnecessarily, incorrectly, and contrary to Supreme Court precedent, insists that prior salary can never be a factor in a pay system that falls within the fourth exception to the Equal Pay Act. Accordingly, I concur separately because following the Supreme Court's guidance, I agree with the Tenth and Eleventh Circuits, as well as the EEOC, the agency charged with enforcing the EPA, that prior pay may be a component of a pay system that comes within the fourth exception recognized in 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). A defense to a pay discrimination claim will lie if the employer meets its burden of showing that its system does not perpetuate or create a pay differential based on sex. We should not have reached out to hold otherwise, particularly as there was no need to do so.[10]

---

situation, an employer might be able to overcome the presumption and show that its pay system was a "factor other than sex."

[10] The majority's assertion that it expresses a "general rule" and does not "attempt to resolve its application under all circumstances" (Majority Opinion at 461) is at odds with its conclusion that past salary cannot be considered "alone or in conjunction with less invidious factors." Majority Opinion at 468. As Judge McKeown notes in her separate concurrence, the

For these reasons, I concur in the result, but not the majority's rationale.

WATFORD, Circuit Judge, concurring in the judgment:

I agree with the result the majority reaches, but I arrive there through a somewhat different reading of the statute.

The Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from discriminating "on the basis of sex" by paying female employees less than their male counterparts for doing the same work. 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). The Act allows an employer to justify such a pay disparity by proving, as an affirmative defense, that the disparity is based on a "factor other than sex." *Id.*; *see Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 196, 94 S.Ct. 2223 (1974). In my view, past pay can constitute a "factor other than sex," but only if an employee's past pay is not itself a reflection of sex discrimination. If past pay does reflect sex discrimination, an employer cannot rely on it to justify a pay disparity, whether the employer considers past pay alone or in combination with other factors. I agree with the majority that holding otherwise would permit employers to perpetuate the very form of sex discrimination the Act was intended to outlaw.

This reading of § 206(d)(1) aligns with the Supreme Court's interpretation of the same provision in *Corning Glass*. There, *Corning Glass* had for many years paid female day-shift inspectors less than male

---

"disclaimer hardly cushions the practical effect of its 'general rule.'" McKeown Concurrence at 472.

night-shift inspectors, even though both sets of inspectors performed the same work. The company argued that this pay disparity was simply the result of prevailing market forces, which allowed men to demand and receive higher wages than women. The Court rejected that argument and held that the disparity nonetheless violated the Act's requirement of "equal pay for equal work." 417 U.S. at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223.

The Court also rejected the company's attempt to defend its new pay system, which eliminated the pay disparity going forward. Beginning in January 1969, all newly hired inspectors would be paid the same wage regardless of shift. The company set the new, uniform wage at an hourly rate above what the day-shift inspectors had been earning but below what the night-shift inspectors made. Existing employees would be paid the new, uniform wage as well, unless they had been earning more beforehand. That meant existing day-shift inspectors got a raise (to the new, uniform wage), but existing nightshift inspectors got to retain their previous, higher wage. *Id.* at 194, 208–09 & n.29, 94 S.Ct. 2223. The Supreme Court held that the resulting pay disparity between female day-shift and male nightshift inspectors' wages was illegal: Although the disparity was attributable to a "neutral factor other than sex"—namely, past pay—the employer could not avail itself of the affirmative defense because an employee's past pay in this instance reflected sex discrimination. *Id.* at 209–10, 94 S.Ct. 2223. Holding otherwise, the Court noted, would "perpetuate the effects of the company's prior illegal practice of paying women less than men for equal work." *Id.*

I think the same analysis should govern even when an employer's prior pay practices are not overtly discriminatory, as they were in *Corning Glass*. If an employer seeks to justify paying women less than men by relying on past pay, it bears the burden of proving that its female employees' past pay is not tainted by sex discrimination, including discriminatory pay differentials attributable to prevailing market forces. *See id.* at 205, 94 S.Ct. 2223. Unfortunately, even today, in most instances that will be exceedingly difficult to do. Despite progress in closing the wage gap, gender pay disparities persist in virtually every sector of the American economy, with women today earning on average only about 82% of what men make, even after controlling for education, work experience, and other factors. *See* Francine D. Blau & Lawrence M. Kahn, *The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations*, 55 J. Econ. Literature 789, 797–800 (2017). It therefore remains highly likely that a woman's past pay will reflect, at least in part, some form of sex discrimination. As a result, an employer will rarely be able to justify a gender pay disparity by relying on the fact that a female employee made less than her male counterparts at her prior job.

The employer in this case failed to prove that Aileen Rizo's past pay is not tainted by sex discrimination. Her prior salary thus cannot be deemed a "factor other than sex." For that reason, I agree that the district court properly denied the County's motion for summary judgment.

APPENDIX C

Aileen RIZO, Plaintiff-Appellee,

v.

Jim YOVINO, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Erroneously Sued Herein as Fresno County Office of Education, Defendant-Appellant.

No. 16-15372

United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.

Argued and Submitted February 17, 2017 San Francisco, California

Filed April 27, 2017

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California, Michael J. Seng, Magistrate Judge, Presiding, D.C. No. 1:14-cv-00423-MJS

Before: A. WALLACE TASHIMA and ANDREW D. HURWITZ, Circuit Judges, and LYNN S. ADELMAN,** District Judge.

** The Honorable Lynn S. Adelman, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, sitting by designation.

OPINION

ADELMAN, District Judge:

The plaintiff, Aileen Rizo, is an employee of the public schools in Fresno County. After discovering that the County pays her less than her male counterparts for the same work, she brought this action under the Equal Pay Act, 29 U.S.C. § 206(d), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5, and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act, Cal. Gov. Code § 12940. When the County[1] moved for summary judgment, it conceded that it paid the plaintiff less than comparable male employees for the same work. However, it argued that this result was lawful because the pay differential was "based on any other factor other than sex," an affirmative defense to a claim under the Equal Pay Act. This other factor was prior salary, and the district court concluded that when an employer bases a pay structure "exclusively on prior wages," any resulting pay differential between men and women is not based on any other factor other than sex. *Rizo v. Yovino*, No. 1:14cv-0423-MJS, 2015 WL 9260587, at *9 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 18, 2015). Based on this conclusion, the district court denied the County's motion for summary judgment.

The district court candidly recognized that its decision potentially conflicted with this court's decision in *Kouba v. Allstate Insurance Co.*, in which we held that prior salary can be a factor other than

---

[1] The defendant is Jim Yovino, the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. However, because Yovino is sued in his official capacity, in this opinion we will refer to the defendant as the County.

sex, provided that the employer shows that prior salary "effectuate[s] some business policy" and the employer uses prior salary "reasonably in light of [its] stated purpose as well as its other practices," 691 F.2d 873, 876–77 (9th Cir. 1982), and thus certified its decision for interlocutory appeal under 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). We permitted that appeal and authorized the County to appeal from the order denying summary judgment.

We conclude that this case is controlled by *Kouba*. We therefore vacate the district court's order and remand with instructions to reconsider the County's motion for summary judgment.

I.

In 2009, the County hired the plaintiff as a math consultant, a position it classifies as management-level. When the County hired Rizo, it used a salary schedule known as "Standard Operation Procedure 1440" to determine the starting salaries of management-level employees. This schedule consists of twelve "levels," each of which has progressive "steps" within it. New math consultants receive starting salaries within Level 1, which has ten steps, with pay ranging from $62,133 at Step 1 to $81,461 at Step 10. To determine the step within Level 1 on which the new employee will begin, the County considers the employee's most recent prior salary and places the employee on the step that corresponds to his or her prior salary, increased by 5%.

Prior to being hired by Fresno County, the plaintiff worked as a math teacher at a middle school in Arizona. When she left that position, she was receiving a salary of $50,630 per year, plus an annual

stipend of $1,200 for her master's degree. Adding 5% to the plaintiff's prior compensation resulted in a salary lower than Fresno County's Level 1, Step 1 salary. Thus, under Standard Operation Procedure 1440, the plaintiff's starting salary was set at the minimum Level 1 salary: $62,133. However, the County also paid the plaintiff a $600 stipend for her master's degree, so her total starting pay was $62,733 per year.

In July 2012, the plaintiff was having lunch with her colleagues when a male math consultant who had recently been hired informed her that he started on Step 9 of Level 1. The plaintiff subsequently learned that the other math consultants, all of whom were male, were paid more than she was. The plaintiff complained to the County about this disparity, but the County informed her that all salaries had been properly set under Standard Operation Procedure 1440.

Dissatisfied with the County's response, the plaintiff initiated this suit. The County moved for summary judgment, arguing that the plaintiff's salary, though less than her male colleagues', was based on "any other factor other than sex," namely, prior salary. The district court determined that, under the Equal Pay Act, prior salary alone can never qualify as a factor other than sex, reasoning that "a pay structure based exclusively on prior wages is so inherently fraught with the risk… that it will perpetuate a discriminatory wage disparity between men and women that it cannot stand, even if motivated by a legitimate non-discriminatory business purpose." *Rizo*, 2015 WL 9260587, at *9. The court

therefore denied the County's motion for summary judgment.

II.

Under the Equal Pay Act, the plaintiff has the burden of establishing a prima facie case of discrimination. *Stanley v. Univ. of S. Cal.*, 178 F.3d 1069, 1073–74 (9th Cir. 1999). "The Equal Pay Act creates a type of strict liability; no intent to discriminate need be shown." *Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 446 (9th Cir. 1986) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). Thus, to make out a prima facie case, the plaintiff must show only that he or she is receiving different wages for equal work. *Hein v. Or. Coll. of Educ.*, 718 F.2d 910, 916 (9th Cir. 1983).

"Once the plaintiff establishes a prima facie case, the burden of persuasion shifts to the employer to show that the wage disparity is permitted by one of the four statutory exceptions to the Equal Pay Act: '(i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex.'" *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446 (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 2069(d)(1)). "These exceptions are affirmative defenses which the employer must plead and prove." *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 875.[2]

---

[2] The plaintiff also alleges claims under Title VII and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act. "When a Title VII claimant contends that she has been denied equal pay for substantially equal work, …Equal Pay Act standards apply." *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446; *see also Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 875. For this reason, we do not separately discuss the plaintiff's Title VII claim. Because the parties do not assert that there are differences

In the district court, the County conceded that the plaintiff had established a prima facie case under the Equal Pay Act, but asserted the affirmative defense that the pay differential was "based on any other factor other than sex." Because the County sought summary judgment on the basis of an affirmative defense on which it would bear the burden of proof at trial, it must show at the summary-judgment stage that "no reasonable trier of fact" could fail to find that it had proved that defense. *Soremekun v. Thrifty Payless, Inc.*, 509 F.3d 978, 984 (9th Cir. 2007). However, the issue that prompted this interlocutory appeal is purely one of law: whether the district court's conclusion that prior salary alone can never be a "factor other than sex" is correct.

In *Kouba*, the employer, Allstate Insurance, "compute[d] the minimum salary guaranteed to a new sales agent on the basis of ability, education, experience, and prior salary." 691 F.2d at 874. As result of this practice, on average, female agents made less than male agents. *Id.* at 875. The plaintiff alleged that Allstate's "use of prior salary caused the wage differential," and that therefore the differential violated the Equal Pay Act. *Id.* Allstate argued that, to the extent its use of prior salary "caused the wage differential," "prior salary constitute[d] a factor other than sex." *Id.* The district court rejected this argument, reasoning that (1) because so many employers paid discriminatory salaries in the past, the court would presume that a female agent's prior salary was based on her gender unless the employer

---

between federal law and the California Fair Employment and Housing Act, we also do not separately discuss California law.

presented evidence to rebut that presumption, and (2) absent such a showing, prior salary is not a factor other than sex. *Id.*

On appeal, we rejected the district court's interpretation of the Equal Pay Act. *Id.* at 876. We held that "the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary," even though an employer could "manipulate its use of prior salary to underpay female employees." *Id.* at 878. However, we did not hold that prior salary automatically qualifies as a factor other than sex. Rather, we held that an employer could maintain a pay differential based on prior salary (or based on any other facially gender-neutral factor) only if it showed that the factor "effectuate[s] some business policy" and that the employer "use[s] the factor reasonably in light of the employer's stated purpose as well as its other practices." *Id.* at 876–77. We then noted that Allstate had offered "two business reasons for its use of prior salary" and directed the district court to evaluate those reasons on remand. *Id.* at 877.

The County has offered four business reasons for using Standard Operation Procedure 1440, under which starting salaries are based primarily on prior salary: (1) the policy is objective, in the sense that no subjective opinions as to the new employee's value enters into the starting-salary calculus; (2) the policy encourages candidates to leave their current jobs for jobs at the County, because they will always receive a 5% pay increase over their current salary; (3) the policy prevents favoritism and ensures consistency in application; and (4) the policy is a judicious use of taxpayer dollars. But, the district court did not evaluate whether these reasons effectuate a business

policy or determine whether the County used prior salary "reasonably," as required by *Kouba*. Rather, the district court determined that, even though in *Kouba* we held that the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary, *Kouba* does not preclude a finding that an employer may not use prior salary "as the *only* factor." *Rizo*, 2015 WL 9260587, at *7. According to the district court, "[t]he Ninth Circuit in *Kouba* was not called upon to, and did not, rule on the question of whether a salary differential based solely on prior earnings would violate the [Equal Pay Act], even if motivated by legitimate, non-discriminatory business reasons." *Id*. at *8. The district court then followed cases from other circuits holding that prior salary alone cannot justify a pay disparity. *Id*. at *8–9 (citing, among other cases, *Angove v. Williams-Sonoma, Inc.*, 70 Fed.Appx. 500, 508 (10th Cir. 2003); *Irby v. Bittick*, 44 F.3d 949, 954 (11th Cir. 1995); *Price v. Lockheed Space Operations Co.*, 856 F.2d 1503, 1506 (11th Cir. 1988); *Glenn v. Gen. Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567, 1570–71 (11th Cir. 1988)).

We do not agree with the district court that *Kouba* left open the question of whether a salary differential based solely on prior earnings violates the Equal Pay Act. To the contrary, that was exactly the question presented and answered in *Kouba*. The plaintiff in *Kouba* alleged that Allstate's "use of prior salary *caused the wage differential*." 691 F.2d at 875 (emphasis added). Although noting that Allstate "question[ed]" whether its use of prior salary caused the differential, we left the question of causation for the district court to resolve on remand. *Id*. at 875 n.5. It is true that Allstate, in setting an employee's pay,

considered factors other than prior salary, including "ability, education, [and] experience." *Id.* at 874. However, we did not attribute any significance to Allstate's use of these other factors. Rather, we focused on prior salary alone and determined that it would be a "factor other than sex" within the meaning of the Equal Pay Act, provided that Allstate could show on remand that its use of prior salary was reasonable and effectuated some business policy. *Id.* at 876–78.

The plaintiff and the EEOC, as amicus curiae, argue that prior salary alone cannot be a factor other than sex because when an employer sets pay by considering only its employees' prior salaries, it perpetuates existing pay disparities and thus undermines the purpose of the Equal Pay Act. But this argument was presented in *Kouba*, and the result we reached was to allow an employer to base a pay differential on prior salary so long as it showed that its use of prior salary effectuated some business policy and that the employer used the factor reasonably in light of its stated purpose and its other practices. *Id.* We did not draw any distinction between using prior salary "alone" and using it in combination with other factors.

Moreover, we do not see how the employer's consideration of other factors would prevent the perpetuation of existing pay disparities if, as we assumed in *Kouba* and as is the allegation here, prior salary is the only factor that *causes* the current disparity. For example, assume that a male and a female employee have the same education and number of years' experience as each other, but the male employee was paid a higher prior salary than the female employee. The current employer sets salary by

considering the employee's education, years of experience, and prior salary. Using these factors, the employer gives both employees the same salary credit for their identical education and experience, but the employer pays the male employee a higher salary than the female employee because of his higher prior salary. In this example, it is prior salary alone that accounts for the pay differential, even though the employer also considered other factors when setting pay. If prior salary alone is responsible for the disparity, requiring an employer to consider factors in addition to prior salary cannot resolve the problem that the EEOC and the plaintiff have identified.[3]

III.

Because *Kouba* holds that a pay differential based on the employer's use of prior salary can be "a differential based on any other factor other than sex," we vacate the district court's order denying the County's motion for summary judgment and remand for further proceedings. On remand, the district court must evaluate the four business reasons offered by the County and determine whether the County used prior salary "reasonably in light of [its] stated purpose[s] as well as its other practices." *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876–77. We emphasize that because these matters relate to the County's affirmative defense rather than to the

[3] We also note that, if an employer's use of prior salary alone were unacceptable under the Equal Pay Act, but the employer's mere consideration of some other factor in addition to prior salary (other than sex) cured the problem, then in the present case the County's pay structure would be lawful. That is because, in addition to prior salary, the County considers a new hire's education when setting pay, as reflected in the "stipend" that the plaintiff received for holding a master's degree.

elements of the plaintiff's claim, the County has the burden of persuasion. *See Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446. Thus, unlike in a typical case under Title VII involving the burden-shifting method of *McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792, 93 S.Ct. 1817, 36 L.Ed.2d 668 (1973), the plaintiff does not have to present evidence that the County's explanation for the pay differential is a pretext for intentional gender discrimination. Rather, it is up to the employer to persuade the trier of fact that its stated "factor other than sex" actually caused the salary differential, that the stated factor "effectuate[s] some business policy," and that the employer used the factor "reasonably in light of [its] stated purpose as well as its other practices." *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876–77. Of course, the plaintiff is free to introduce evidence of pretext (or any other matter that casts doubt on the employer's affirmative defense) if it chooses to do so. *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446.

VACATED and REMANDED. Each party shall bear its own costs.

APPENDIX D

United States District Court, E.D. California.

Aileen RIZO, Plaintiff,
v.
Jim YOVINO, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Defendant.

CASE NO. 1:14-cv-0423-MJS
|
Signed December 17, 2015
|
Filed 12/18/2015

AMENDED ORDER DENYING DEFENDANT'S MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT (ECF NO. 12);

ISSUING CERTIFICATION FOR INTERLOCUTORY APPEAL; AND

VACATING JANUARY 12, 2016, TRIAL DATE

Michael J. Seng, UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

I. INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff initiated this action on February 3, 2014, in the Fresno County Superior Court. She pled four

causes of action: (1) violation of the federal Equal Pay Act ("EPA"), 29 U.S.C. § 206(d); (2) sex discrimination under California Government Code § 12940; (3) sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 196, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq. ("Title VII"); and (4) failure to prevent discrimination under California Government Code § 12940(k).

Defendant Jim Yovino, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (erroneously sued as Fresno County Office of Education), removed this action to this Court on March 24, 2014, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1441(c)(1)(A). The parties have consented to the undersigned's jurisdiction for all purposes. (*See* ECF Nos. 6, 7.)

This matter is before the Court on Defendant's motion for summary judgment. (ECF No. 12.) Plaintiff has filed an opposition. (ECF No. 14.) Defendant has filed a reply. (ECF No. 16.) On November 19, 2015, the parties filed supplemental briefs. (ECF Nos. 18, 19.) The Court heard argument on the motion on November 25, 2015. The motion is fully briefed and ready for disposition.

II. LEGAL STANDARDS

Any party may move for summary judgment, and the Court shall grant summary judgment if the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a); *Wash. Mut. Inc. v. United States*, 636 F.3d 1207, 1216 (9th Cir. 2011). Each party's position, whether it be that a fact is disputed or undisputed, must be supported by (1) citing to particular parts of materials in the record, including but not limited to depositions,

documents, declarations, or discovery; or (2) showing that the materials cited do not establish the presence or absence of a genuine dispute or that the opposing party cannot produce admissible evidence to support the fact. Fed R. Civ. P. 56(c)(1). The Court may consider other materials in the record not cited to by the parties, but it is not required to do so. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)(3); *Carmen v. San Francisco Unified Sch. Dist.*, 237 F.3d 1026, 1031 (9th Cir. 2001).

Plaintiff bears the burden of proof at trial, and to prevail on summary judgment, she must affirmatively demonstrate that no reasonable trier of fact could find other than for her. *Soremekun v. Thrifty Payless, Inc.*, 509 F.3d 978, 984 (9th Cir. 2007). Defendants do not bear the burden of proof at trial and, in moving for summary judgment, they need only prove an absence of evidence to support Plaintiff's case. *In re Oracle Corp. Securities Litigation*, 627 F.3d 376, 387 (9th Cir. 2010).

In judging the evidence at the summary judgment stage, the Court may not make credibility determinations or weigh conflicting evidence, *Soremekun*, 509 F.3d at 984, and it must draw all inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party and determine whether a genuine issue of material fact precludes entry of judgment, *Comite de Jornaleros de Redondo Beach v. City of Redondo Beach*, 657 F.3d 936, 942 (9th Cir. 2011).

III. UNDISPUTED FACTS[1]

A. Standard Operating Procedure No. 1440 ("SOP 1440")

1. Overview

The Fresno County Office of Education's ("FCOE") Management Salary Schedule sets forth the pay range for management-level employees. It consists of twelve levels. Each level has progressive steps within it. *See* Gunner Decl., Ex. G. Plaintiff and other math consultants were hired at Level 1. Level 1 has 10 steps, with pay ranging from $62,133 at Step 1 to $81,461 at Step 10. *Id.*

Prior to November 2004, Standard Operation Procedure No. 1038 ("SOP 1038") set forth the criteria for determining the proper step on the salary schedule for management-level employees "based on experience regarding the position awarded." Gabriel Dep., Ex. 15, ECF No. 14-3 at 89-91.

In November 2004, Standard Operation Procedure No. 1440 ("SOP 1440") was adopted to replace SOP 1038. Gabriel Dep., Ex. 15, ECF No. 14-3 at 99–100. Under SOP 1440, a new management employee's initial salary step is determined by verifying the daily rate of the employee's most recent position, adding a five-percent increase, and then placing that new employee on the next step that pays an amount at or above the five percent increase. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 4. Experience is no longer a factor in determining a candidate's placement on the salary schedule. *See* Gabriel Dep. at 49:2–6, Ex. 15. SOP 1440 also applies

---

[1] All facts set forth herein are found to be without material dispute unless noted otherwise.

to FCOE employees being promoted. Gabriel Dep. at 27:2–5.

Laurie Gabriel, Administrator of FCOE's Human Resource's Department, has worked for FCOE since 1998, first as the Director of Human Resources, then Senior Director, and most recently as the Administrator. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 2. Although the policy of basing a management employee's initial salary on verified prior earnings plus a five-percent increase was not written until November 2004, FCOE has applied that policy since at least 1998 when Gabriel was first hired. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 5; *see also* Gabriel Dep. at 50:17—51:2.

2. Hiring Pursuant to SOP 1440

When a job opening at FCOE is posted, the salary range is posted along with the job description. Dueck Dep. at 18:21–22. An applicant receives no explanation as to how his or her starting salary will be determined unless he or she asks. *See* Gabriel Dep. at 30:22—31:4. An applicant does not learn what his or her actual starting salary will be until an offer is made. Gabriel Dep. at 30:10—31:4; Dueck Dep. at 18:6–14.

Defendant Jim Yovino, first hired on July 31, 2006 as a Deputy Superintendent, is now the Fresno County Superintendent for FCOE. Yovino Decl. ¶ 3. As Superintendent, Yovino's responsibilities include determining how salaries are set. Yovino Decl. ¶ 3. Yovino has hired or promoted a number of employees pursuant to SOP 1440, including Eric Crantz, Tina Nakasian, and Mike Chamberlain, all of whom work

in Plaintiff's department and in the same position as Plaintiff[2]:

Tina Nakasian, a female, was hired on July 23, 2012, and placed on Step 8 of the management salary schedule pursuant to SOP 1440. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6c.

Eric Crantz, a male, was "on loan" from another Fresno County school district, Kingsburg Elementary School District, in 2009. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6e. He was being paid in accordance with that school district's salary schedule while performing services for FCOE. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6e. In July 2012, Crantz was hired as a permanent employee and placed on Step 9 of the management salary schedule in accordance with SOP 1440. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6e; Crantz Dep. at 15:19–22, Ex. 19. Within a day after signing his hiring contract, Crantz noticed that the salary information on it incorrectly showed him earning more than he was entitled to be paid. Crantz Dep. at 22:1–11. Within a day of bringing the error to the attention of the human resources department, Crantz signed a new contract with the correct salary information. Crantz Dep. at 22:15–20, 24:4–25.

Mike Chamberlain, a male, was hired on July 23, 2012, and placed on Step 7 of the salary schedule. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6d. When an offer was made to Chamberlain, he was unaware that salaries were determined by application of SOP 1440, and he tried to negotiate a higher salary by pointing out relevant contract and consultant work he did in addition to his

---

[2] A fourth individual, Carl Veater, also worked as a math consultant in Plaintiff's department. He was hired on December 22, 2003, at Step 7. Gabriel Decl., Ex. C, ECF No. 12-6 at 3.

primary job. Chamberlain Dep. at 16:14–23. Though he felt that his concerns were listened to, *see* Chamberlain Dep. at 17:16–25, his starting salary remained as determined under SOP 1440. Yovino Decl. ¶ 6d. Chamberlain's starting salary was based on a contract he had entered into with Caruthers Unified School District commencing on July 1, 2012, even though he had not actually begun work under that contract. Yovino Decl. ¶ 7. A day or two after signing his initial hiring contract, Chamberlain signed a new contract because the initial contract had incorrect salary information; as a result Chamberlain's salary was adjusted down. Chamberlain Dep. at 28: 3–19.

Since July 1, 2005, when Yovino's predecessor was hired, 9 female administrators were hired or promoted into management positions and placed on a higher step than Yovino's and his predecessor's initial placements. Yovino Decl. ¶ 9. During the same time frame, three male administrators were hired or promoted into management positions and placed on a step higher step than Yovino's and his predecessor's initial placements. Yovino Decl. ¶ 9.

3. Deviations from SOP 1440

There have been times when Defendant has deviated from the standards set forth in SOP 1440. When Elaine Sotiropoulous was hired as a management employee in January 2000, there were three different versions of the management salary schedule in effect. Yovino Decl. ¶ 8. Sotiropoulous was placed on Step 3, which may have been one step higher than she should have been placed under SOP 1440. Yovino Decl. ¶ 8.

In October 2008, Mark Hammons was promoted from an employee in the classified bargaining unit (a 12-month position) to a management position (an 11-month position). Yovino Decl. ¶ 7. Under SOP 1440, Hammons should have been placed at Step 1, but Yovino approved placement at Step 2 because of the fewer days Hammons would be working; otherwise, Hammons's promotion would have resulted in a pay cut. Yovino Decl. ¶ 7; Gabriel Decl. ¶ 6.

B. Plaintiff's Application and Employment with FCOE

Plaintiff, a female, has a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics Education, a Master's degree in Educational Technology, and a Master's degree in Mathematics Education. Pl. Dep. at 8:14–24, 9:2–14. Her work experience includes teaching high school math, physics and art at a public school, *id*. at 10:12–22; working as a math department head and then math curriculum designer at a publishing company, *id*. at 11:2–19; and teaching math at a public school, *id*. at 12:6–15, 15:4–10.

In September 2009, Plaintiff applied for a position as a math consultant in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Department at FCOE. Yovino Decl. ¶ 11; Pl. Decl. ¶ 2; Pl. Dep., Attach. As part of her application, Plaintiff submitted proof of her earnings at her previous position. Pl.'s Dep. at 21:1–4.

Following two interviews, Lori Hamada offered Plaintiff the math consultant position in October 2009 by with a starting salary at Step 1 of the salary schedule pursuant to SOP 1440. Pl.'s Dep. at 20:5–7, 27:2–5; Yovino Decl. ¶ 11. Plaintiff understood that

her salary was comparable to a person with as much experience as she had. Pl. Dep. at 24:19–22.

Plaintiff's last position paid her $50,630 plus $1,200 for her Master's degree for 206 days. Pl. Dep. at 22:7–12. Plaintiff's starting salary at FCOE was $62,133, plus a master's degree stipend of $600 for 196 days of work. *Id*. at 22:22:25, 27:2–5. Plaintiff was paid $11,500 more than her previous salary for 20 fewer days of work. Plaintiff remains employed at FCOE and has received a raise each year. *Id*. at 95:4–6.

C. FCOE Math Consultants

The record is unclear as to how many math consultants were in Plaintiff's group at the time that she filed her complaint. Defendant asserts that there were five: Plaintiff (female), Tina Nakasian (female), Eric Crantz (male), Mike Chamberlain (male), and Carl Veater (male). Per the Joint Statement of Undisputed Facts, Tina Nakasian was hired on July 23, 2012, before Plaintiff filed her complaint. *See* ECF No. 12-17 at 2 ¶ 13. Plaintiff's, however, maintains that there were only four math consultants when she filed her complaint and that she was the only female. Pl. Decl. ¶¶ 5, 8.[3]

D. Complaint to Human Resources

On July 31, 2012, Plaintiff was having lunch with several colleagues when she was informed by Eric Crantz, who had just been hired, that he had been placed on Step 9 of the salary schedule. Pl. Decl. ¶ 6.

---

[3] It is undisputed that Tina Nakasian, a woman, works in the same department and in the same position as Plaintiff, *see* J. Statement of Undisputed Facts, ECF No. 12-17 at 3, *see also* Pl. Dep. at 38:4–9.

On August 7, 2012, Plaintiff complained to Gabriel about the pay disparity between herself and her male colleagues. Pl. Decl. ¶ 7; Gabriel Decl., Ex. D. Based on Plaintiff's concerns, Gabriel requested that reports be compiled on management employees as of August 2012 who held the same or similar classifications as Plaintiff. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 9. The results demonstrated to Defendant that there was no significant difference between men and women insofar as their initial placement on the salary scale.[4] *Id.*

Based on the results of the reports, on August 31, 2012, Gabriel wrote a letter to Plaintiff, explaining that Plaintiff's placement on the salary schedule was consistent with SOP 1440 and not discriminatory. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 10, Ex. D. Gabriel also informed Plaintiff that a review of current management employees hired over the past 25 years demonstrated that consistent application of SOP 1440 had placed more females higher on the salary schedules than males in the same or similar position in the same department.[5] *Id.*

---

[4] The same reports were prepared twice more, in January 2013 and June 2014, with similar results. Gabriel Decl. ¶ 9.

[5] Several days after filing the complaint, Plaintiff's supervisor, Jon Dueck, remarked in front of others that because FCOE was applying for a grant whose purpose was to serve women and minorities, Plaintiff should write the grant. Pl. Decl. ¶ 9. Dueck said, "You're a girl and you're a minority, why don't you write that grant." Pl. Decl. ¶ 9. Dueck laughed about the comment with another male co-worker. Pl. Decl. ¶ 9. Even though Plaintiff found the comment to be inappropriate, she never discussed it with Dueck never reported the incident to human resources. Dueck Dep. at 26:3–5; Pl. Dep. at 81:17–19, 88:18–20. Defendant moves, in part, for summary judgment on Plaintiff's fourth claim

IV. EVIDENTIARY MATTERS

A. Plaintiff's Request for Judicial Notice

Plaintiff asks the Court to take judicial notice of the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2014 survey results of earnings of male and female employees by occupation, which she attached to her request and is also available at http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf. (ECF No. 14-5.) Though Plaintiff does not state why she seeks judicial notice of this document in her request, her opposition refers to it as evidence of a pay disparity between male and female educators. Opp'n at 21–22.

Defendant objects to this request on the ground that Plaintiff fails to authenticate or lay a foundation for the document or show how the "facts" contained therein are capable of accurate and ready determination. Defendant also objects that the document reflects wages nationwide, not wages of male and female educators in California and Arizona, the states where the salaries at issue here were determined.

The Court may take judicial notice of matters that are either "generally known within the trial court's territorial jurisdiction" or "can be accurately and readily determined from sources whose accuracy cannot reasonably be questioned." Fed. R. Evid.

– failure to prevent discrimination – on the ground that it could not have prevented discrimination with regard to Jon Dueck's statements because Plaintiff never complained about the statements. The opposition, however, clarifies that Plaintiff's fourth claim is actually premised on Defendant's failure to discontinue application of SOP 1440 following Plaintiff's complaint. It is not based on Jon Dueck's statements.

201(b). Under Federal Rule of Evidence 901, evidence that a public record or report is from the public office where items of that nature are kept satisfies the requirement that admitted evidence be authenticated. *Premier Nutrition, Inc. v. Organic Food Bar, Inc.*, 2008 WL 1913163, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Mar. 27, 2008) aff'd, 327 Fed. Appx. 723 (9th Cir. 2009). The printout also bears "distinctive characteristics" of the agencies' websites. *Haines v. Home Depot U.S.A., Inc.*, 2012 WL 1143648, at *7 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 4, 2012) ("courts have considered the 'distinctive characteristics' of the website in determining whether a document is sufficiently authenticated." (Citations omitted)).

Rule 902 allows for the self-authentication of certain documents, including official publications: "Books, pamphlets, or other publications purporting to be issued by public authority." Fed. R. Evid. 902(5); *Paralyzed Veterans of Am. v. McPherson*, 2008 WL 4183981, at *7 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 9, 2008). Federal courts routinely consider records from government websites to be self-authenticating. *See*, *e.g.*, *Estate of Gonzales v. Hickman*, 2007 WL 3237727, at *2 (C.D. Cal. May 30, 2007); *Lorraine v. Markel Am. Ins. Co.*, 241 F.R.D. 534, 551 (D. Md. 2007) ("Given the frequency with which official publications from government agencies are relevant to litigation and the increasing tendency for such agencies to have their own websites, Rule 902(5) provides a very useful method of authenticating these publications. When combined with the public records exception to the hearsay rule, Rule 803(8), these official publications posted on government agency websites should be admitted into evidence easily."); *U.S. ex rel. Parikh v. Premera Blue Cross*, 2006 WL 2841998, at *4 (W.D.

Wash. Sept. 29, 2006) (considering documents that can be found on Government websites, such as GAO Reports and Health and Human Services' Reports self-authenticating).

Here, the printout from Bureau of Labor Statistics is an official United States Government publication that is accessible via the government entity's website. The Court therefore deems it an "Official Publication" under Rule 902(5) and considers it properly authenticated. As it relates to this case, the survey results establish that, on average and in the United States as a whole, male teachers out-earn their female counterparts.[6] The Court will take judicial notice of this fact.

B. Defendant's Objections

Defendant also objects that Plaintiff has in numerous places mischaracterized the record or deposition testimony and made arguments premised on inadmissible hearsay. The Court has independently reviewed and evaluated the deposition transcripts and other evidence and does not rely on either party's characterization of the evidence in

---

[6] During oral arguments, defense counsel disputed that this survey reflected a pay disparity between male and female educators. The Court finds otherwise. The document demonstrates that the median weekly earnings of full-time workers in the "Education, training, and library occupations" are $1,140 for men and $897 for women. A pay disparity also is shown for each of the subjections thereunder, which include post-secondary teachers ($1,409 for men and $1,143 for women); secondary school teachers ($1,108 for men and $984 for women); and elementary and middle school teachers ($1,096 for men and $956 for women).

reaching its decision. Accordingly, the objections are moot and overruled on that ground.

V. DISCUSSION

A. The Equal Pay Act

The Equal Pay Act ("EPA") makes it unlawful for employers to pay employees of one sex less than employees of the opposite sex "for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1).

The Ninth Circuit employs a burden-shifting framework in evaluating EPA claims. The plaintiff initially has the burden of establishing a prima facie case by demonstrating that employees of the opposite sex were paid different wages for work that was "substantially equal." *See Stanley v. Univ. of S. Cal.*, 178 F.3d 1069, 1073–74 (9th Cir. 1999). The "substantially equal" inquiry involves two discrete steps. First, the plaintiff must show that the jobs being compared "have a common core of tasks." *Id.* at 1074 (internal quotation marks omitted). If the plaintiff makes this showing, "the court must then determine whether any additional tasks, incumbent on one job but not the other, make the two jobs 'substantially different.'" If the jobs entail substantial differences in skill, effort, or responsibility, or if the jobs are not performed under similar working conditions, the claim must fail. *See Forsberg v. Pac. Nw. Bell Tel. Co.*, 840 F.2d 1409, 1414 (9th Cir. 1988) (explaining that each criterion must be met).

Once the plaintiff establishes a prima facie case, the burden shifts to the employer to demonstrate that the wage disparity is attributable to one of four statutory

exceptions: "(i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex." 29 U.S.C. § 206(d)(1). "These exceptions are affirmative defenses which the employer must plead and prove." *Maxwell v. City of Tucson*, 803 F.2d 444, 446 (9th Cir. 1986) (internal quotation marks omitted). If the employer establishes one of the affirmative defenses, the burden shifts back to the plaintiff to show that "the employer's proffered nondiscriminatory reason is a pretext for discrimination." *Stanley*, 178 F.3d at 1076 (internal quotation marks omitted).

1. Plaintiff's Prima Facie Case

In making her prima facie case under the EPA, Plaintiff asserts that she is a woman who was started at a lower step on the salary schedule than her male coworkers despite being hired for substantially equal work. The evidence before the Court confirms that Plaintiff started at Step 1 on the management salary schedule, Mike Chamberlain started at Step 7, Carl Veater started at Step 7, and Eric Crantz started at Step 9. Plaintiff omits mention of the second female in this group, Tina Nakasian, who started at Step 8 and thus was higher on the salary schedule than two of the three males. However, "[t]he existence of a female in the higher classification does not … defeat the plaintiff's prima facie showing of wage discrimination." *E.E.O.C. v. Maricopa County Comm. College Dist.*, 736 F.2d 510, 515 (9th Cir. 1984) (internal citation omitted). "[T]he proper test for establishing a prima facie case in a professional setting … is whether the plaintiff is receiving lower wages than the average of wages paid to all employees

of the opposite sex performing substantially equal work and similarly situated with respect to any other factors, such as seniority, that affect the wage scale." *See Hein v. Oregon College of Educ.*, 718 F.2d 910, 916 (9th Cir. 1983). The Court finds, and Defendant does not dispute, that Plaintiff has met her burden here. She has established a prima facie case.

2. Defendant's Affirmative Defense: Prior Salary

The burden now shifts to Defendant to show that the wage disparity caused by SOP 1440 derives from a system which falls within one of EPA's four exceptions. Defendant's affirmative defense rests on the fourth catch-all provision, i.e., that the salary difference results from a factor other than sex, namely application of a facially-neutral policy, SOP 1440.

Salary differences that result from unequal starting salaries "do not violate the Equal Pay Act if the original salary can be justified by one of the four exceptions to the Equal Pay Act." *Hein*, 718 F.2d at 920. Defendant asserts that FCOE's policy qualifies as such because it determines an applicant's starting salary solely by reference to his or her prior salary and does so for four business reasons: (1) SOP 1440 is objective; (2) it is effective in attracting quality new employees; (3) it prevents favoritism and ensures consistency; and (4) it is a judicious use of taxpayer dollars.

Plaintiff argues, however, that an employer's reliance *solely* on prior salary in setting starting salaries is prohibited by the EPA. Defendant counters that the Ninth Circuit has unequivocally found that the EPA allows an employer's consideration of prior

salary. Both parties rely on *Kouba v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 691 F.2d 873, 878 (9th Cir. 1982). There, the Ninth Circuit held that the EPA does not impose a per se prohibition against consideration of prior salary in setting a new employee's salary. But there, prior salary was but one of several factors considered by the employer.

This case thus obligates this Court to determine if the Ninth Circuit's approval of the use of prior salary as one factor extends to condone its use as the *only* factor. To address this issue and better understand the parties' arguments as well as this Court's ultimate determination, it is helpful to review the history and context of *Kouba* as well as subsequent judicial comment on it. In *Kouba*, Plaintiff represented a class of female insurance agents who accused Allstate of unlawful sex discrimination for using prior salary as one of several factors in determining an employee's starting pay. The district court entered partial summary judgment for Plaintiff. It held in essence that the EPA prohibited consideration of prior salary absent an affirmative showing that the employer had attempted to "ascertain[ ] whether or not the previous salary was itself based upon factors other than sex." *Kouba v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 523 F. Supp. 148, 163 (E.D. Cal. 1981). The district court was concerned that Allstate's policy would perpetuate historic sex discrimination. It therefore sought to provide judicial guidance as to how to limit such an effect: "Although the issue is not without its difficulties, it thus appears to me that as a matter of law an employer may not set a salary schedule which differentiates between its male and female employees doing the exact same job, based upon the immediate past salaries paid to the

men and women, unless it can demonstrate that it has assessed the previous salaries and determined that they themselves were set on "other factors other than sex." " The district court went on to suggest that a prospective employer could evaluate the previous salaries by contacting the previous employer and inquiring about its hiring practices. *Id*. at 162–63, 163 n.15.

The Ninth Circuit rejected that approach. In reversing and remanding, it held that "the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary." *Kouba*, 691 F.2d at 876. While the appellate court "share[d] the district court's fear that an employer might manipulate its use of prior salary to underpay female employees," it observed that a court's ability to protect against such abuse was "somewhat limited" since the Equal Pay Act "entrusts employers, not judges, with making the often uncertain decision of how to accomplish business objectives." *Id*. A pragmatic standard, "which protects against abuse yet accommodates employer discretion, is that the employer must use the [prior salary] factor reasonably in light of the employer's stated purpose as well as its other practices." *Id*. at 876–77. The Ninth Circuit recognized the possibility that a business reason could prove to be a pretext for discrimination and that the risk of that is "especially great with a factor like prior salary which can easily be used to capitalize on the unfairly low salaries historically paid to women." *Id*. at 876. Nonetheless, it held that a violation of the EPA will not be found if the prior salary was "use[d] reasonably in light of the employer's stated purpose as well as its other practices." *Id*.

As noted, Plaintiff seeks to limit *Kouba*'s import to those cases where prior salary is but one of several factors considered by an employer. Defendant, on the other hand, argues that there is no material difference between this case and *Kouba*. It urges the Court to find that under *Kouba* consideration of prior salary, whether alone or in combination with other factors, is permissible so long as its use is reasonably related to an employer's legitimate business reasons.

The Ninth Circuit in *Kouba* was not called upon to, and did not, rule on the question of whether a salary differential based solely on prior earnings would violate the EPA, even if motivated by legitimate, non-discriminatory business reasons. Courts who have considered this issue are split. There are those who have held that an employer's EPA defense may not be based solely on prior salary. *See*, *e.g.*, *Irby v. Bittick*, 830 F. Supp. 632, 636 (M.D. GA Sept. 8, 1993) ("If prior salary alone were a justification, the exception would swallow up the rule and inequality in pay among genders would be perpetuated."), aff'd on appeal, 44 F.3d 949, 954 (11th Cir. 1995) ("We have consistently held that 'prior salary alone cannot justify pay disparity' under the EPA.") *Angove v Williams-Sonoma, Inc.*, 70 Fed. Appx. 500, 508 (10th Cir. 2003) (citing *Irby* in holding that "[t]he EPA only precludes an employer from relying *solely* upon a prior salary to justify pay disparity.") (emphasis in original). *See also Price v. Lockheed Space Operations Co.*, 856 F.2d 1503, 1506 (11th Cir. 1988) ("*Kouba* does not stand for the proposition that prior salary alone can justify pay disparity. Rather, the Ninth Circuit held that 'the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary.'"); *Lewis v. Smith*, 255

F. Supp. 2d 1054, 1063 (D. Ariz. Apr. 4, 2003) (holding that "merely relying on the prior salary of an employee, without analyzing the market value of the employer's [sic] skills, is insufficient to establish an equal pay defense.") (internal citations omitted); *Wachter-Young v. Ohio Cas. Group*, 236 F. Supp. 2d 1157, 1164 (D. Or. May 14, 2002) ("While an employer may not overcome the burden of proof on the affirmative defense of relying on 'any other factor other than sex' by resting on prior pay alone...there is no prohibition on utilizing prior pay as part of a mixed-motive.") (citing *Irby*, 44 F.3d at 954); *Wyant v. Burlington Northern Santa Fe R.R.*, 210 F. Supp. 2d 1263, 1291 (N.D. Ala. Jun. 5, 2002) ("[Defendant]'s reference to [Plaintiff]'s prior salary in setting current salary alone is not a legitimate factor other than sex.").

Other courts, however, have expressly held that an employer may rely on prior salary alone. *See*, *e.g.*, *Wernsing v. Dep't of Human Srvcs, State of Illinois*, 427 F.3d 466 (7th Cir. 2005) (rejecting the plaintiff's argument that use of prior salary alone violates the EPA); *Taylor v. White*, 321 F.3d 710, 720 (8th Cir. 2003) ("[W]e believe a case-by case analysis of reliance on prior salary or salary retention policies with careful attention to alleged gender-based practices preserves the business freedoms Congress intended to protect when it adopted the catch-all "factor other than sex" affirmative defense."); *Groussman v. Respiratory Home Care*, 1985 WL 5621, at *X (C.D. Cal. 1985) (finding that employer satisfied its burden under the EPA by demonstrating that the salary differentials were based on prior salary alone).

The Eleventh Circuit's analysis in *Glenn v. General Motors Corp.*, 841 F.2d 1567 (11th Cir. 1988), is

helpful. In that case, GM claimed to have "a longstanding, unwritten, corporate-wide policy against requiring an employee to take a cut in pay when transferring to salaried positions" from hourly positions. 841 F.2d at 1570. As a result, the female plaintiffs in that case were paid less than their male comparators who had transferred from higher-paying hourly jobs in the company. The Eleventh Circuit rejected this policy as insufficient to establish a "factor other than sex" for the affirmative defense. It reviewed the legislative history of the Equal Pay Act, finding that it "indicates that the 'factor other than sex' exception applies when the disparity results from unique characteristics of the same job; from an individual's experience, training, or ability; or from *special exigent circumstances* connected with the business." *Id.* at 1571 (emphasis added). "[P]rior salary alone cannot justify pay disparity." *Id.* In a footnote, the *Glenn* court addressed *Kouba*:

> Contrary to GM's gloss, *Kouba v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 691 F.2d 873 (9th Cir. 1982), does not stand for the proposition that prior salary alone can justify pay disparity. In *Kouba*, the Ninth Circuit held that "the Equal Pay Act does not impose a strict prohibition against the use of prior salary." *Id.* at 878. The Ninth Circuit added that "while we share the district court's fear that an employer might manipulate its use of prior salary to underpay female employees, the [district] court must find that the business reasons given by [defendant] Allstate do not reasonably explain its use of the factor before finding a violation of the Act." *Id.* Allstate had claimed that it used prior salary to predict a new employee's performance

> as a sales agent. *Id*. The Ninth Circuit held that strict relevant considerations needed to be evaluated on remand to decide whether Allstate could rely on prior salary. *Kouba* is consistent with the present case because the Ninth Circuit would permit use of prior salary where the prior job resembled the sales agent position and where Allstate relied on other available predictors. In the present case, GM does not argue that the males' hourly wages serve to predict that males will be better follow-ups than the female appellees. Nor does the evidence in the record as a whole support that GM could resort to any other factor than the prior salary to justify the pay disparity.

841 F.3d at 1571 n.9.

This Court then is faced with the task of passing on the propriety, under the EPA, of Defendant's application of SOP 1440. It must do so within the framework of the foregoing divergent legal authorities and within a factual scenario that leads to the finding — undisputed by Plaintiff — that SOP 1440 was, at least on its face, designed to be objective and gender-neutral. Considering all of the above, the Court concludes that, notwithstanding its non-discriminatory purpose, SOP 1440 necessarily and unavoidably conflicts with the EPA.

In doing so, this Court will follow the Tenth and Eleventh Circuits and find that a pay structure based exclusively on prior wages is so inherently fraught with the risk – indeed, here, the virtual certainty— that it will perpetuate a discriminatory wage disparity between men and women that it cannot stand, even if

motivated by a legitimate non-discriminatory business purpose. The evidence in this record reflects an across-the-board pay disparity between male and female educators nationwide. Lateral hiring salary plans such as SOP 1440 which do not look beyond prior salary will perpetrate that disparity. Defendant's application of SOP 1440 "contravene[s] Congress' intent and perpetuate[s] the traditionally unequal salaries paid to women for equal work." *Price*, 856 F.2d at 1506; *see also Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, 417 U.S. 188, 205 (1974) (A pay differential which "ar[ises] simply because men would not work at the low rates paid women...[and reflect][s] a job market in which [the employer] could pay women less than men for the same work" is not based on a cognizable factor other than sex under the Equal Pay Act.). To say that an otherwise unjustified pay differential between women and men performing equal work is based on a factor other than sex because it reflects historical market forces which value the equal work of one sex over the other perpetuates the market's sex-based subjective assumptions and stereotyped misconceptions Congress passed the Equal Pay Act to eradicate. *Corning Glass*, 417 U.S. at 210–11.

Defendant has not met his burden to assert as an affirmative defense a qualifying justification for the wage differential present here. Accordingly, summary judgment will be denied.

B. Title VII

Title VII makes it "an unlawful employment practice for an employer" to "discriminate against any individual with respect to" the "terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's

race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." 42 U.S.C. § 2000e–2(a).

The Court begins its analysis by highlighting the appropriate legal standard applicable to Plaintiff's Title VII claim since the parties' briefs demonstrate confusion. As a starting point, EPA and Title VII claims overlap since both statutes render it unlawful to differentiate "in wages on the basis of a person's sex." *Lewis*, 255 F. Supp. 2d at 1059 (quoting *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446). There are, however, important differences between the two statutory schemes. Title VII, for example, places a broader prohibition on discriminatory wages than the EPA and, unlike the EPA, permits a plaintiff to pursue a claim without showing substantial equality of jobs with different pay rates. *County of Washington v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161, 169–71, 179–80 (1981); *Lewis*, 255 F. Supp. 2d at 1060–61. Also, whereas the EPA "creates a type of strict liability; no intent to discriminate need be shown," *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446, a claim brought pursuant to Title VII typically involves a showing of discriminatory intent. *Texas Dept. of Community Affairs v. Burdine*, 450 U.S. 248, 253–54 (1981).

The standard applicable to a plaintiff's Title VII claim depends on the theory upon which it is based. When a plaintiff asserts a Title VII claim that is premised on unequal pay for equal work, it is analyzed under EPA standards. *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446; *Gunther v. Washington County*, 623 F.2d 1303, 1318 (9th Cir. 1979) ("When a discrimination claim is based on a theory that the plaintiffs are denied equal pay for equal work, Equal Pay Act standards are applicable.") (supplemental opinion denying hearing), aff'd, *County of Washington v. Gunther*, 452 U.S. 161 (1981). Of

course, a Title VII cause of action can also exist outside the scope of the EPA. *Gunther*, 452 U.S. at 181; *Spaulding v. University of Washington*, 740 F.2d 686, 699–700 (9th Cir. 1984) overruled on other grounds, *Atonio v. Wards Cove Packing Co., Inc.*, 810 F.2d 1477 (9th Cir. 1987); *Lewis*, 255 F. Supp. 2d at 1060. Thus, "[w]hen a claim of discrimination is *not* based on an equal work theory, it must be analyzed separately under Title VII." *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446 (emphasis added).

Here, Plaintiff's claim is premised on a theory of unequal pay for equal work. *See* Pl.'s Opp'n at 1 ("[A] discriminatory pay claim under Title VII and FEHA is analyzed the same way as a claim under the Equal Pay Act"); Def.'s Mot. Summ. J. at 11 (Plaintiff's EPA, Title VII and FEHA claims "alleg[e] essentially the same thing: Plaintiff was paid less than male math Consultants for equivalent work"). Accordingly, EPA standards apply to Plaintiff's Title VII claim. *Maxwell*, 803 F.2d at 446. "[T]he dispositive issue[, therefore,] is whether [Defendant] established a defense to [Plaintiff]'s claims. If [Defendant] can establish a defense, it prevails; if it cannot, [Plaintiff] prevails." *Id*.

As discussed *supra*, Defendant cannot establish an affirmative defense under the EPA based on its use of prior salary alone. Since Defendant has not asserted any other viable defense, its motion for summary judgment must be denied.

C. FEHA: Wage Discrimination

Under California's Fair Employment and Housing Act ("FEHA"), it is illegal for an employer to discriminate against an employee "in compensation or

in terms, conditions, or privileges of employment" on the basis of sex. Cal. Gov't Code Code § 12940(a). "Because state and federal employment discrimination laws are similar, California courts look to federal precedent when interpreting FEHA." *Guz v. Bechtel Nat'l, Inc.*, 24 Cal. 4th 317, 354 (2000); *see also Metoyer v. Chassman*, 504 F.3d 919, 941 (9th Cir. 2007) ("California courts apply the Title VII framework to claims brought under FEHA.") (citing *Guz*, 24 Cal. 4th at 354).

Under this framework, Defendant's motion for summary judgment on the FEHA claim also will be denied.

D. FEHA: Failure to Prevent Discrimination

California Government Code § 12940(k) provides that it is unlawful "for an employer...to fail to take all reasonable steps necessary to prevent discrimination and harassment from occurring" in the workplace. "When a plaintiff seeks to recover damages based on a claim of failure to prevent discrimination or harassment [ ]he must show three essential elements: 1) plaintiff was subjected to discrimination, harassment or retaliation; 2) defendant failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent discrimination, harassment or retaliation; and 3) this failure caused plaintiff to suffer injury, damage, loss or harm." *Lelaind v. City and County of San Francisco*, 576 F. Supp. 2d 1079, 1103 (N.D. Cal. 2008). "One such reasonable step, and one that is required in order to ensure a discrimination-free work environment, is a prompt investigation of [a] discrimination claim." *California Fair Employment and Housing*

Commission v. Gemini Aluminum Corporation, 122 Cal. App. 4th 1004, 1024 (2004) (citing *Northrop Grumman Corp. v. Workers' Comp. Appeals Bd.*, 103 Cal. App. 4th 1021, 1035 (2002)).

This claim is premised on Defendant's conclusion that SOP 1440 is not discriminatory following its investigation of Plaintiff's complaint to human resources. Defendant moves for summary judgment on the ground that "[t]he fact that FCOE determined SOP 1440 did not discriminate against women and that Plaintiff was treated entirely consistent with the policy by no means equates to failure to prevent discrimination." Def.'s Mot. Summ. J. at 12. Defendant's argument is conclusory and unsupported by citation to authority. Absent legal authority for doing so, this Court can not absolve an employer of liability for failing to prevent discrimination simply because it investigated a complaint of a discriminatory policy. Summary judgment will be denied.

VI. CERTIFICATION FOR INTERLOCUTORY APPEAL

1. Legal Standard

The final judgment rule ordinarily provides that courts of appeal shall have jurisdiction only over "final decisions of the district courts of the United States." 28 U.S.C. § 1291. However, "[w]hen a district judge, in making in a civil action an order not otherwise appealable under this section, shall be of the opinion that such order involves a controlling question of law as to which there is substantial ground for difference of opinion and that an immediate appeal from the order may materially advance the ultimate termination of the litigation, he shall so state in

writing in such order." 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). "The Court of Appeals which would have jurisdiction of an appeal of such action may thereupon, in its discretion, permit an appeal to be taken from such order." *Id.* "Certification under § 1292(b) requires the district court to expressly find in writing that all three § 1292(b) requirements are met." *Couch v. Telescope Inc.*, 611 F.3d 629, 633 (9th Cir. 2010). "Section 1292(b) is a departure from the normal rule that only final judgments are appealable, and therefore must be construed narrowly." *James v. Price Stern Sloan, Inc.*, 283 F.3d 1064, 1067 n.6 (9th Cir. 2002). To that end, "section 1292(b) is to be applied sparingly and only in exceptional cases." *In re Cement Antitrust Litig. (MDL No. 296)*, 673 F.2d 1020, 1027 (9th Cir. 1981), aff'd sub nom. *Arizona v. Ash Grove Cement Co.*, 459 U.S. 1190 (1983).

2. Discussion

In order to certify an order for interlocutory appeal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b), the court must find that an interlocutory order: (1) involves a controlling question of law; (2) there is substantial ground for difference of opinion on that question; and (3) a resolution of the legal issue will materially advance the ultimate termination of the litigation. 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). "A question of law may be deemed 'controlling' if its resolution is quite likely to affect the further course of the litigation, even if not certain to do so." *Sokaogon Gaming Enter. v. Tushie-Montgomery Assoc.*, 86 F.3d 656, 659 (7th Cir. 1996) (citations omitted); *Reese v. BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc.*, 643 F.3d 681, 688 (9th Cir. 2011). An issue of law may also be considered "controlling" if reversal of an order would terminate the action. *Genentech, Inc. v.*

Novo Nordisk A/S, 907 F. Supp. 97, 99 (S.D.N.Y. 1995).

The controlling issue in this case is: Whether, as a matter of law under the EPA, an employer subject to the EPA may rely on prior salary alone when setting an employee's starting salary? If the answer to this question is "yes", i.e., contrary to this Court's conclusion above, it likely will result in a grant of Defendant's motion for summary judgment and a finding in favor of Defendant on liability on all claims. As such, the first criterion for certification is satisfied.

The second factor requires a showing that there is a "substantial ground for difference of opinion." 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). As noted in *Couch v. Telescope, Inc.*, 611 F.3d 629, 633 (9th Cir. 2010):

> Courts traditionally will find that a substantial ground for difference of opinion exists where "the circuits are in dispute on the question and the court of appeals of the circuit has not spoken on the point, if complicated questions arise under foreign law, or if novel and difficult questions of first impression are presented." 3 Federal Procedure, Lawyers Edition § 3:212 (2010) (footnotes omitted). However, "just because a court is the first to rule on a particular question or just because counsel contends that one precedent rather than another is controlling does not mean there is such a substantial difference of opinion as will support an interlocutory appeal." *Id.* (footnotes omitted).

As discussed *supra*, there is substantial difference of opinion on the question presented. Specifically, the Tenth and Eleventh Circuits have held that an

employer may not rely solely on prior salary. On the other hand, the Seventh and Eighth Circuits have held that an employer is not barred from relying on prior salary alone. Put simply, there is a distinct split in authority on the pure legal question presented by this case and in this certification request. The question is one of first impression in the Ninth Circuit. Hence, the second factor also is satisfied.

The third factor requires that resolution of the legal issue materially advance the ultimate termination of the litigation. 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b). As the undersigned noted in the December 7, 2015, Order for additional briefing, it appears that the Court's denial of Defendant's motion for summary judgment effectively resolves the issue of liability on Plaintiff's claims in her favor. If, however, the Ninth Circuit determines that Defendant may rely solely on prior salary in determining an applicant's starting salary, Defendant may likely avoid liability altogether and see the litigation terminated in its favor.

For these reasons, the Court finds it prudent to certify this action for interlocutory appeal.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

1. Defendant's June 10, 2015, motion for summary judgment (ECF No. 12) is DENIED;
2. The Court CERTIFIES pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1292(b) that the legal issue identified in this order – namely, whether, as a matter of law under the EPA, 29 U.S.C. § 206(d), an employer subject to the EPA may rely on prior salary alone when setting an employee's starting

salary—is appropriate for interlocutory appeal. The issue presented "involves a controlling question of law as to which there is substantial ground for difference of opinion and an immediate appeal from the order may materially advance the ultimate termination of the litigation"; and

3. The January 12, 2016, trial in this matter is hereby VACATED.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

APPENDIX E

Aileen RIZO, Plaintiff–Appellee,

v.

Jim YOVINO, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Erroneously Sued Herein as Fresno County Office of Education, Defendant–Appellant.

No. 16–15372

United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.

AUGUST 29, 2017

D.C. No. 1:14–cv–00423–MJS Eastern District of California, Fresno

ORDER

THOMAS, Chief Judge:

Upon the vote of a majority of nonrecused active judges, it is ordered that this case be reheard en banc pursuant to Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 35(a) and Circuit Rule 35–3. The three-judge panel disposition in this case shall not be cited as precedent by or to any court of the Ninth Circuit.

APPENDIX F

29 U.S.C.A. § 206

§ 206. Minimum wage

Effective: June 30, 2016

Currentness

* * *

(d) Prohibition of sex discrimination

(1) No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate, within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions, except where such payment is made pursuant to (i) a seniority system; (ii) a merit system; (iii) a system which measures earnings by quantity or quality of production; or (iv) a differential based on any other factor other than sex: *Provided*, That an employer who is paying a wage rate differential in violation of this subsection shall not, in order to comply with the provisions of this subsection, reduce the wage rate of any employee.

(2) No labor organization, or its agents, representing employees of an employer having employees subject to

any provisions of this section shall cause or attempt to cause such an employer to discriminate against an employee in violation of paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(3) For purposes of administration and enforcement, any amounts owing to any employee which have been withheld in violation of this subsection shall be deemed to be unpaid minimum wages or unpaid overtime compensation under this chapter.

(4) As used in this subsection, the term "labor organization" means any organization of any kind, or any agency or employee representation committee or plan, in which employees participate and which exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work.

* * *