

LAF LEGAL ADVOCACY FUND

Marcine.humphrey@gmail.com



The Legal Advocacy Fund (code #3999) seeks to eliminate sex discrimination in the workplace and in higher education. It provides case support, campus outreach, travel grants, online resources and much more. Each year when I attend the AAUW New York State Convention, I always find the “Legal Advocacy Fund Luncheon” the highlight of the weekend. At this luncheon we hear from an individual that has benefited from AAUW’s assistance in her (or his) fight for equality. I feel so inspired and proud of our organization. This year we heard from a woman who won her case! What I realize is that many of the cases take years to settle and it takes such a firm commitment to continue to fight injustice.



Aileen Rizo worked as a math consultant for the Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) in Fresno, California, training instructors in new ways of teaching math. Rizo was hired by the FCOE in 2009 after earning a master’s degree and teaching for 13 years. She and her family moved from Arizona to California for her new position. **As she described it, she uprooted her life for this job.** In 2012, a recently hired male colleague mentioned that he had been placed at step nine on the county’s 10-step pay scale. Rizo was shocked — she had been placed at step one on the scale when she began her job, she had more experience and seniority than her male colleague. After filing an internal complaint, Rizo was told that the FCOE based new employees’ salaries on just one factor: the employee’s salary history. On the basis of the county’s

policy it seemed that Rizo’s less-experienced colleague was given a higher salary only because he had been paid more at his previous job than she had been paid at her previous job.

Rizo eventually filed suit under the Equal Pay Act and California’s sex discrimination statutes. The case was filed in the US District Court for the Eastern District of California in 2014 and moved through the judicial system. In April 2017 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit handed down an unfavorable decision in Rizo’s case. She did not stop! AAUW joined an amicus brief in support of Rizo’s petition for rehearing in front of the full panel and she won her case!!

Women like Aileen Rizo and AAUW continue to fight for equal pay through a broad range of research, policy, and legal advocacy. Why Rizo Matters: Basing pay on salary history is one factor that can perpetuate the pay gap, but many people don’t understand the domino effect that pay inequity can have on economic security. Rizo’s case sheds light on this important yet often unrecognized factor that contributes to the pay gap.

Rizo is now running for the State Assembly in California (the election is in November). “I wanted to run because my district’s current representative has been voting against the pay equity bills I’ve been testifying for,” she says. The case also opened her eyes to the many other hurdles women still face in the workplace. “I tell everyone I know, I will never be the same after this, but that’s a great thing.”