

## DARTMOUTH

### **Treasurer Goldberg: Wage equality 'a family issue'** By Phil Devitt Editor

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DARTMOUTH — When will the wage gap be closed in Massachusetts?

That's the question Valerie Bassett, executive director of the Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts, posed to an audience at UMass Dartmouth last week.

"The answer is 2058," she said, disappointment in her voice. "When you tell that to students they are horrified because that's going to be well into their careers."

State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg and the Office of Economic Empowerment led one of several regional round-table discussions at the university Sept. 11, identifying reasons that gap should be closed — and soon.

Although Massachusetts became the first state to require equal pay in 1945, female workers here still earn 82 cents on the dollar, according to Goldberg. Treasury data also shows African-American women in Massachusetts earn 61 cents and Latina women earn 50 cents on the dollar.

"This isn't just a women's issue," said Goldberg, who served as moderator. "It's really a family issue, an economic issue. We need to make sure people are paid what they're worth. ... This is not about punishing men. This is equalizing and leveling the playing field so that it ultimately results in economic stability for everyone."

Bassett, a Westport resident, said causes for the wage gap could range from individual biases — employers are more likely to hire people like themselves — to outdated economic formulas that assume men are the breadwinners and women are housewives. Bassett also referenced a "negotiation gap," noting women are more likely to accept lower salaries and negotiate for others before negotiating for themselves.

"This is a complicated problem and no one has all the answers," Bassett said.

Dr. Michael Goodman, associate professor and director of the UMass Dartmouth Public Policy Center, rejected the counter-argument that the wage gap "is not really a problem." As new

businesses blossom and Baby Boomers exit the workforce in bigger numbers, employers stand to lose out on workers who are too qualified for the pay they are offered.

"The real way to create wealth in this economy is through innovation," Goodman said. "Young women are an ever larger share of the college graduates and highly educated people in this country. Women remain an untapped source of talent for growing industries. We fail to take advantage of that capital resource in our own region to our significant disadvantage."

Goldberg said businesses that don't use "the talent" of qualified female workers will be neither competitive nor innovative, weakening their bottom lines.

UMass Dartmouth Chancellor Divina Grossman said at 50.8 percent, Massachusetts leads the nation in the number of adults who have college degrees. But the numbers closer to home are cause for concern. Grossman said 30 percent of SouthCoast residents and less than 20 percent of Fall River and New Bedford residents have degrees.

"Right there, we have a problem, because we know education and economic opportunities are inextricably linked," she said.

Grossman also highlighted the university's efforts to encourage girls to pursue higher education, including a regular on-campus event meant to stimulate interest in science, technology, engineering and math.

Panelists also included New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Rick Kidder and Greater Southeastern Massachusetts Labor Council President Cynthia Rodrigues.

Goldberg created a statewide advisory committee on wage equality, committed to developing innovative best practices to address the state's wage gap. In addition to organizing regional round-tables, the committee has been charged with providing government agencies with tools to review pay structure; developing a wage equality tool kit for businesses; planning a statewide conference for April 2016 that will bring together policymakers, businesses and organizations; and launching a state-run equal-pay website for employees and employers.

Goldberg said the tool kit will show businesses they can help close the wage gap and how to do it.

"I wouldn't have run for this office if I didn't want to do something, so we're doing it and we need your help," Goldberg told the crowd at the close of the 90-minute discussion.

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