

ENGAGED
COMMUNITIES SERIES

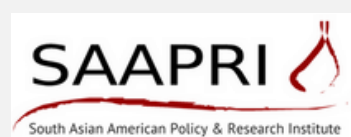


KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Here's what you need to know

**Workplace Discrimination and Legal Protections
in a Changing Landscape**

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Our Panelists

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Workplace Discrimination and Legal Protections in a Changing Landscape



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Why this matters now

- DEI rollbacks + mixed signals from agencies ≠ lost rights.
- Your federal & state protections still exist—
- but enforcement, access, and employer behavior are shifting.

What discrimination looks like

Unequal pay, hiring bias, promotion denials, exclusion from meetings/training.
Overt harm (harassment/hostility) and subtle patterns that disadvantage you.

Retaliation is real

After reporting, workers often face demotions, cut hours, bad reviews, or firing.
It's unlawful, but common, so plan for it as you assert your rights.

The law: layers that protect you

- Federal: Title VII (race/color/religion/sex/national origin), ADEA (age), ADA (disability), Equal Pay, etc.
- State/Local can go further (e.g., broader equal-pay standards; inclusive restroom access).
- Coverage thresholds vary – your location matters.

Big Ideas

First steps if you're harmed

- Document everything: emails, screenshots, texts, dates, names.
- Report in writing to HR/manager if safe to do so.
- Expect potential retaliation; know that creates its own legal claim.

If reporting at work isn't safe

- You can contact state/federal enforcement agencies directly.
- You don't always need to complain internally first—
- but investigations aren't anonymous; get support before filing.

Gaps to know (contract/gig workers)

- Many anti-discrimination laws don't fully cover independent contractors (harassment may be an exception in some states).
- Forced arbitration & class-action waivers limit public remedies—
- policy change + litigation both matter.

Pay equity & transparency

- Salary-history bans and pay-range postings help close gaps.
- Don't let secrecy silence you: discussing pay with coworkers is protected.
- Occupational segregation still depresses wages for women of color.

Practical help & remedies

- Get a lawyer early (many work on contingency).
- Ask for more than money: reinstatement, back pay, record clean-up, training/monitoring, even an apology or firing of the harasser.
- Community support: workers' centers, legal aid, NELA state chapters.

Our Panelists' Insight

Economic security as safety

Sharmili rooted the conversation in her GBV work: whether a survivor can leave abuse often hinges on economic independence. Workplace discrimination isn't just "unfair"—it directly affects safety, healing, and the ability to chart a future. That's why employment rights (fair pay, stable hours, non-retaliation) are part of a broader anti-violence strategy, not a separate policy silo.

Enforcement capacity vs. rights on paper

Both speakers emphasized the gap between law and lived reality. Federal and state protections still exist, but when enforcement agencies shrink, re-prioritize, or move slowly, workers experience those rights as distant. Companies know this, so deterrence weakens. It's why local/state laws (and well-funded local agencies) matter and why private counsel often becomes the practical path, even while agency investigations are pending.

"Original evidence" and non-anonymous filings

Documentation came up as more than a tip, it's a strategy. Screenshots, emails, texts (time-stamped, unedited) carry more weight than after-the-fact summaries. Sharmili also flagged a reality check: agency complaints aren't anonymous, your employer will likely know you filed. That makes planning, safety, and emotional support essential, especially for people with immigration or income vulnerabilities.

Our Panelists' Insight

Arbitration, class waivers, and power

Tarina spotlighted how forced arbitration and class-action waivers reshape outcomes behind closed doors and weaken systemic accountability. Paired with deep-pocketed lobbying, these tools can blunt public scrutiny. Her counter: combine litigation + policy + organizing so individual cases can trigger structural change (e.g., revisiting policies, training, and monitoring in settlements).

DEI: labels change; obligations don't

Inside companies, responses to national politics vary: some rename or quietly tuck DEI under “talent” or “pipeline,” some double down, others pull back. The key takeaway: internal branding doesn't erase legal duties under Title VII, ADA, ADEA, Equal Pay, and stronger state/local analogs. Workers should still expect, and insist on, non-discrimination, regardless of what a program is called.

“DEI labels may change, but anti-discrimination laws still apply.” — Tarina

Pay equity is structure, not just salary

Beyond one-to-one disparities, Sharmili highlighted occupational segregation: women of color and immigrant women clustered in undervalued roles. Transparency reforms (salary-history bans, posted ranges, protection for pay discussion) help, but closing gaps also means moving people into higher-paid fields, valuing “women's work,” and not offloading unpaid DEI labor onto underrepresented staff.

Remedies beyond dollars

“Make whole” can include reinstatement, back pay, clearing personnel files, mandated training/monitoring, and—if negotiated—apologies, role changes, or termination of a harasser. Tarina urged workers not to sign severance or broad releases without counsel; contingency-fee employment lawyers can often engage early with no upfront cost.

Community infrastructure that works

For low-wage and precarious workers, workers' rights centers, legal aid, and NELA state chapters offer education and accompaniment. Sharmili noted how organized communities (e.g., immigrant-rights groups) have made “know your rights” common knowledge—proof that collective capacity can offset fear, retaliation risk, and resource gaps.