



Public Policy Priorities

2007-2008

Women have made great strides toward economic equality over the last several decades – but for many women and their families, the challenge of achieving economic self-sufficiency remains an uphill battle. Women continue to earn less than men and are nearly twice as likely to be poor than men. Women have made gains in professional jobs traditionally dominated by men, but have made relatively little progress in blue collar occupations. As a result, many women remain segregated in the lowest-paying jobs in our country.

With the majority of families relying on women's wages to make ends meet, women's economic security is critical to the economic well being of our nation. **During the 110th Congress, Women Work! will fight for policies that advance economic justice for women and strengthen families and communities.**

PROMOTING WOMEN'S ENTRY, RE-ENTRY AND ADVANCEMENT IN HIGH-PAYING WORK

Employment that offers family-supporting wages, good benefits, job stability and prospects for advancement is the key to women's economic self-sufficiency. Research consistently demonstrates that to succeed in these jobs, women must have access to education, training and job readiness programs that address their specific needs and barriers to employment. **To advance economic opportunities for women and families, Women Work! advocates for:**

A workforce investment system that works for women. The federal workforce development and job training system has not met its commitment to prepare women for today's workforce. In recent years, the number of women and the share of low-income individuals and single parents participating in the workforce investment system has declined steadily. As reauthorization debates continue, Women Work! urges Congress to ensure that the Workforce Investment Act reauthorization prioritizes services for those most in need and includes accountability for moving women and families toward economic self-sufficiency. In addition, Congress should:

- **Actively provide opportunities for women to train for traditionally "male" occupations** which typically offer wages that are 20 to 30 percent higher than traditionally "female" jobs.

- **Require specialized services for displaced homemakers** and other women seeking to re-enter the workforce after time out spent caring for family members. **Designate funding for community-based organizations and programs** with expertise in meeting the needs of these women.

- **Ensure that all job seekers have access to child care, transportation and other support services** that help workers complete training and obtain and retain jobs.

A fair minimum wage. The current minimum wage of \$5.15/hr is at its lowest value since 1955. Women Work! calls on Congress to pass the Fair Minimum Wage Act to increase the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 and provide nine million working women with a much needed pay increase.

Expanded and increased need-based aid for higher education. Higher education consistently leads to increased earnings and employment stability, but for many women this road to economic self-sufficiency is out of reach because of high tuition and attendance costs. Women Work! urges Congress to increase the maximum Pell Grant to keep pace with rising costs of higher education and adjust the program to meet the needs of working adults.

**One out of every 14
working women and one
out of every five working
single mothers are poor.**

Improved gender equity in the career and technical education system.

Career and technical education is a powerful strategy for women to acquire the skills they need to succeed in high paying work. As States and the Department of Education implement the reauthorized Perkins law, Women Work! will work to ensure that improved gender equity provisions are fully realized and that States and schools make meaningful expenditures on services that help women succeed in career and technical education.

Stronger laws against wage discrimination.

Full-time working women still are paid, on average, only 77 cents for each dollar full-time working men are paid. Women Work! calls on Congress to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act to strengthen current laws against wage discrimination.

A woman with an associate's degree earns 44 percent more than a woman with a high school education.

Increased education and training opportunities for TANF participants.

To significantly reduce poverty among women in the United States, the focus of the TANF program must shift from simply moving women off welfare to preparing women to succeed in jobs with career potential and upward mobility. As a first step toward achieving this goal, Women Work! urges Congress to give states more flexibility to meet work participation rates through education and training.

HELPING WORKERS BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY

No one should be forced to choose between caring for their family and making ends meet. Women in particular are likely to juggle the dual roles of worker and primary caretaker. **To ensure that workers can balance work and family without jeopardizing economic security, Women Work! advocates for:**

Access to quality child care and after school programs.

With costs for one child as high as \$13,000 a year, child care is a critical issue for women's economic security. Women Work! urges Congress to increase funding for child care assistance, campus-based child care, Head Start and after-school programs and ensure that all women who are working, in training programs or engaged in a job search have access to child care.

60 percent of working women earn half or more of their families' income.

Paid sick days for all workers.

Fifty-nine million workers in the United States do not have paid sick leave. Women Work! urges Congress to pass the Healthy Families Act to provide at least seven paid sick days per year – enabling employees to care for themselves or their family members when necessary.

Expanded Family and Medical Leave (FMLA).

Working parents rely on FMLA leave to welcome a new child or care for themselves and their families. However, current law is too limited – providing unpaid leave only for those who work in companies of 50 or more employees. Women Work! calls on Congress to expand the FMLA by providing for paid leave and expanding the program to cover all workers.

Women Work! The National Network for Women's Employment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advances economic justice and equality for women through education, advocacy and organizing. Since 1978, the Network has assisted more than 10 million women to successfully enter, re-enter and advance in the workforce. Through supporting, advocating and increasing women's economic self-sufficiency, Women Work! members strengthen families and communities.