



Fast Facts: Economic Security for North Carolina Families

By Ryan Erickson, Sarah Jane Glynn, and Heidi Williamson | September 24, 2015

In North Carolina and across the United States, we need policies that promote economic security for women and families. Working families need higher livable wages, women need and deserve equal pay for equal work, and parents need to be able to maintain good jobs that allow them to work and raise their children simultaneously. Strong economic security policies will enable North Carolina women and families to get ahead—not just get by.

Family structure is shifting significantly. For most North Carolinians, the days of the full-time, stay-at-home mom are long in the past: Mothers are the sole or primary breadwinners in 45 percent of North Carolina families and co-breadwinners in another 23 percent.¹ To promote women's economic security, North Carolina's policies should address the needs of working mothers and reflect the roles that women are playing to provide for their families. Here are seven areas in which policymakers and advocates can help women bolster their families' economic security.

Provide access to paid sick days

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone is afforded the time to get better. Many women go to work sick or leave their sick children at home alone because they fear that they will be fired for missing work. Allowing employees to earn paid sick days helps keep families, communities, and the economy healthy.

- About 40 million U.S. employees, or 40 percent of the nation's private-sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.² In North Carolina, the rate is even higher: Just less than 45 percent of private-sector workers, or almost 1.5 million people, do not have paid sick days.³
- If employees must stay home from work because they or their children are ill, the loss of pay can take a serious toll—particularly on low-income workers, who are the least likely to have access to paid sick leave.⁴

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Expand paid family and medical leave

Access to paid family and medical leave would allow workers to be with their newborn children during the crucial first stages of a child's life, to care for an aging parent or spouse, or to recover from their own illness.

- The United States is the only developed country that does not guarantee access to paid maternity leave and one of only three developed countries that do not offer broader family and medical leave insurance.⁵ Only 12 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.⁶
- The National Partnership for Women & Families gave North Carolina a “D”—the second-lowest possible grade—on policies that help parents of newborn children. While North Carolina offers some protections to state employees that go beyond federal law, the state does not expand upon federal rights or protections guaranteed by federal law for private-sector workers.⁷

Ensure equal pay

Although federal law prohibits unequal pay for equal work, there is more to do to ensure that both women and men enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination across North Carolina.

- Women are the primary, sole, or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of U.S. families but continue to earn less than their male counterparts.⁸ Latinas and African American women experience the sharpest pay disparities.⁹
- North Carolina women earn 85 cents for every dollar that North Carolina men earn.¹⁰ The wage gap is even larger for black women and Latinas in North Carolina, who respectively earn 63 cents and 46 cents for every dollar that white men earn.¹¹

Expand quality, affordable child care

Families need child care to be able to work, but many families lack access to high-quality child care options. Parents want and need child care that supports young children's development and adequately prepares them for school.

- Sixty-eight percent of North Carolina children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.¹²

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- For a North Carolina family with one infant and one 4-year-old, child care costs an average of \$16,847 per year, or nearly one-third of the median income for a North Carolina family with children.¹³

Increase the minimum wage

Women make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers, and raising the minimum wage would help hardworking women across North Carolina better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.¹⁴
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour would boost wages for 726,000 women in North Carolina and nearly 20 million women nationally.¹⁵ More than 54 percent of the workers in North Carolina who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$12 are women.¹⁶

Guarantee access to quality health care

Women need comprehensive reproductive health services—including access to abortion care—in order to thrive as breadwinners, caregivers, and employees.

- In 2013, nearly 654,000 North Carolina women were in need of publicly supported family planning services and supplies.¹⁷
- Because federal Title X funding—which covers contraception, pregnancy testing, and cancer screenings—has not kept up with inflation and often faces the threat of cuts at the federal level,¹⁸ North Carolina should step in and ensure that women have access to quality family planning resources.¹⁹

Promote women's political leadership

Across the United States, women are dramatically underrepresented in political office: They make up 51 percent of the population but only 29 percent of elected officials.²⁰

- Women make up 51 percent of North Carolina's population but only 27 percent of its elected officials.²¹
- Women of color make up 18 percent of the state's population but only 6 percent of its officeholders.²²

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Endnotes

- 1 Data are taken from Sarah Jane Glynn and Jeff Chapman's analysis of Miriam King and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 3.0," available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/index.shtml> (last accessed September 2015).
- 2 Elise Gould, Kai Filion, and Andrew Green, "The Need for Paid Sick Days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security" (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2011), available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/temp2011/BriefingPaper319-2.pdf>.
- 3 Institute for Women's Policy Research and National Partnership for Women & Families, "Workers' Access to Paid Sick Days in the States" (2015), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/workers-access-to-paid-sick-days-in-the-states.pdf>.
- 4 The percentage of workers with paid sick leave increases with compensation. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2013* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), Table 32, available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2013/ebb0052.pdf>.
- 5 International Labour Organization, "Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world" (2014), available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf; Jody Heymann and others, "Contagion Nation: A Comparison of Paid Sick Day Policies in 22 Countries" (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2009), available at <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-sick-days-2009-05.pdf>.
- 6 Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey*, Table 32.
- 7 States' grades in this assessment reflect the degree to which a state's laws improve upon federal law. See National Partnership for Women & Families, "Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws That Help New Parents" (2014), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/expecting-better-2014.pdf>.
- 8 Sarah Jane Glynn, "Breadwinning Mothers, Then and Now" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Glynn-Breadwinners-report-FINAL.pdf>.
- 9 Anna Chu and Charles Posner, "The State of Women in America: A 50-State Analysis of How Women Are Faring Across the Nation" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2013), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/StateOfWomen-4.pdf>.
- 10 National Women's Law Center, "The Wage Gap, State by State," available at <http://www.nwlc.org/wage-gap-state-state> (last accessed September 2015).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 "Available parents" refers to "resident parents." See Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Parents in the Labor Force," available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-allavailable-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473> (last accessed September 2015).
- 13 The average annual cost of child care in North Carolina is \$9,255 for an infant and \$7,592 for a 4-year-old. For a family with children in North Carolina, the median income is \$51,900 per year. See Child Care Aware of America, "Child Care in the State of: North Carolina" (2015), available at <http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-State-Fact-Sheets-North-Carolina.pdf>; Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children," available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-incomeamong-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365> (last accessed September 2015).
- 14 National Women's Law Center, "Fair Pay for Women Requires a Fair Minimum Wage" (2015), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/fair-pay-women-requires-fair-minimum-wage>.
- 15 Economic Policy Institute, "State Tables: Characteristics of workers who would be affected by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$12 by July 2020" (2015), available at <http://s2.epi.org/files/2015/revised-minimum-wage-state-tables.pdf>; David Cooper, "Raising the Minimum Wage to \$12 by 2020 Would Lift Wages for 35 Million Workers" (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2015), Appendix A: Data tables, available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/2015/raising-the-minimum-wage-to-12-dollars-by-2020-would-lift-wages-for-35-million-american-workers.pdf>.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Jennifer J. Frost, Lori Frohwirth, and Mia R. Zolna, "Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2013 Update" (New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2015), available at <https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/win/contraceptive-needs-2013.pdf>.
- 18 Rachel Benson Gold, "Going the Extra Mile: The Difference Title X Makes," *Guttmacher Policy Review* 15 (2) (2012): 13–17, available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/15/2/gpr150213.html>.
- 19 Through the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina provides services using Title X funding. Because these programs are often vulnerable to cuts, however, North Carolina lawmakers should ensure that these programs are adequately funded. For more information on the Title X-funded programs in North Carolina, including the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Family Planning Program, see National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association, "Title X in North Carolina – Improving Public Health and Saving Taxpayer Dollars" (2015), available at <http://www.nationalfamilyplanning.org/document.doc?id=574>.
- 20 Reflective Democracy Campaign, "Who Leads Us?," available at <http://wholeads.us> (last accessed September 2015).
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.