



## Fast Facts

# Economic Security for Women and Families in Texas

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Texas has become an increasingly hostile state for women, with policymakers instituting burdensome restrictions on various forms of health care access and staying implementation of local paid sick days laws. Policymakers should instead prioritize policies, such as equal pay for equal work and paid leave, that will ensure the health and economic security of women and their families in Texas.

Women need policies that reflect their roles as providers and caregivers. In Texas, mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 59.7 percent of families,<sup>1</sup> and these numbers are higher for some women of color. The following policy recommendations can help support the economic security of women and families in Texas.

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### Promote equal pay for equal work

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

- Texas women who are full-time, year-round workers earned about 81 cents for every dollar that Texas men earned in 2017;<sup>2</sup> if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not reach parity in the state until 2049.<sup>3</sup> The wage gap is even larger for black women and Latinas in Texas, who earned 58.2 cents and 44 cents, respectively, for every dollar that white men earned in 2016.<sup>4</sup>
- Due to the gender wage gap, each woman in Texas will lose an average of \$391,000 over the course of her lifetime.<sup>5</sup>

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## Increase the minimum wage

Women constitute a disproportionate share of low-wage workers; raising the minimum wage would help hardworking women across Texas and enable them to better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Nearly 6 in 10 of all minimum wage workers in Texas are women.<sup>7</sup>
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 would boost wages for 2,456,000 women in Texas and more than 23 million women nationally. Fifty-two percent of Texas workers who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$15 are women.<sup>8</sup>
- In Texas, the current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour. The minimum wage for workers who receive tips is \$2.13 per hour. More than two-thirds of tipped wage workers are women.<sup>9</sup>

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## Guarantee access to quality health care

Women need access to comprehensive health services—including abortion and maternity care—in order to thrive as breadwinners, caregivers, and employees. To ensure women are able to access high-quality care, states should, at minimum, strengthen family planning programs such as Title X; protect and expand Medicaid; and end onerous restrictions that reduce access to abortion care and undermine the patient-provider relationship. At the state level, Texas should ensure that women have access to the full spectrum of quality, affordable, and women-centered reproductive health services.

- In 2014, nearly 1.8 million women in Texas were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies, and 37 percent of those women were uninsured—in part due to the state’s refusal to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.<sup>10</sup> Texas not only has the highest uninsured rate in the country, but it also has the highest number of uninsured women of any state.<sup>11</sup>
- Title X—the nation’s only federal domestic program focused solely on providing family planning and other related preventive care, such as contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing, and cancer screenings—served almost 172,000 women in Texas in 2017, up from 108,000 women in 2014.<sup>12</sup> Funding, however, has not kept pace: In 2014, Texas disbursed \$13.7 million to Title X clinics but provided only a minimal increase in funding by 2017, to \$14.2 million.<sup>13</sup>

- Texas has restrictions on the allocation of public funds for abortion services and bars state family planning money from funding health care providers and entities that contract or are affiliated with an abortion provider.<sup>14</sup> When distributing family planning funds, the state also gives the lowest priority to private reproductive health-focused providers.<sup>15</sup>
- There are significant state restrictions on abortion in Texas: The state requires biased counseling that gives women inaccurate and misleading information about abortion care; a 24-hour waiting period and an ultrasound at least 24 hours before women can undergo the procedure; and parental consent for young women under the age of 18.<sup>16</sup>
- Texas' infant mortality rate—5.7 deaths per 1,000 live births—is slightly lower than the national rate of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>17</sup>
- Texas' maternal mortality rate—14.6 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births<sup>18</sup>—is lower than the national rate of 18 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>19</sup> The United States' maternal mortality rate is higher than that of any other country in the developed world.<sup>20</sup>

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## Ensure workers have access to paid sick days

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone is afforded the time to get better. Many women go to work sick, 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 37 million U.S. employees, or nearly one-third of the nation's private sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.<sup>21</sup>
- In Texas, the rate is even higher: 45 percent of private sector workers, or 4.2 million people, do not receive paid sick days.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2018, both Austin and San Antonio passed local paid sick days laws, allowing certain employees to start accruing and using paid sick time to care for themselves or a loved one.<sup>23</sup> Austin's law encountered a legal challenge, supported by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, staying its implementation in October 2018.<sup>24</sup>

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## Ensure fair scheduling practices

Many low-wage and part-time workers—approximately 60 percent of whom are women<sup>25</sup>—face erratic work schedules and have little control over when they work and for how long.

- More than 1 in 4 low-wage U.S. workers has a schedule that is nonstandard—that is, outside of the traditional 9-to-5 workweek.<sup>26</sup> This can be especially difficult for parents who need to plan for child care.
- In addition to threatening the economic security of these workers and their families, unfair scheduling practices are often accompanied by reduced access to health benefits and increased potential for sexual harassment.<sup>27</sup>

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## Provide access to paid family and medical leave

Access to paid family and medical leave would allow workers to be with their newborn children during the critical early stages of the child's life; to care for an aging parent or spouse; to recover from their own illness; or to assist in a loved one's recovery.

- Only 17 percent of civilian workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.<sup>28</sup>
- Unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible to 62 percent of working people in Texas. Workers and families in Texas need paid family and medical leave for reasons other than childbirth. For example, more than 1 in 5 workers in Texas is at least 55 years old, and in less than 15 years, the share of the state's population that is 65 and older will grow by nearly one-third.<sup>29</sup> Texas' aging population means an increase in older adults with serious medical conditions who will need additional care.
- National data show that 55 percent of employees who take unpaid leave through the FMLA use it for personal medical reasons. Twenty-one percent of workers use leave for the birth or adoption of a child, while another 18 percent use it to care for a family member.<sup>30</sup>

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## Expand quality, affordable child care

Families need child care to ensure they are able to work, but many families lack access to affordable, high-quality child care options that support young children's development and meet the needs of working families.

- Sixty percent of Texas children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.<sup>31</sup>
- For a Texas family with one infant and one 4-year-old, the annual price of a child care center averages \$15,703 per year, or more than one-fourth of the median income for a Texas family with children.<sup>32</sup>
- Texas has relatively high enrollment in public preschool compared to the national average, with 58 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.<sup>33</sup>

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## Protect workers against all forms of gender-based violence

Women cannot fully participate in the economy if they face the threat of violence and harassment. There are a number of steps lawmakers can take to prevent violence against women and support survivors, including establishing greater workplace accountability; strengthening enforcement; increasing funding for survivor support services; and educating the public on sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>34</sup>

- In Texas, 37.2 percent of women have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes,<sup>35</sup> and 30.5 percent of women have experienced noncontact sexual harassment.<sup>36</sup> Given that research at the national level suggests that as many as 70 percent of sexual harassment charges go unreported, these state numbers likely only scratch the surface.<sup>37</sup>
- Forty percent of Texas women have experienced intimate partner violence, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.<sup>38</sup> Experiencing intimate partner violence has been shown to hinder women's economic potential in many ways, including loss of pay from missed days of work and housing instability.<sup>39</sup>

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## Protecting the rights of immigrant women and families

Immigrants—particularly those seeking asylum and those without legal status—can be vulnerable to social and economic insecurity. A combination of federal and state policies targeting immigrants is cause for concern in Texas. The Trump administration's decisions to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and allow Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to expire for more than 300,000 people who have lived and worked lawfully in the country for nearly two decades will force many immigrants out of the workforce, putting them, their families, and the communities in which they reside in economic peril.<sup>40</sup> In addition, immigrant women can be especially vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>41</sup>

- In 2016, nearly 17 percent of Texas' population was foreign-born, of which more than half were women.<sup>42</sup>
- In 2016, 1 in 5 workers in Texas was foreign-born, contributing to the state's economy across various industries.<sup>43</sup>
- More than 2,669,000 Texans live in households with family members who are unauthorized, including more than 1,232,000 children.<sup>44</sup>
- If Dreamers are no longer able to renew their DACA, Texas could lose more than \$6.3 billion annually from its gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>45</sup> There are 306,000 immigrants in the state's workforce who are Dream-Act eligible, and putting them on a pathway to citizenship could increase the state's GDP by up to \$11.3 billion.<sup>46</sup>

- Texas is home to 44,800 TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti, as well as their 53,800 U.S.-born children.<sup>47</sup> All of these TPS holders will lose their protected status when the designation expires in 2019, leaving them with two choices: to remain in the United States without legal status or work authorization or to return to a country they haven't known for years.

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## Protecting the rights of incarcerated women

The growing problem of mass incarceration in the United States hinders the economic potential of those affected and disproportionately harms communities of color.<sup>48</sup>

Incarceration can have a particularly destabilizing effect on families with an incarcerated mother, especially if that woman is a breadwinner. The experience of incarceration is also uniquely traumatic for women in ways that can deter long-term economic security, even after release.<sup>49</sup>

- The incarceration rate in Texas is 563 per 100,000 people.<sup>50</sup> Approximately 8.8 percent of prisoners in Texas are women.<sup>51</sup>
- Women are the fastest-growing segment of the overall U.S. prison population, but there are fewer federal prisons for women than there are for men, contributing to overcrowding and hostile conditions for incarcerated women.<sup>52</sup>
- Incarcerated women suffer from a wide range of abuses at the hands of the prison system, including lack of access to menstrual hygiene products; lack of adequate nutrition and prenatal care; shackling during pregnancy and childbirth; and separation and further disruption from children for whom they are primary caregivers.<sup>53</sup>

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## Promote women's political leadership

Across the United States, women are underrepresented in political office: They constitute 51 percent of the population but only 29 percent of elected officials.<sup>54</sup>

- Women make up 50 percent of Texas' population but only 31 percent of its elected officials.<sup>55</sup>
- Women of color constitute 28 percent of the state's population but only 6 percent of its officeholders.<sup>56</sup>

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