

Economic and Health Justice for Women and Families in Pennsylvania

OCTOBER 2024

In Pennsylvania and across the country, policymakers must prioritize progressive policies that support women and families' economic security, health outcomes and overall well-being. For Black women, who make up approximately 10 percent of women in Pennsylvania, policies that center their needs and address the systemic oppression and racism that create disparate health and economic outcomes are especially vital.¹ Pennsylvania women need livable wages, supportive workplace policies such as paid family and medical leave, comprehensive health care access, and access to abortion – and they need a democracy that allows for their voices to be heard.

Paid Leave

- About 62 percent of working people in Pennsylvania do not have access to paid family leave. Sixty-one percent of Pennsylvanians are unable to access unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.²
- Nationwide, nearly one third of all adults aged 55-64 — and 41 percent of older Black women and 43 percent of older Latinas — hold a physically demanding job, which may exacerbate or cause serious medical conditions that require care, particularly in older workers and disabled workers. In Pennsylvania, that would mean 369,400 older workers, 21,000 older Black women workers and 8,300 older Latina workers.³
- If women in Pennsylvania participated in the labor force at the same rate as women in peer countries with paid leave, there would be an estimated 107,000 additional workers in the state and \$3.7 billion more wages earned statewide.⁴

**81% OF BLACK MOTHERS IN
PENNSYLVANIA ARE
BREADWINNERS.**

**— *Paid Leave Means a Stronger
Pennsylvania***

Equal Pay

- Across the nation, women overall are typically paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to men.⁵ Pennsylvania women who were full-time, year-round workers earned only 81 cents for every dollar that men in Pennsylvania earned in 2023.⁶ For Black women this gap is even larger – for every dollar that men earned in 2022 (the latest available data), Black women in Pennsylvania earned only 65 cents.⁷
- Women’s wages support their households. In Pennsylvania, 81 percent of Black mothers are key family breadwinners.⁸

Minimum Wage

- As of 2021, nearly 8 in 10 minimum wage workers in Pennsylvania were women.⁹ Pennsylvania uses the federal minimum wage of only \$7.25 an hour – the federal minimum wage hasn’t been raised since 2009.¹⁰

Student Loan Debt

- Women hold nearly two-thirds of Americans’ collective \$1.7 trillion of student loan debt. Black women are especially impacted by student loan debt – they hold more student debt than other demographics, with an average of \$38,800 in federal undergraduate loans a year after completing a bachelor’s degree.¹¹ Pennsylvania has the 22nd highest student debt per borrower, with a total student debt of \$66.5 billion owed across more than 1.8 million borrowers across the state.¹²

Poverty

- In Pennsylvania, 12.6 percent of women 18 and over were experiencing poverty in 2023 – for Black women, that rate increases to 22.8 percent.¹³

Health Justice

- Non-Hispanic, Black women in Pennsylvania had the highest pregnancy-associated mortality ratio, experiencing maternal mortality at twice the rate of their white counterparts in 2018.¹⁴
- Eight percent of Black women between the ages of 19-64 in Pennsylvania lacked health insurance coverage between 2017 and 2021.¹⁵
- Pennsylvania is one of the more restrictive states for abortion access.

- Abortion is banned at 24 weeks and later, patients are forced to wait 24 hours after counseling to obtain an abortion, and State Medicaid coverage of abortion care is banned except in limited circumstances.¹⁶
- Restrictions on reproductive health cost Pennsylvania over \$8 billion in total average annual economic loss¹⁷

A Stronger Democracy

- Less than 32 percent of Pennsylvania’s state legislators are women. Women of color broadly make up only 4.7 percent of Pennsylvania’s state legislature, with one of the larger gaps in the country in representation of women of color compared to the percentage of adult women of color who reside in the state.¹⁸
- Pennsylvania is ranked 31st by the Cost of Voting Index, representing a more restrictive electoral climate than other states in the country.¹⁹

Comprehensive policy solutions are necessary – and women and families in Pennsylvania cannot wait.

The following policy recommendations would support women and families’ economic security, health care access, and well-being in Pennsylvania and beyond.

- Family friendly workplace standards, including a common sense, national paid leave program
- Fair pay protections and practices
- A higher minimum wage and elimination of the tipped minimum wage
- Stronger protections for workers’ rights to unionize
- Ensure access to abortions and comprehensive reproductive health care

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, September). Sex by Age (Black or African American Alone). *American Community Survey, ACA 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B01001B*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from

[https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B01001B?g=010XX00US\\$0400000&d=ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(2024, September\). Sex by Age. American Community Survey, ACA 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B01001. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B01001?g=010XX00US\\$0400000&d=ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables \(unpublished author calculation\)](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B01001B?g=010XX00US$0400000&d=ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024, September). Sex by Age. American Community Survey, ACA 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B01001. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B01001?g=010XX00US$0400000&d=ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables (unpublished author calculation))

² The National Partnership for Women & Families. (2024, February). *Paid Leave Means a Stronger Pennsylvania*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-pennsylvania.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Majumder, A., & Mason, J. (2024, September) *America's Women and the Wage Gap*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2023, Geographies: All States within United States and Puerto Rico, Table B20017: Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Work Experience in the Past 12 Months (in 2023 Inflation Adjusted Dollars) for the Population 16 Years and Over with Earnings in the Past 12 Months. Retrieved 12 September 2024, from <https://data.census.gov/> (Unpublished calculations based on those who worked full-time, year-round).

⁷ National Women's Law Center. (2024, March) *The Wage Gap by State for Black Women Overall — March 2024*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Wage-Gap-State-by-State-Black-Women-3.1.24.pdf>

⁸ See note 2; Shaw, E., Mason, C. N., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID19. Retrieved 16 January 2024, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-SkyMothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf>; "Key breadwinner" means a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who contributes 40 percent or more of the couple's joint earnings. Nationally, 79 percent of Black mothers, 64 percent of Native American mothers, 60 percent of mothers identifying as multiracial or "other" race, 49 percent of Latina mothers, 48 percent of white mothers and 43 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are key breadwinners

⁹ National Women's Law Center. (2021, January 12). *Women and the Minimum Wage, State by State*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/resource/women-and-minimum-wage-state-state/>

¹⁰ Economic Policy Institute. (2024, January 1). *Minimum Wage Tracker*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from https://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/#/min_wage/South%20Carolina

¹¹ Jackson, V., & Williams, B. (2022, April). *How Black Women Experience Student Debt*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-Black-Women-Experience-Student-Debt-April-2022.pdf>

¹² Coppock, J. (2024, March). *Student Loan Debt: What Explains the Disparities?* Retrieved 7 October 2024, from <https://www.degreechoices.com/blog/student-loan-debt-by-state/>

¹³ National Women's Law Center. (2023, October). *Women in Poverty, State by State*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/resource/women-in-poverty-state-by-state/>

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Health: Bureau of Family Health. (2022, January). *Pennsylvania Maternal Mortality Review: 2021 Report*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/TR/Reports/2022_0008R.pdf

¹⁵ National Women's Law Center. (2023, May). *Social Determinants of Health Metrics for Black Women by State*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/resource/social-determinants-of-health-metrics-for-black-women-by-state/>

¹⁶ Guttmacher Institute. (2024, January 24). *Interactive Map: US Abortion Policies and Access After Roe*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/pennsylvania/abortion-statistics>

¹⁷ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2024, January). *Updated Analysis of the Cost of Abortion Restrictions to States*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Updated-Analysis-of-the-Cost-of-Abortion-Restrictions-to-States-1.pdf>

¹⁸ Frye, J., Goodman, S., & Haider A. (2023, November). *State Legislatures' Lack of Representation Threatens Freedom*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/report/democracy-abortion-access/>

¹⁹ Schraufnagel, S., Pomante M., & Li Q. (2022, September). Cost of Voting in the American States: 2022. *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 21(3), 220-228.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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