

# Economic and Health Justice for Women and Families in Wisconsin

OCTOBER 2024

In Wisconsin 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 5 percent of women in Wisconsin, policies that center their needs and address the systemic oppression and racism that create disparate health and economic outcomes are especially vital.<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin 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 76 percent of working people in Wisconsin do not have access to paid family leave. Sixty-two percent of Wisconsinites are unable to access unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.<sup>2</sup>
- 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 Wisconsin, that would mean 177,600 older workers, 3,500 older Black women workers and 3,500 older Latina workers.<sup>3</sup>
- If women in Wisconsin participated in the labor force at the same rate as women in peer countries with paid leave, there would be an estimated 22,000 additional workers in the state and \$758 million more wages earned statewide.<sup>4</sup>

**87% OF BLACK MOTHERS IN  
WISCONSIN ARE  
BREADWINNERS.**

**— Paid Leave Means a Stronger  
Wisconsin**

## Equal Pay

- Across the nation, women overall are typically paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to men.<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin women who were full-time, year-round workers earned only 83 cents for every dollar men in Wisconsin earned in 2023.<sup>6</sup> For Black women this

gap is even larger – for every dollar that men earned in 2022 (the latest available data), Black women in Wisconsin earned only 62 cents.<sup>7</sup>

- Women’s wages support their households. In Wisconsin, 87 percent of Black mothers are key family breadwinners.<sup>8</sup>

## Minimum Wage

- As of 2021, nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers in Wisconsin were women.<sup>9</sup> Wisconsin uses the federal minimum wage of only \$7.25 an hour – the federal minimum wage hasn’t been raised since 2009.<sup>10</sup>

## Child Care

- In Wisconsin, full-time center-based infant care costs 13.4 percent of family median income.<sup>11</sup>

## 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.<sup>12</sup> Wisconsin has the 44th highest student debt per borrower, with a total student debt of \$23.8 billion owed across 748,400 borrowers across the state.<sup>13</sup>

## Poverty

- In Wisconsin, 11.3 percent of women 18 and over were experiencing poverty in 2022 – for Black women, that rate increased to 24.4 percent.<sup>14</sup>

## Health Justice

- Black women in Wisconsin had a pregnancy-related mortality rate that was nearly 2.5 times higher than for their white counterparts from 2011-2015.<sup>15</sup>
- Just under eight percent of Black women between the ages of 19-64 in Wisconsin lacked health insurance coverage between 2017 and 2021.<sup>16</sup>
- Wisconsin is a restrictive state for abortion access, impacting the nearly 1.3 million women of reproductive age living in the state.<sup>17</sup>
  - Abortion is banned at 20 weeks and later, patients are forced to participate in in-person counseling before making an appointment, and State Medicaid coverage of abortion care is banned except in very limited circumstances.<sup>18</sup>

- However, restrictions on reproductive health cost Wisconsin more than \$4 billion in total average annual economic loss<sup>19</sup>

## A Stronger Democracy

- Less than 32 percent of Wisconsin's state legislators are women. Women of color broadly make up only 8.3 percent of Wisconsin's state legislature.<sup>20</sup>
- Wisconsin is ranked 44th by the Cost of Voting Index, representing one of the most restrictive electoral climates in the country.<sup>21</sup>

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

The following policy recommendations would support women and families' economic security, health care access, and well-being in Wisconsin 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

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<sup>1</sup>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](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](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B01001?g=010XX00US$0400000&d=ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables) (unpublished author calculation)

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

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>5</sup> 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>
- <sup>6</sup> 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).
- <sup>7</sup> 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>
- <sup>8</sup> 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
- <sup>9</sup> National Women's Law Center. (2021, January 12). *Women and the Minimum Wage, State by State*. Retrieved 1 October 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/resource/women-and-minimum-wage-state-state/>
- <sup>10</sup> Economic Policy Institute. (2024, January). *Minimum Wage Tracker*. Retrieved 7 October 2024, from [https://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/#/min\\_wage/South%20Carolina](https://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/#/min_wage/South%20Carolina)
- <sup>11</sup> Gailey, A. (2024, October). *Study: Care for one infant costs at least 10% of a family's yearly income in 48 states*. Retrieved 29 October 2024, from <https://www.bankrate.com/banking/child-care-costs-by-state-study/#infant-care-costs-are-high>
- <sup>12</sup> 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>
- <sup>13</sup> 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/>
- <sup>14</sup> 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/>
- <sup>15</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. (2022, April). *2016-2017 Wisconsin Maternal Mortality Report*. Retrieved 29 October 2024, from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p03226.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> 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/>
- <sup>17</sup> Gallagher Robbins, K., Goodman, S., & Klein, J. (2023, June). *State Abortion Bans Harm More Than 15 Million Women of Color: Dobbs Impact Felt Nationwide*. Retrieved 9 October 2024 from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://nationalpartnership.org/report/state-abortion-bans-harm-woc/>
- <sup>18</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2024, January 24). *Interactive Map: US Abortion Policies and Access After Roe*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://states.guttmacher.org/policies/wisconsin/abortion-policies>
- <sup>19</sup> 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>
- <sup>20</sup> 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/>
- <sup>21</sup> 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, from <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/elj.2022.0041>

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](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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