

# Economic and Health Justice for Women and Families in South Carolina

February 2024

In South Carolina 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 13% of South Carolina's population, policies that center their needs and address the systemic oppression and racism that create disparate health and economic outcomes are especially vital. South Carolinian 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% of working people in South Carolina do not have access to paid family leave. Sixty-four percent of South Carolinians are unable to access unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.<sup>1</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 workers with disabilities. In South Carolina, that would mean 125,100 older workers, 21,400 older Black women workers and 2,100 older Latina workers.<sup>2</sup>
- If women in South Carolina participated in the labor force at the same rate as women in countries with paid leave, there would be an estimated 82,000 additional workers in the state and \$2.6 billion more wages earned statewide.<sup>3</sup>

**81% OF BLACK MOTHERS IN SOUTH CAROLINA ARE BREADWINNERS.**

— National Partnership for Women and Families, Paid Leave Means a Stronger South Carolina

## Equal Pay

- Across the nation, women overall are typically paid 78 cents for every dollar paid to men. South Carolina women who were full-time, year-round workers earned only 73 cents for every dollar that white, non-Hispanic men in South Carolina earned in 2022.

For Black women this gap is even larger – for every dollar that white men earned in 2022, Black women in South Carolina earned only 57 cents.<sup>4</sup>

● Women’s wages support their households. In South Carolina, 81% of Black mothers are key family breadwinners.<sup>5</sup>

## **Minimum Wage**

● As of 2021, more than half of minimum wage workers in South Carolina were women.<sup>6</sup> South Carolina uses the federal minimum wage of only \$7.25 an hour – the federal minimum wage hasn’t been raised since 2009.<sup>7</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>8</sup> South Carolina has the fifth highest student debt per borrower, with a total student debt of \$29.1 billion owed across more than 700,000 borrowers across the state.<sup>9</sup>

## **Poverty**

● In South Carolina, 14.1% of women 18 and over are experiencing poverty – for Black women, that rate increases to 22.1%.<sup>10</sup>

## **Health Justice**

● Black women in South Carolina experienced a 67% higher pregnancy-related mortality ratio compared to their white counterparts in 2018 and 2019.<sup>11</sup>

● 13.9% of Black women between the ages of 19-64 in South Carolina lacked health insurance coverage between 2017 and 2021.<sup>12</sup>

● South Carolina is one of the most restrictive states for abortion access.

- Abortion is banned at 6 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.<sup>13</sup>
- Restrictions on reproductive health cost South Carolina almost \$3 billion in total average annual economic loss<sup>14</sup>

## **A Stronger Democracy**

- Less than 15% of South Carolina's state legislators are women, among the lowest percentage in the country. Women of color broadly make up only 4.7% of South Carolina's state legislature, with one of the largest gaps in the country in representation of women of color compared to the percentage of adult women of color who reside in the state.<sup>15</sup>
- South Carolina is ranked 43rd by the Cost of Voting Index, representing one of the most restrictive electoral climates in the country.<sup>16</sup>

## **Comprehensive policy solutions are necessary – and women and families in South Carolina cannot wait.**

The following policy recommendations would support women and families' economic security, health care access, and well-being in South Carolina 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> The National Partnership for Women & Families. (2024, February). *Paid Leave Means a Stronger South Carolina*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-south-carolina.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> The National Partnership for Women & Families. (2023, September). *Quantifying America's Gender Wage Gap by Race/Ethnicity*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/quantifying-americas-gender-wage-gap.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> See note 1.
- <sup>6</sup> 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/>
- <sup>7</sup> 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](https://www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/#/min_wage/South%20Carolina)
- <sup>8</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>9</sup> Coppock, J. (2024, January). *Student Loan Debt: What Explains the Disparities?* Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://www.degreechoices.com/blog/student-loan-debt-by-state/>
- <sup>10</sup> National Women's Law Center. (2023, October 24). *Women in Poverty, State by State 2022*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://nwlc.org/resource/women-in-poverty-state-by-state-2022/>
- <sup>11</sup> South Carolina Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Review Committee. (2023, March). *Legislative Brief*. Retrieved 14 February 2024, from <https://scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-SC-MMMRC-Legislative-Brief.pdf>
- <sup>12</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>13</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/south-carolina/abortion-statistics>
- <sup>14</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>15</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>16</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.

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](https://NationalPartnership.org).

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