



FAST FACTS:

Economic Security for Women and Families in Louisiana

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***Authors' note:** CAP uses “Black” and “African American” interchangeably throughout many of our products. We chose to capitalize “Black” in order to reflect that we are discussing a group of people and to be consistent with the capitalization of “African American.”*

Women and families in Louisiana face barriers to accessing quality health care, representation in leadership, and economic security. Louisiana women are experiencing the biggest gender wage gap in the country, and government officials are advancing legislation that would restrict access to reproductive health care, some of which has been ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. Moving forward, lawmakers must prioritize policies that allow Louisiana women to get ahead.

Women need policies that reflect their roles as providers and caregivers. In Louisiana, mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 69 percent of families,¹ 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 Louisiana.

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 Louisiana enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination.

- Louisiana women who are full-time, year-round workers earned about 69 cents for every dollar that Louisiana men earned in 2017—the biggest gender wage gap in the country.² If the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not reach parity in the state until 2115.³ The wage gap is even larger for Black women and Latinas in Louisiana, who earned 47.5 cents and 52 cents, respectively, for every dollar that white men earned in 2019.⁴
- Due to the gender wage gap, each woman in Louisiana will lose an average of \$629,480 over the course of her lifetime.⁵

Increase the minimum wage

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

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.⁶ Nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in Louisiana are women.⁷
- In Louisiana, the current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour.⁸ The minimum wage for workers who receive tips is \$2.13 per hour.⁹ More than two-thirds of tipped wage workers in Louisiana are women.¹⁰
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 would boost wages for 443,000 women in Louisiana and more than 23 million women nationally.¹¹ Sixty-one percent of Louisiana workers who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$15 are women.¹²

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 Medicaid; and end onerous restrictions that reduce access to abortion care and undermine the patient-provider relationship. At the state level, Louisiana should ensure that women have access to the full spectrum of quality, affordable, and women-centered reproductive health services.

- In 2014, more than 321,000 women in Louisiana were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies, and 27 percent of those women were uninsured.¹³
- 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 about 38,000 women in Louisiana in 2017, up from about 36,000 women in 2014.¹⁴ Title X funding in Louisiana has remained stagnant at around \$4.5 million.¹⁵
- Louisiana has restrictions on abortion care: In-person state-mandated counseling, an ultrasound, and a 24-hour waiting period are required before the procedure is provided, thus requiring at least two trips; state health plans offered under the Affordable Care Act are prohibited from covering abortion; state Medicaid funds cannot cover abortion care except in cases of rape, incest, or life endangerment to the woman; telemedicine cannot be used to administer medication abortion; and parental notification for young people under the age of 18 is required.¹⁶
- Louisiana’s infant mortality rate—7.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017—is higher than the national rate of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017.¹⁷ The state’s maternal mortality rate is 22.2 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016,¹⁸ compared with the national rate of 17.2 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015.¹⁹

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.

- More than 34 million U.S. employees, or 29 percent of the nation's private sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.²⁰
- In Louisiana, the rate is even higher: 45.1 percent of private sector workers, or more than 670,000 people, do not receive paid sick days.²¹

Ensure fair scheduling practices

Many low-wage and part-time workers—approximately 60 percent of whom are women²²—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.²³ 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.²⁴

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 family member; to recover from their own serious illness; or to assist in a loved one's recovery from a serious illness or injury.

- Only 17 percent of civilian workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.²⁵
- Unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible to 65 percent of working people in Louisiana.²⁶ Workers and families in the state need paid family and medical leave for reasons other than childbirth. For example, more than 1 in 5 workers in Louisiana is at least 55 years old, and in less than 15 years, the state's population that is 65 and older will grow by nearly 20 percent.²⁷ Louisiana's 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.²⁸

Expand quality, affordable child care

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

- Sixty-six percent of Louisiana children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.²⁹
- For a Louisiana family with one infant and one 4-year-old, the annual price of a child care center averages \$11,650 per year,³⁰ or almost one-fifth of the median income for a Louisiana family with children.³¹
- Louisiana is ahead of the national average in children enrolled in public preschool, with about 43 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.³²

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 to 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.³³

- In Louisiana, 29.5 percent of women have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes, and 23.4 percent of women have experienced noncontact sexual harassment.³⁴ 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.³⁵
- About 36 percent of Louisiana women have experienced intimate partner violence, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.³⁶ 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.³⁷

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.³⁸ 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.³⁹

- The incarceration rate in Louisiana is 719 per 100,000 people.⁴⁰ Approximately 6 percent of prisoners in Louisiana are women.⁴¹
- 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.⁴²
- 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

- Women make up 51 percent of Louisiana's population but only 16 percent of its elected officials.⁴⁵
- Women of color constitute 21 percent of the state's population but only 6 percent of its officeholders.⁴⁶
- Two of Louisiana's largest cities, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, are led by Black women, Mayor LaToya Cantrell (D) and Mayor Sharon Weston Broome (D), respectively.⁴⁷

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