



Congresswoman Cheri Bustos

Women's Economic Security: IT'S A FAMILY THING

WE CAN AND HAVE TO DO BETTER!

HERE IS A SNAPSHOT OF THE ISSUES I'M WORKING HARD ON EACH DAY TO INCREASE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, NOT ONLY FOR WORKING WOMEN, BUT FOR ALL HARD WORKING FAMILIES ACROSS OUR REGION, STATE AND COUNTRY:

For all the glass ceilings women have shattered in recent years, many hardworking women and their families are still struggling to get by. Women now comprise almost half of our national workforce, but they have been held back by workplace policies that belong in a televised period drama—think Mad Men—not the 21st Century workplace.

As I've traveled across the more than 7,000-square miles in northwest and central Illinois that I'm proud to represent in Congress, I consistently hear stories of hard working women having to make difficult choices to provide for their families' economic security.

CLOSING THE WAGE GAP

In the 17th Congressional District of Illinois, median earnings for women working full-time and year-round were just 73 percent of men's earnings—\$31,449 for women compared to \$42,840 for men.ⁱ This is even worse than the national average, where women earn 78 percent of what men earn.

Women of color continue to suffer an even greater disparity. Nationally, African American women working full-time and year-round earn just 64 percent of White men's earnings, and Hispanic women earn even less, at just 54 percent.ⁱⁱ

Closing this gap will put more money in the pockets of working women and allow them to better support their families.

To help close this gender wage gap, I'm working to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act that will help ensure employers pay equal salaries for equal work done by men and women. This bill would support women's negotiating power and help make salary information more transparent by prohibiting companies from retaliating against employees who share salary information.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES WITH LIVABLE WAGES

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, close to one in five women in Illinois' 17th Congressional District live below the federal poverty line. Many of these women and their families are employed but still do not earn enough to make ends meet.

It is estimated that two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women.ⁱⁱⁱ Working full-time and year-round at Illinois' minimum wage of \$8.25 per hour, a woman earns roughly \$16,500 per year,^{iv} a salary well below the federal poverty line for a family of three.^v Raising the minimum wage will give working families more to spend on basic necessities, such as groceries, child care and rent—and this increased spending will have a positive impact on our economy as a whole.

While increased minimum wages are on the horizon in Illinois, raising the national minimum wage will not only level the playing field between Illinois and our neighboring states, but it will also increase women's earning and spending power, which will strengthen our families and our economy.



PROVIDING OPTIONS FOR AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

Without help, child care can account for more than half of a family's income. Here in Illinois, the annual cost of infant care averages \$12,568,^{vi} while the median income for a single mother, regardless of family size, is \$23,000.^{vii}

Investing in quality, affordable child care programs for hard working families would allow parents to work full-time and increase their financial stability while setting up their children for future success. These programs also need to be flexible to support parents who work non-traditional hours.

On a national level, I support expanding access to programs like Head Start and am working to pass the bipartisan Child and Dependent Care FSA Enhancement Act. This bill will increase the amount of pre-tax money a family can put into a flexible spending account (FSA) to pay for child care from \$5,000 to \$7,500 annually and tie that amount to inflation to keep up with the rising cost of care.

ENSURING PAID SICK LEAVE

In Illinois, 43 percent of workers do not receive paid sick leave to care for themselves or a family member when they are ill or to seek routine or preventative medical care. Nationally, 39 percent of workers do not receive paid sick leave.^{viii}

Allowing workers to take paid sick leave will help working families, and it also makes good business sense. Were the state of Illinois to institute paid sick leave, Illinois employers

would save roughly \$272 million through increased productivity, a reduction in the spread of disease and lower employee turnover.^{ix}

I continue to support legislation like the Healthy Families Act, which would allow workers to accrue paid sick days to be used to recover from their own illnesses, to access preventive care, to provide care to a sick family member or to attend school meetings related to a child's health condition or disability.

SECURING RETIREMENT FOR OUR SENIORS

Women are more likely than men to leave and re-enter the workforce during the course of their careers. Combined with a longer life expectancy and a higher likelihood of working in part-time jobs that don't qualify for retirement plans,^x this reality can result in inadequate retirement savings for many senior women.^{xi}

Many women rely solely upon Social Security to support themselves in retirement. In Illinois, the average annual income for single elders is barely above the federal poverty line at \$11,627.^{xii} The national average for women hovers around \$16,040.^{xiii} Ultimately, this means that despite working hard for years, many Illinois women can't afford life's basic necessities in their golden years.

That's why I've always fought hard to protect important programs like Medicare and Social Security, which allow millions of seniors to live in dignity.

ⁱ AAUW "The Gender Pay Gap: Illinois"; 2014: Median Earnings for women working full-time year round were just 70%: women - \$31,566, men - \$45,312

ⁱⁱ The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap. AAUW. 2015; The Wage Gap, State by State. National Women's Law Center. 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ Equal Pay and the Wage Gap. National Women's Law Center. 2014

^{iv} Fair Pay for Women. National Women's Law Center. Calculation based on a 40 hour work week, 50 weeks per year.

^v 2015 Poverty Guidelines; Fair Pay for Women. National Women's Law Center. Calculation based on a 40 hour work week, 50 weeks per year

^{vi} Childcare in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets. Childcare Aware of America. 2014; The average annual cost of full-time care for an infant in center-based care ranges from \$5,496 in Mississippi to \$16,549 in Massachusetts.

^{vii} Breadwinner Moms. Pew Research Center. 2013

^{viii} Lovell, Vicky. Valuing Good Health in Illinois: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days. IWPR. March 2009; Economic News Release: Selected Paid Leave Benefits, Bureau of Labor Statistics March 2014; Paid Sick Days Access Varies by Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, and Job Characteristics, IWPR July 2014

^{ix} No One Should Have to Choose Between Their Health and Their Job. Women Employed. Web. 22 Jan

^x Women and Retirement Savings. US Dept of Labor. 2013

^{xi} What Every Woman Should Know About Retirement Savings and How to Make it Last. US Dept of Labor. 2012

^{xii} At a Glance: Illinois' Women in Retirement. Wider Opportunities for Women. 2009;

^{xiii} Why Many Retired Women Live in Poverty. CNN Money, May 2014