



POISED FOR SUCCESS OR SCRAPING BY: HOW OUR ECONOMY IS STILL FAILING WOMEN

No question about it, women have made significant gains in the workforce since the 1970s. Back then, women comprised 38 percent of the labor force, while today women make up roughly half.¹ Despite these advances, women often work in low-wage positions with few benefits. In fact, two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women.² Working full-time and year-round at the minimum wage in Illinois places a woman below the federal poverty line for a family of three.

According to the Pew Research Center, mothers are the primary breadwinners in 40 percent of households with children under the age of 18.³ Since women play such a vital role in a family's economic security, it is critical that we examine some of the key factors that impact women's financial stability such as the persistent wage gap, livable wages, affordable child care and paid sick leave.

Wage Gap

- In the 17th Congressional District of Illinois, median earnings for women working full-time year-round were just 70 percent of men's earnings - \$31,566 for women compared to \$45,312 for men.⁴ Nationally, women fair slightly better, earning 77 percent of what men earn.⁵
- Women of color suffer an even greater disparity. African American women working full-time year-round earn 64 percent of white men's earnings and Hispanic women earn 53 percent.⁶

Livable Wages

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, close to one in five women in the 17th Congressional District live below the federal poverty line. And, it's estimated that two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women.⁷
- Working full-time and year-round at Illinois' minimum wage of \$8.25 per hour, a woman will earn roughly \$16,500 per year,⁸ a salary that is \$3,290 below the federal poverty line for a family of three.⁹
- According to the National Women's Law Center, increasing the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour would boost wages enough to move a family of three above the federal poverty line.¹⁰
- Raising the minimum wage would not only increase women's earning power, it would also increase their spending power. By increasing the minimum wage by \$1, a minimum wage worker would spend an additional \$2,800 per year.¹¹

Affordable Child Care

- In Illinois, the annual cost of infant care averages \$12,697, while the median income for a single mother, regardless of family size, is \$24,226.¹²
- Without help, some women would pay around half of their income for child care, but, at present, 82 percent of eligible children do not receive federal assistance due to a lack of funding for programs like the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).¹³
- The CCDBG, which is available to help Illinois low-income families, is structured to assist families of three making less than \$35,328¹⁴, but federal dollars for child care assistance programs are only reaching a small portion of families in need of support.¹⁵
- Cuts to Illinois' Early Childhood Block Grant program funds have resulted in 20,000 fewer children participating in supported programs between 2009 and 2013.¹⁶

Paid Sick Leave

- In Illinois, 43 percent of workers do not receive paid sick leave to care for themselves or a family member. Nor do they receive paid leave to seek routine medical care or help with an issue related to domestic violence.¹⁷
- Were the state of Illinois or the federal government to institute paid sick leave, Illinois employers would save roughly \$272 million through increased productivity, a reduction in the spread of disease and fewer turnovers.¹⁸
- Workers would further benefit from paid sick leave through the early treatment and detection of an illness and access to preventative screenings, all of which would reduce recovery times and overall health care costs.¹⁹

¹ *How Do We Know? America's Changing Labor Force*. U.S. Census Bureau. Web. 13 March 2014. <census.gov/how/infographics/acs_infographic_eeo.html>.

² *Fair Pay for Women Requires Increasing the Minimum Wage and Tipped Minimum Wage*. National Women's Law Center. 11 Feb. 2014.

³ Wang, Wendy et al. *Breadwinner Moms: Mothers are the Sole or Primary Provider in Four-in-Ten Households with Children; Public Conflicted about the Growing Trend*. Pew Research Center, 29 May 2013.

⁴ *The Gender Gap: Illinois*. AAUW. Web. 13 March 2014. <aauw.org/files/2013/09/Illinois-Pay-Gap-2013.pdf>.

⁵ *The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap*. AAUW. 2014.

⁶ *The Simple Truth*. 2014.

⁷ *Fair Pay for Women*. National Women's Law Center.

⁸ *Fair Pay for Women*. National Women's Law Center. Calculation based on a 40 hour work week, 50 weeks per year.

⁹ *2014 Poverty Guidelines*.

¹⁰ Cooper, David. *Raising the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10.10 Would Lift Wages for Millions and Provide A Modest Economic Boost*. Economic Policy Institute. 19 Dec. 2013. <epi.org/publication/raising-federal-minimum-wage-to-1010>.

¹¹ *Fair Pay for Women*. National Women's Law Center. Also see, Aaronson, Daniel et al. *The Spending and Debt Responses to Minimum Wage Increases*. Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. 8 Feb. 2011.

¹² *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care*. ChildCare Aware. 2013.

¹³ Shriver, Maria and the Center for American Progress. *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Pushed Back from the Brink*. January 2014.

¹⁴ Schulman, Karen et al. *Pivot Point State Child Care Assistance Policies 2013*. National Women's Law Center.

¹⁵ Shriver. *The Shriver Report*.

¹⁶ *Moving Policy, Making Progress: Illinois Kids Count 2013*, Voices for Illinois Children. <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.cca-il.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/voices_2013kc_report_final-s.pdf>.

¹⁷ Lovell, Vicky. *Valuing Good Health in Illinois: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. March 2009.

¹⁸ *No One Should Have to Choose Between Their Health and Their Job*. Women Employed. Web. 22 Jan. 2014 <womenemployed.org/no-one-should-have-choose-between-their-health-and-their-job>.

¹⁹ Lovell. *Valuing Good Health in Illinois*. Institute for Women's Policy Research.