



FAST FACTS

Economic Security for Virginia Families

By Ryan Erickson, Sarah Jane Glynn, and Heidi Williamson June 19, 2015

Families in the Commonwealth of Virginia and across the United States need policies that promote economic security for women and families. Working families need higher livable wages, women need and deserve equal pay for equal work, and parents need to be able to maintain good jobs and raise their children simultaneously. Strong economic security policies will enable Virginia women and families to get ahead—not just get by.

Family structure is shifting significantly. For most Virginians, the days of the full-time, stay-at-home mom are long in the past: Mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 61.9 percent of Virginia families.¹ To promote the economic security of women and their families, Virginia's policies should address the needs of working mothers and reflect the roles that women are playing to provide for their families. Here are seven policy areas in which policymakers and advocates can help women bolster their families' economic security.

Provide access to paid sick days

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone is afforded the time to get better. Many women go to work sick or leave their sick children at home alone 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.

- About 40 million U.S. employees, or 40 percent of the nation's private-sector workforce, do not have access to paid sick days.² In Virginia, the rate is higher: More than 41 percent of private-sector workers—1.1 million people—do not have paid sick days.³
- If employees must stay home from work because they or their children are ill, the loss of pay can take a serious toll—particularly on low-income workers, who are the least likely to have access to this benefit.⁴

Expand paid family and medical leave

Access to paid family and medical leave could allow workers to be with their newborn children during the crucial first stages of a child's life, to care for an aging parent or spouse, or to recover from their own illness.

- The United States is the only developed country without guaranteed access to paid maternity leave and one of only three developed countries that do not offer broader family and medical leave insurance.⁵ Only 12 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers.⁶
- The National Partnership for Women & Families gave Virginia a “D”—the second-lowest grade—on policies that help parents of newborn children because, with the exception of state workers, Virginia does not offer adequate protections to new parents beyond the unpaid leave available to workers under the Family and Medical Leave Act.⁷

Ensure equal pay

Although federal law prohibits unequal pay for equal work, there is more to do to ensure that both women and men enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination across Virginia.

- Women are the primary, sole, or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of U.S. families, but they continue to earn less than their male counterparts. Latinas and African American women experience the sharpest pay disparities.⁸
- Virginia women earn 79 cents for every dollar that Virginia men earn; if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not receive equal pay until 2073.⁹ The wage gap is even larger for black and Latina women in Virginia, who earn 60 cents and 52 cents respectively for every dollar that white men earn.¹⁰

Expand quality, affordable child care

Families need child care to be able to work, but many families lack access to high-quality child care options. Parents want and need child care that supports young children's development and adequately prepares them for school.

- 65 percent of Virginia children younger than age 6 have all available, resident parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.¹¹

- For a Virginia family with one infant and one 4-year-old, child care costs an average of \$17,724 per year, or just less than one-quarter of the median income for a Virginia family with children.¹²

Increase the minimum wage

Women make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers, and raising the minimum wage would help hardworking women across Virginia better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum-wage workers in the United States.¹³
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour would boost wages for 515,000 women in Virginia and nearly 16 million women nationally.¹⁴

Guarantee access to quality health care

Women need comprehensive reproductive health services—including access to abortion care—in order to thrive as breadwinners, caregivers, and employees.

- Virginia should expand its Medicaid coverage, which would help the 128,000 Virginia women who cannot afford to purchase a plan through the state health exchange under the Affordable Care Act and do not qualify for Medicaid coverage.¹⁵ While 29 states and the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid coverage, more than 3 million women across the United States fall in the coverage gap.¹⁶
- In 2012, nearly half a million Virginia women were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies.¹⁷ Because federal Title X funding—which covers contraception, pregnancy testing, and cancer screenings—has not kept up with inflation and often faces the threat of cuts at the federal level, Virginia should step in and ensure that women have access to quality family planning resources.¹⁸

Promote women's political leadership

Across the United States, women are dramatically underrepresented in political office: Women make up 51 percent of the population but only 29 percent of elected officials.¹⁹

- Virginia is among the least representative states—it is ranked 48 out of all 50 states and Washington, D.C.—when considering whether Virginia's elected officials reflect the gender and racial makeup of the commonwealth's population.²⁰

- Women make up 51 percent of Virginia’s population but only 29 percent of its elected officials. Likewise, women of color make up 19 percent of the commonwealth’s population but only 7 percent of its officeholders.²¹

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Endnotes

- 1 Sarah Jane Glynn, “Breadwinning Mothers, Then and Now” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Glynn-Breadwinners-report-FINAL.pdf>. Data are taken from Glynn and Jeff Chapman’s analysis of Miriam King and others, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 3.0,” available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/index.shtml> (last accessed June 2015).
- 2 Elise Gould, Kai Filion, and Andrew Green, “The Need for Paid Sick Days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security” (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2011), available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/temp2011/BriefingPaper319-2.pdf>.
- 3 Institute for Women’s Policy Research and National Partnership for Women & Families, “Workers’ Access to Paid Sick Days in the States” (2015), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/workers-access-to-paid-sick-days-in-the-states.pdf>.
- 4 The percentage of workers with paid sick leave increases with compensation. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2013* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013), Table 32, available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2013/ebb10052.pdf>.
- 5 International Labour Organization, “Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world” (2014), available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf; Jody Heymann and others, “Contagion Nation: A Comparison of Paid Sick Day Policies in 22 Countries” (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2009), available at <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-sick-days-2009-05.pdf>.
- 6 Bureau of Labor Statistics, *National Compensation Survey*, Table 32.
- 7 National Partnership for Women & Families, “Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws That Help New Parents” (2014), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/expecting-better-2014.pdf>. States’ grades in this assessment reflect the degree to which a state’s laws improves upon federal law.
- 8 Anna Chu and Charles Posner, “The State of Women in America: A 50-State Analysis of How Women Are Faring Across the Nation” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2013), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/StateOfWomen-4.pdf>.
- 9 Status of Women in the States, “Virginia,” available at <http://statusofwomensdata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/virginia/> (last accessed June 2015).
- 10 Chu and Posner, “The State of Women in America.”
- 11 “Available parents” applies to “resident parents.” See Kids Count Data Center, “Children Under Age 6 with All Parents in the Labor Force,” available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-allavailable-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473> (last accessed June 2015).
- 12 The average annual cost of child care in Virginia is \$10,028 for an infant and \$7,696 for a 4-year-old. For a family with children in Virginia, the median income is \$74,100 per year. See Child Care Aware of America, “Child Care in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets” (2014), available at http://www.ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-Child-Care-in-America_State-Fact-Sheets.pdf; Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households with Children,” available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-incomeamong-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365> (last accessed June 2015).
- 13 National Women’s Law Center, “Fair Pay for Women Requires a Fair Minimum Wage,” May 13, 2015, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/fair-pay-women-requires-fair-minimum-wage>.
- 14 Economic Policy Institute, “State Tables: Characteristics of workers who would be affected by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$12 by July 2020” (2015), available at <http://s2.epi.org/files/2015/revised-minimum-wage-state-tables.pdf>; Economic Policy Institute, “Data Tables: Raising the Minimum Wage to \$12 by 2020 Would Lift Wages for 35 Million Workers” (2015), available at <http://s4.epi.org/files/pdf/85139.pdf>.
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- 17 Jennifer J. Frost, Mia R. Zolna, and Lori Frohwirth, “Contraceptive Needs and Services, 2012 Update” (New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2012), available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/win/contraceptive-needs-2012.pdf>.
- 18 Rachel Benson Gold, “Going the Extra Mile: The Difference Title X Makes,” *Guttmacher Policy Review* 15 (2) (2012), available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/15/2/gpr150213.html>. Through Plan First, Virginia provides many of the services covered under Title X funding, but because these programs are often vulnerable to cuts, Virginians should ensure that these programs are adequately funded. For more information on Plan First, see Cover Virginia, “Plan First,” available at http://coverva.org/programs_plan_first.cfm (last accessed June 2015).
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- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.