



FAST FACTS:

Economic Security for Women and Families in Alabama

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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 Alabama face barriers to accessing quality health care and economic security. Lawmakers must prioritize policies that ensure reproductive health care access for all, implement higher livable wages, and provide workers with paid leave.

Women need policies that reflect their roles as providers and caregivers. In Alabama, mothers are the sole, primary, or co-breadwinners in 64.8 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 Alabama.

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 Alabama enjoy the fullest protections against discrimination.

- Alabama women who are full-time, year-round workers earned about 73 cents for every dollar that Alabama men earned in 2017;² if the wage gap continues to close at its current rate, women will not reach parity in the state until 2089.³ The wage gap is even larger for Black women and Latinas in Alabama, who earned 58.5 cents and 48.8 cents, respectively, for every dollar that white men earned in 2017.⁴
- Due to the gender wage gap, each woman in Alabama will lose an average of \$511,400 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 Alabama and enable them to better support their families.

- Women make up nearly two-thirds of all minimum wage workers in the United States.⁶ About 70 percent of all minimum wage workers in Alabama are women.⁷
- In Alabama, the current minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour.⁸ The minimum wage for workers who receive tips is \$2.13 per hour.⁹ Almost three-quarters of tipped wage workers in Alabama are women.¹⁰
- Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 would boost wages for 451,000 women in Alabama and more than 23 million women nationally.¹¹ Fifty-eight percent of Alabama 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, Alabama should ensure that women have access to the full spectrum of quality, affordable, and women-centered reproductive health services.

- In 2014, more than 332,000 women in Alabama were in need of publicly funded family planning services and supplies, and 24 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 82,000 women in Alabama in 2017, down from 93,000 women in 2014.¹⁴ Title X funding has itself increased slightly, from \$5.2 million in 2014 to \$5.3 million in 2019.¹⁵
- Alabama has restrictions on abortion care: In-person state-mandated counseling, an ultrasound, and a 48-hour waiting period are required before the procedure is provided, thus necessitating at least two trips; state health plans offered under the Affordable Care Act and public funding are prohibited from covering abortion 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
- This past May, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey (R) signed into law a bill that bans all abortion except in cases of rape, incest, or life endangerment and that punishes abortion providers for providing abortion care with up to 99 years in prison.¹⁷
- Alabama’s infant mortality rate—7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births—is higher than the national rate of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.¹⁸

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.¹⁹
- In Alabama, the rate is even higher: 44.6 percent of private sector workers, or more than 671,000 people, do not receive paid sick days.²⁰

Ensure fair scheduling practices

Many low-wage and part-time workers—approximately 60 percent of whom are women²¹—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.²² 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.²³

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.²⁴
- Unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible to 61 percent of working people in Alabama.²⁵ 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 Alabama 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 30 percent.²⁶ Alabama'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.²⁷

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-three percent of Alabama children younger than age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, which makes access to affordable, high-quality child care a necessity.²⁸
- For an Alabama family with one infant and one 4-year-old, the annual price of a child care center averages \$10,919 per year,²⁹ or almost one-fifth of the median income for an Alabama family with children.³⁰
- Alabama lags behind the national average in children enrolled in public preschool, with about 36 percent of 4-year-olds enrolled.³¹

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.³²

- In Alabama, 34 percent of women have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes, and 26 percent of women have experienced noncontact sexual harassment.³³ 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.³⁴
- About 38 percent of Alabama women have experienced intimate partner violence, which can include physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷ 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.³⁸

- The incarceration rate in Alabama is 486 per 100,000 people.³⁹ Approximately 9 percent of prisoners in Alabama are women.⁴⁰
- 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.⁴¹
- 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.⁴²

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.⁴³

- Women make up 52 percent of Alabama's population but only 17 percent of its elected officials.⁴⁴
- Women of color constitute 18 percent of the state's population but only 6 percent of its officeholders.⁴⁵

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