



# The Feminization of Hunger and Poverty in the United States

## Chapter Summary

Gender discrimination is a major cause of hunger and poverty in the United States. In order to reduce hunger and poverty in our country, we must identify and adopt policies that help eliminate entrenched and interconnected sexism and racism.

In our 2014 Hunger Report, *Ending Hunger in America*, Bread for the World Institute offered a comprehensive plan to end hunger here at home by 2030. That plan is the backdrop to this report. Ending hunger in the United States is not a pipe dream. It is a goal we can reach within 15 years. A more detailed summary of the plan offered in the 2014 Hunger Report appears on pages 172-175. While this chapter assumes and incorporates all of the elements in the plan, here we zero in on gender discrimination and institutions that can work against it.

This chapter focuses on how some of the same issues discussed earlier—lack of bargaining power, unpaid care work, insufficient political representation—apply to the United States. As in all other countries, women in the United States are paid less than men. They struggle to balance work and caring for their children with too little help from their partners and their government. Policymakers undervalue their experiences and their opinions on policy matters, at least partly because they are proportionately underrepresented in government.

As in the rest of the report, the focus is on low-income women, those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty. Unfortunately, this is not a small group. One in every *three* people in the United States spent part of the Great Recession in poverty. For most it was a short-lived experience, others cycled in and out, and still others were stuck there. It doesn't take long for hunger to harm body and soul, and it is completely unnecessary for this to happen to anyone in the United States.

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Eliminate the wage gap by sex and race, enforce anti-discrimination laws.
- Support women's ability to work by raising the federal minimum wage to a livable standard, protecting collective bargaining rights, mandating paid sick leave and family leave, and providing high-quality, affordable child care with sufficient public and private funding.
- Eliminate mandatory minimum sentencing and support reintegration of returning citizens.
- Reduce poor maternal and child health outcomes by making affordable health care available to all.
- Increase women's representation in public office and other decision-making bodies critical to building a more just and equitable society.

## Women Are Still Paid Less

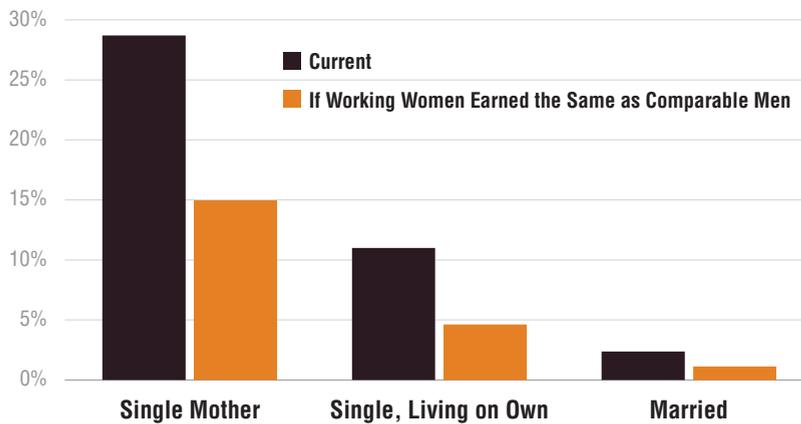
The Equal Pay Act was signed into law in 1963. At the time, women were paid 59 cents for every \$1 that men were paid.<sup>1</sup> Since then the wage gap has narrowed, but wages are still far from equal. At the average pace of improvement since 1963, it would take more than an additional 50 years to reach pay equity. So far the 21st century has been an era of wage stagnation for the majority of the nation's workforce, both women and men. Since 2001, there has been little change in the wage gap. The most recent data show that women who work full-

time, year-round are paid about 78 cents for every \$1 that men in a comparable position are paid.<sup>2</sup> Even in the 10 largest categories of low-wage jobs, where women comprise the overwhelming majority of workers, there is a wage gap of 10 percent favoring men.<sup>3</sup>

In 2014, the Institute for Women's Policy Research released a study showing that closing the wage gap between men and women would cut the poverty rate among working women and their families by half.<sup>4</sup> The poverty rate for working single mothers would fall from 29 percent to 15 percent. See Figure 4.1. According to the authors, "The total increase in women's earnings with pay equity represents more than 14 times

**Figure 4.1 Equal Pay Would Reduce Poverty by Half for Families with a Working Woman**

Current Poverty Rate and Estimated Rate if Women Earned the Same as Comparable Men



Source: Heidi Hartmann, Jeff Hayes, and Jennifer Clark (January 2014), *How Equal Pay for Working Women would Reduce Poverty and Grow the American Economy*, Institute for Women's Policy Research.

what the federal and state governments spent in fiscal year 2012 on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).<sup>5</sup>

The majority of minimum-wage workers are women, and women hold 76 percent of the 10 low-wage jobs that employ the most people. Here, "low-wage"<sup>6</sup> means jobs that pay \$10.10 an hour or less. That is the proposed minimum wage in a bill introduced in 2013 by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA). The current minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. Childcare workers and home health aides, job categories that are 95 percent and 90 percent female respectively, are two of the lowest-paid yet fastest-growing jobs in the

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 1 in 4 U.S. women have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup>

**1 in 4**

More than **1 million women** are under the supervision of the criminal justice system—in prison or jail or on probation or parole.<sup>2</sup>

country. Restaurant servers, 70 percent of whom are women, are paid a subminimum wage of \$2.13 an hour—the same dollar amount as in 1991. Tips raise their actual earnings, but only to a median wage of \$8.92 an hour, according to the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>7</sup>

The real value (purchasing power) of the minimum wage peaked in 1968. Adjusted for inflation, it is currently worth two-thirds of its value back then. Low-wage work pays so little that a full-time job is no assurance that a parent can keep food on the table until the next paycheck. Raising the minimum wage would, of course, put more money in the hands of minimum-wage workers right away. But it also sets the stage for improving the wages and earning potential of the rest of the low-wage workers in the United States.

As we mentioned, this chapter focuses mainly on women at risk of hunger and poverty. Recently two “exceptions” to the wage gap have appeared. One is among the highest-paid women, whose median earnings continue to gain ground on those of the top earning men. At the same time, the growth in earnings of both women and men at the top outpaces that of other workers. Thus, there is a widening gap between the highest-earning women and all other women. “The equalizing effect



of the Equal Pay Act and other measures that removed the most blatant forms of gender discrimination has been to some extent countered by the growing economic divide between the affluent and everyone else,” says sociologist Leslie McCall of Northwestern University. “Being at the top now outweighs being a woman.”<sup>8</sup>

The second exception is that the wage gap between African American and Hispanic women as a group and African American and Hispanic men as a group is now smaller than the gap between African American and Hispanic women as a group and white women.<sup>9</sup> This may say more about depression of the wages of men of color than about advances among women of color; the change in the wage gap is most likely due to a combination of these

Women represent a larger share of low-wage workers than men. Women are also the majority of minimum-wage workers.

Even though women are the majority of pediatricians in the United States, they earn only **66 percent** of what male pediatricians earn.<sup>3</sup>



In 2013, **31.5 percent** of women earned poverty-level wages, significantly higher than men’s **23.7 percent** share.<sup>4</sup>

and other factors. In any case, a rising proportion of women living in poverty are women of color, although many white women live below the poverty line as well. African American and Hispanic women would benefit most from an increase in the minimum wage.

Motherhood comes with a wage gap all its own. Mothers with the same job as their childless female peers—with the same experience and the same level of education—are paid an hourly wage that is 5 percent lower for each child they have.<sup>10</sup> Motherhood is costly

in other high-income countries as well, but the effects are cushioned by expansive public childcare programs.<sup>11</sup> Fathers experience no such penalty versus their childless male peers. In fact, men with children tend to earn more than men without children.<sup>12</sup>

Save the Children's 2014 edition of *State of the World's Mothers*—its 15<sup>th</sup> annual—ranks the United States 31<sup>st</sup> in the world on how mothers and their children fare.<sup>13</sup> European countries and Australia consistently rank in the top 10, while the United States has not been in the top 10 since 2006. Since 2000, its position has dropped the farthest of any country.

A job, as we've discussed, helps

improve women's bargaining power at home. In 1990, the United States had the sixth highest rate of female labor force participation among high-income countries. By 2010, it had fallen to number 17, mainly because, according to a study by Cornell economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn, our country failed to adopt family-friendly labor policies as other high-income countries have done.<sup>14</sup> When low-income men are asked why they work fewer hours than they wish, they are likely to say they cannot find a job that offers more hours. When the same question is put to low-income women, they are more likely to say they cannot find a job with the flexibility they need to balance it with family responsibilities.<sup>15</sup> Women's far greater responsibility for children and child care makes the difference.

When TANF was established in 1996, it marked a major change in social policy. From then on, government assistance to the most vulnerable families in the country was conditional on adults working. These were mostly low-income single mothers and their children. In its first years, TANF seemed to be successful in moving single mothers into the workforce, although this did not necessarily make them better off financially. In hindsight, the increase in the number of single mothers in the workforce was driven mainly by an economy operating at full employment. When this period of growth ended, it made little difference if government assistance was contingent on work requirements. When the economy is depressed, many people simply can't find jobs.



Otto Yamamoto

A 2013 rally in New York City to raise the minimum wage from the current rate of \$7.25 per hour.

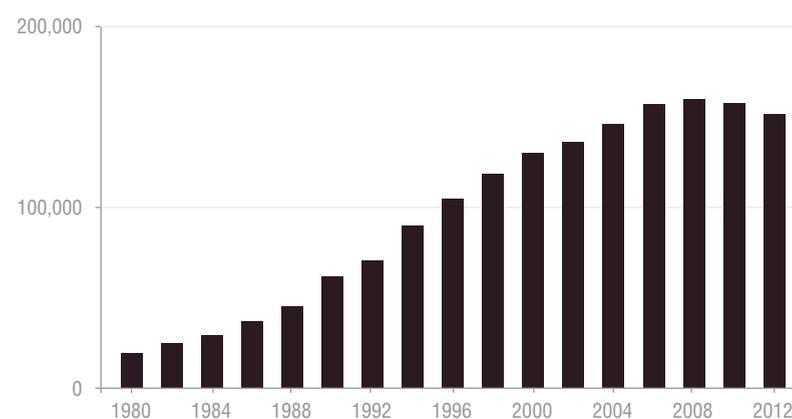
## Gender, Race, and Mass Incarceration

According to reports from the United States Conference of Mayors, joblessness leads the list of causes of hunger and homelessness in U.S. cities.<sup>16</sup> No family is more at risk of hunger and homelessness than one with a parent who has been incarcerated for a felony crime. Since 1991, the number of children with a mother who has been to prison for a felony conviction has more than doubled.<sup>17</sup> See Figure 4.2. The end of a prison sentence does not complete the punishment phase for people convicted of a felony. People who have been arrested or convicted are discriminated against for employment. A 2010 Survey by the Society for Human Resources Management found that 92 percent of employers conduct criminal background checks.<sup>18</sup> Laws prohibit returning citizens from a successful reentry to their communities and contribute to high recidivism rates—ex-offenders prefer the term “returning citizens” to highlight rights denied them as citizens of the United States.

Laws that ban people with felony drug convictions from receiving TANF or food stamps (hereafter called SNAP, the abbreviation for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly the Food Stamp Program) are the most direct links between hunger and the criminal justice system. People with felony drug convictions are permanently barred from receiving TANF in 12 states, while 25 states and the District of Columbia have shorter bans or provide some exemptions.<sup>19</sup> In nine states, a felony drug conviction prohibits people from ever receiving SNAP again.<sup>20</sup> Georgia is one of the states that impose a lifetime SNAP ban after felony drug convictions; the threshold for felony drug possession there is 1 ounce of marijuana.<sup>21</sup> Criminal convictions make it harder to obtain federal student aid;<sup>22</sup> this is especially true of drug-related offenses.<sup>23</sup> Twelve states impose a lifetime ban on the right to vote; thirty-five states impose post-sentence restrictions on voting rights.<sup>24</sup>

By now it is common knowledge that the United States imprisons more people per capita than any other country in the world.<sup>25</sup> The U.S. prison population has increased by 500 percent over the last 40 years.<sup>26</sup> The number of men in prison remains much higher than the number of women but since 1980 the rate of women imprisoned has been increasing 50 percent faster than the rate of men.<sup>27</sup> Two-thirds of incarcerated women are serving sentences for nonviolent offenses, most of these for drug offenses whose lengthy sentences are mandated by punitive policies enacted in the name of a War on Drugs.<sup>28</sup> Law enforcement focuses on communities of color and the justice system on meting out punishment disproportionately

Figure 4.2 Children With an Imprisoned Mother



Source: Brennan Center for Justice, New York University (2014).

to people of color. “Small race and class differences in offending are amplified at each stage of criminal processing,” says Harvard sociologist Bruce Western, one of the foremost experts on mass incarceration in the United States.<sup>29</sup> African Americans are 14 percent of regular drug users and 37percent of those arrested for drug offenses.<sup>30</sup>

### *Mothers in Chains*

Motherhood was the common bond that united the women at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut—the separation from their children and the insurmountable sorrows it caused them. Most of the women were imprisoned for nonviolent drug offenses and serving mandatory minimum sentences. In their bunks late at night, women lay awake and wept for their missing children, praying for God to watch over them and shorten the time in which they remained apart.

Desseray Wright was serving a 10-year mandatory minimum sentence for selling drugs when her eldest child and only daughter, 16-year-old Quanisha, was murdered on Mother’s Day 2010 while trying to protect another young woman being taunted by a man with a gun.<sup>31</sup> When her two sons lost their sister, who was a student at the Bronx Leadership Academy and had helped to look after them, they began to spiral out of the control of their grandmother, who had been caring for them ever since Desseray went to prison.

Andrea James, head of Families for Justice As Healing, drafted a “compassionate release” request for Desseray so that she could return to parenting her sons before their lives were destroyed by violence or they ended up in prison themselves. Although Desseray was in a prison for women who pose the least security threat, and had served more than half of her sentence, the Federal Bureau of Prisons denied the request. See Box 4.1 on page 152 for more about Andrea, a former attorney who wrote the book *Upper Bunkies Unite* about her time at the federal women’s prison in Danbury, CT.

Children are the collateral damage in the War on Drugs, during which first fathers and

then mothers have been handed harsh mandatory sentences for drug offenses. Table 4.1 shows the decline in employment rates for African American men of prime working age between 1970 and 2010. Many of the manufacturing jobs that contributed to the growth of an African American middle class vanished during this period. Urban neighborhoods deteriorated as higher wage manufacturing jobs were replaced by

lower paying jobs in services or no jobs at all. At a time when jobs were vanishing, one might have expected an increase in support for education and retraining to counter the changes in the labor market. This did not happen, and cuts to social welfare programs in the 1970s and 80s made it harder for affected communities to cope. After doing time in prison, men return to their communities, where their criminal record leaves them with worse employment prospects than before.

**Table 4.1 Mean Black Male Employment Rates in Large Metropolitan Areas, 1970-2010**

Age Cohort	1970	1990	2010
16-64	72.3	62.0	54.1
25-54	83.3	70.3	64.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau data, reprinted in Marc V. Levine (January 2012), “Race and Male Employment in the Wake of the Great Recession: Black Male Employment Rates in Milwaukee and the Nation’s Largest Metro Areas 2010,” Working Paper, Center for Economic Development, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

Children whose parents are incarcerated experience higher rates of trauma-related stress, depression, aggression, and other anti-social behaviors including truancy, drug use, sexual promiscuity, and dropping out of school.<sup>32</sup> Most of the women who have served time in federal prison for a drug felony are mothers of minor children.<sup>33</sup> This describes most of the women at the Danbury prison. Some had used selling drugs as a survival strategy to feed their children and themselves. In New York, nearly 75 percent of incarcerated women were the primary care giver of their children prior to their arrest.<sup>34</sup>

One recent improvement for returning citizens has been access to health care, including mental health care, under the Affordable Care Act. Women in prison report a higher rate of mental health problems than men. More than 70 percent of mothers in prison report having sought out mental health treatment or counseling before incarceration, a much higher percentage than in the general population.<sup>35</sup> At this writing, many people who could benefit from healthcare reform are not; see pages 169-170 to learn about the role of Medicaid in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Some states are focusing on mental health care as a crime prevention strategy and using the Affordable Care Act to expand the availability and affordability of mental health services.<sup>36</sup> For example, the Affordable Care Act includes the largest expansion of substance use disorder treatment coverage in a generation.<sup>37</sup> According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, 80 percent of women in prison have a history of substance use disorder.<sup>38</sup> A post-prison treatment program for 1,182 female returning citizens in California reduced recidivism rates by 80 percent.<sup>39</sup> It costs much more to keep a person in prison than provide treatment. In New York, a community-based program for women with substance use disorders designed to keep families together cost an average of \$34,000 per year to house a mother and two children, compared to \$129,000 for incarceration and foster care.<sup>40</sup>

Public opinion is strongly in favor of treatment programs rather than incarceration for drug users.<sup>41</sup> Treatment is a cost-effective alternative to incarceration, makes it possible for families to stay together, and improves public safety by reducing recidivism. Since the victims of crimes committed by people with substance problems are disproportionately residents of low-income communities, treating substance use disorder as a public health problem rather than a crime would make an important contribution to the well-being of these communities.



On June 21, 2014, people from across the country gathered on the National Mall in Washington, DC, at the Free Her Rally organized by Families for Justice as Healing, calling for an end to mass incarceration.

## Second Chances

The federal Second Chance Act was enacted in 2008 to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from prisons, jails, and juvenile detention facilities. Between 2009 and 2013, it provided \$255 million to 49 states and the District of Columbia for programs such as career training, mentoring, and community supervision. There are also programs geared specifically to people with substance use disorders and mental health conditions.<sup>42</sup> Since the Second Chance Act was enacted, the size of the prison population has continued to grow, but at a slower rate than in previous years.<sup>43</sup> A weak economy and its effect on state budgets offered governors a reason to experiment with Second Chance funding to reduce incarceration and its financial costs.

Working against the idea of second chances, for either women or men, is what scholar and activist Angela Davis called the “prison industrial complex.”<sup>44</sup> Like the “military industrial complex,” the term carries a warning of the dangers of bringing commercial interests and motivations into public policy decision-making—in this case decisions about criminal justice. The prison industrial complex explains a lot about why the United States imprisons people at a higher rate than any other country in the world.

In a review of 62 private prison contracts with state and local governments, the nonprofit In the Public Interest found that two-thirds of

contracts contained “lockup quotas.” In other words, correctional facilities run by private contractors must be kept full. When occupancy quotas are not met, taxpayers are obliged to pick up the cost to reimburse contractors for a loss in revenue.<sup>45</sup> In Colorado, crime rates were down by a third in a decade, but occupancy requirements at three state prisons meant taxpayers owed contractors an additional \$2 million.<sup>46</sup> As the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison company, told its shareholders in 2010: “The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices, or through the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by our criminal laws.”<sup>47</sup>

Legislation such as the Second Chance Act provides a vehicle to broaden cost-effective and humane alternatives to incarceration. Just one of many examples: in Texas, a community-based treatment program cost an average of \$12 a day, versus \$137 per bed in a correctional setting.<sup>48</sup> Treatment programs can help individuals heal, but they do not generate the jobs needed to revitalize communities with few viable economic opportunities. The rising costs of mass incarceration strain public budgets and curtail what policymakers are willing and



Joseph Moller/Bread for the World

**Nate Gordon is a member of the HELP program for male returning citizens in Cincinnati, OH. HELP was featured in Bread for the World Institute's 2014 Hunger Report, *Ending Hunger in America*. Gordon is shown here with his daughter.**

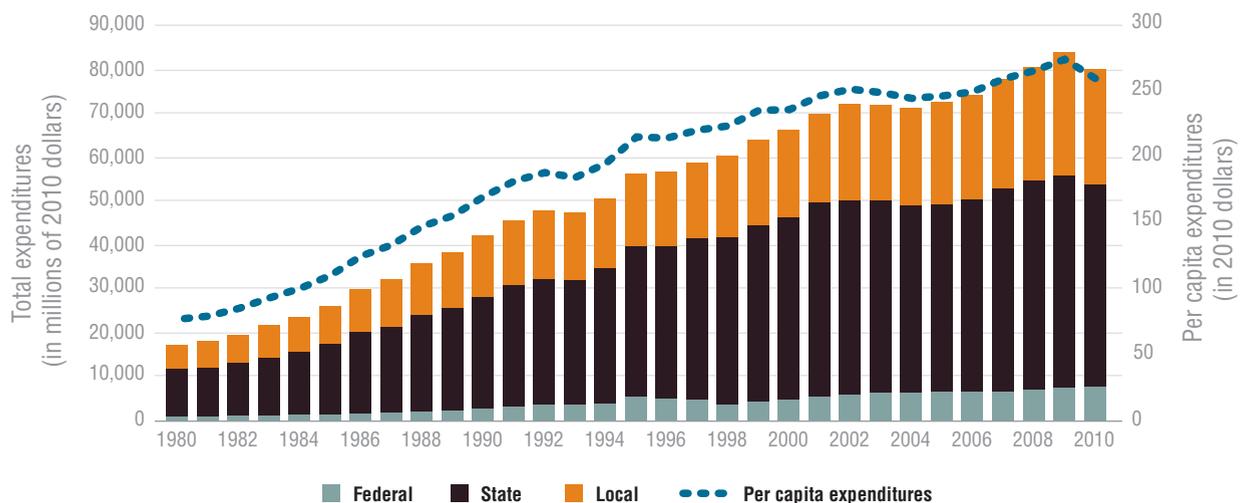
able to invest in community revitalization. Figure 4.3 shows how per capita expenditures on corrections more than tripled between 1980 and 2010.<sup>49</sup>

In the early 2000s, the Justice Mapping Center (JMC) identified “million-dollar blocks”: a geographic breakdown of places where incarcerating residents was costing the government more than \$1 million a year.<sup>50</sup> By using new tools to visualize data geographically, JMC matched the home addresses of incarcerated people with street maps to show how the costs of mass incarceration could be pinpointed to a small number of zip codes or census tracts. In Pennsylvania, taxpayers were spending upwards of \$40 million to imprison residents of one Philadelphia zip code.<sup>51</sup> New York City had a much lower crime rate per capita than Houston, but the maps that JMC produced showed identical patterns, where a small number of neighborhoods had the highest share of incarcerated people. Million-dollar blocks helped to refocus conversations about crime prevention on the re-entry of residents when they were released and what could be done to improve conditions in these communities.

Connecticut was one of the first states to seize on JMC’s work. In the early 2000s, Connecticut prisons were so overcrowded that the state was contracting with Virginia to house 500 prisoners it had no room for, costing Connecticut taxpayers millions of dollars. It turned out that half of Connecticut’s prison population was drawn from a small group of neighborhoods in three cities. The Hill neighborhood in New Haven was costing the state \$20 million annually to imprison 387 people—\$6 million for parole violations alone.<sup>52</sup> In 2004, the state government approved a plan to reinvest \$13 million of its corrections budget into targeted strategies to improve conditions in the high-incarceration neighborhoods. Much of the money

**Figure 4.3 Total Corrections Expenditures by Level of Government and Per Capita Expenditures, 1980-2010**

In real terms, total corrections expenditures today are more than 350 percent higher than they were in 1980, while per capita expenditures increased nearly 250 percent over the same period.



Source: Melissa Kearney and others (May 2014), *Ten Economic Facts about Crime and Incarceration in the United States*, The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution.

## FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE AS HEALING

Andrea James has fought for justice within the criminal justice system for more than 25 years, including many years as a criminal defense attorney. But in 2009 she was disbarred and sentenced to a 24-month federal prison sentence for wire fraud. Even after a career defending the rights of disenfranchised people, she was stunned at what she saw upon entering the federal prison system.

“During my incarceration I was deeply affected by the great number of women who are in prison,” Andrea said. “Most of these women are serving very long mandatory minimum or guideline sentences for minor participation in drug possession or sales. Most of them are mothers. Their sentences are unreasonably long, the average being 10 years. They have been in prison long after what should be considered fair sentences while their children, left behind, struggle to survive.”

Andrea has committed herself to fulfilling the promise she made to women who remain in prison. Families for Justice as Healing (FJAH), the organization she founded in 2010 inside the federal prison for women in Danbury, CT, brings formerly incarcerated women together to be part of a movement to create alternatives to incarceration. FJAH rejects U.S. drug policies that prioritize



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

**Andrea James, founder and head of Families for Justice as Healing, speaking at Bread for the World's 2014 National Gathering about the effects of mass incarceration on women and their families.**

criminalization and incarceration, advocating for a shift toward community wellness. The organization believes that to seriously confront drug-related illness, crime, and violence, the nation's leaders must commit to evidence-based solutions that address poverty, addiction, and trauma.

When Andrea was released in 2011, she carried FJAH back to her home community in Roxbury, MA. Since then, FJAH has been active in building coalitions, advocating in legislatures, and raising awareness among policymakers of the need to end the War on Drugs. From national rallies to summer camps for girls, FJAH is continually expanding and evolving. On June 21, 2014, FJAH led the FREE HER rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC. People from across the country used their collective voice to raise awareness of the devastating impact that overly harsh drug sentencing policies have had on women and their children and how mass incarceration and the War on Drugs has directly impacted communities.

was used to increase support for mental health and addiction services. A study of more than 25,000 incarcerated men and women in Connecticut found it cost the state twice as much to treat a person with a serious mental illness while incarcerated as treatment alone.<sup>53</sup> The initiative had an immediate impact on reducing the incarceration rate of men and women, and between 2003 and 2005 probation violations were cut in half.<sup>54</sup> But the early success did not last; within a few years, incarceration rates began to rise again. In a review of the effort, the research and advocacy group The Sentencing Project found that there had been too little focus on improving employment opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

## Balancing Act at Home and in the Workplace

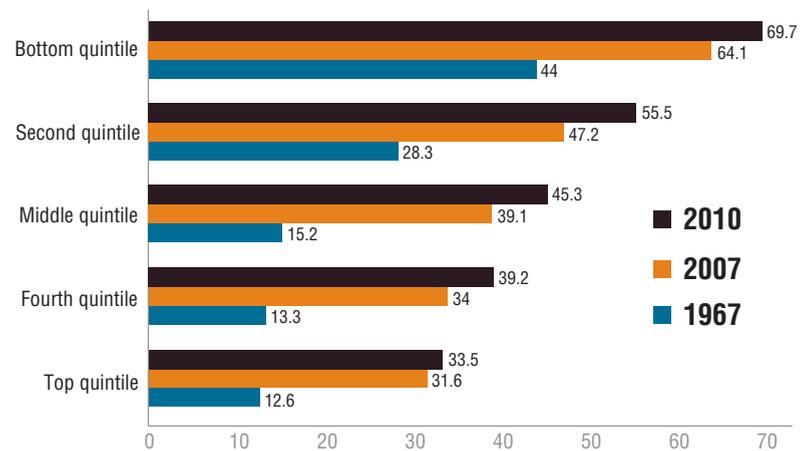
Many women besides returning citizens are struggling to find a job that pays enough to support themselves and their families. Most jobs that have been created in the wake of the Great Recession are in low-paying sectors. Usually, holding such a job means not only that money is very tight but that employees have few benefits such as paid sick leave and little flexibility in their schedules.

How to piece together child care is perhaps the biggest problem of all for women who work in low-wage jobs. Of course the adult in single-parent families must be the breadwinner as well as the caregiver, but in the low-wage sector, even two-parent families are struggling. Married couples in low-income families least of all can afford to spare a wife’s salary to stay at home and care for their children. See Figure 4.4. But this is what some decide given the cost of care and the fact it is rising at a much faster rate than family incomes.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, federal and state support for child care has stagnated, failing even to keep pace with inflation, at the same time the size of the low-wage workforce is increasing. The average number of children receiving federal childcare assistance each month in 2012 (the most recent year for which data are available) was at the lowest level since 1998.<sup>57</sup>

Childcare subsidies to low-income families reach just one in six families that are eligible under federal law.<sup>58</sup> Nationwide, families in poverty who pay for child care spend an average of 30 percent of their incomes on it.<sup>59</sup> To a family with young children, child care routinely costs more than housing, utilities, transportation, or food. High-quality care provided by trained professionals in early childhood development is expensive for all families. In 31

Figure 4.4 **There Are More Women Breadwinners in Every Income Group**

Percentage of working wives earning as much or more than their husbands, by family income quintile



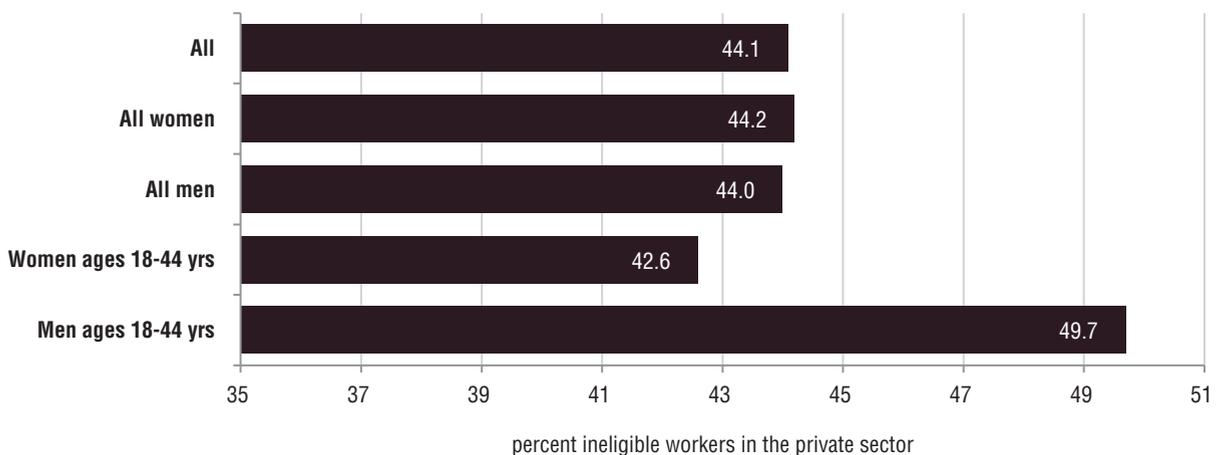
Source: Sarah Jane Glynn (April 2012), “The New Breadwinners: 2010 Update,” Center for American Progress.

states, the average annual cost for an infant in center-based care is higher than a year's tuition and fees at a four-year public college.<sup>60</sup>

Child care is just the largest of a number of critical work supports that are in short supply for parents who struggle to balance work and job responsibilities on low incomes. Another is paid sick leave, which, although of course it cannot replace affordable child care, can also help make a job more flexible for parents. High-income workers are four times as likely as low-income ones to have paid sick leave<sup>61</sup>—and 40 million workers go without.<sup>62</sup> In a poll commissioned for *The Shriver Report*, 96 percent of working single mothers who were asked what workplace policy would help them most named paid leave to care for themselves or a sick family member.<sup>63</sup>

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) grants workers the right to 12 weeks of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child, but it has several critical shortcomings. Most low-income families cannot afford to take unpaid leave, so any other concerns are a moot point. But in addition, FMLA does not apply to all workers. See Figure 4.5. In 2012, 44 percent of private sector workers were not eligible, either because they worked for a company with fewer than 50 employees or they had not worked the required 1,250 hours over the previous 12 months.<sup>64</sup> Helene Jorgensen and Eileen Appelbaum of the Center for Economic and Policy Research have shown that amending FMLA to cover all workers in companies of every size would not impose an undue financial hardship on employers.<sup>65</sup> According to a 2012 Department of Labor survey of nearly 7,000 small firms (fewer than 50 employees) that offer FMLA on a voluntary basis, only 1 percent said that offering FMLA benefits to all employees affected them negatively. One-third reported a positive effect, and the other two-thirds reported no noticeable effect.<sup>66</sup> Leave policies are some of the most important work supports, but we must underscore that better leave policies do not address parents' ongoing childcare needs.

Figure 4.5 Percentage of Private-Sector Employees Who Are Not Eligible for FMLA, 2012



Source: Helene Jorgenson and Eileen Appelbaum (February 2014), "Expanding Federal Family and Medical Leave Coverage: Who Benefits from Changes in Eligibility Requirements?" Center for Economic and Policy Research.

In 1971, the United States very nearly had a comprehensive federal childcare policy. The Comprehensive Child Development Act (CCDA) passed with broad bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, but President Nixon vetoed it. Since then childcare policy has been fragmented and focused mostly on low-income families. There are minimal tax credits available to middle-income and high-income parents. But tax credits do not address issues of quality. High-quality care is necessary for proper child development. In fact, early childhood

education is inseparable from child care. Child “Development” was the point of the CCDA. Presently child care is treated as custodial and left to parents to figure out, while early education is treated as developmental and worthy of investment, even though child care should and often does offer children opportunities to learn. At this point, few members of Congress would say a disparaging word about early education—although the growing recognition of the benefits of early education has not yet been accompanied by significant new resources. All children benefit from high quality care, but families in poverty benefit the most.<sup>67</sup> Society benefits as well. Research on brain development makes clear

these are the years when investments in children yield the highest return in everything from

increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to reductions in crime.<sup>68</sup>

The reason President Nixon gave for vetoing the CCDA was that it would “‘Sovietize’ the American family.”<sup>69</sup> Far more than global politics has changed since 1971—both the composition of the U.S. workforce and American social norms are also dramatically different. When CCDA was before Congress, 40 percent of married women with children under 18 were in the workforce.<sup>70</sup> By 2010, it was 70 percent.<sup>71</sup> In the late 1960s, husbands were the sole wage earners in 36 percent of married couples, compared to 19 percent in 2010. For at least the bottom half of household incomes, women earn as much or more than their husbands.<sup>72</sup>

A study in Denmark found that women who continue to work because of government support for their children’s care contribute more to the national tax base than the cost of that care to the government.<sup>73</sup> OECD (developed) countries in Western Europe, Asia, and Latin America spend a larger share of their GDP on child care and early education than the United States.<sup>74</sup> In European countries the actual cost of the care is not significantly higher than in the United States—and, because providing it is a government function, quality standards are higher and resources are more equitably distributed.<sup>75</sup> In the United States, parents foot



Margie Nea

**The United States is the only developed country without paid maternity leave.**

most of the bill for what should be thought of as a public good—simply an extension of the well-accepted idea that a free public education is an investment in the future.

There is much the United States can learn from Britain in particular, argues Jane Waldfogel, a sociologist at Columbia University and author of *Britain's War on Poverty*.<sup>76</sup> In 1998, the British government launched an ambitious effort to end child poverty that included universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. Universality gave the programs broader political support than if they had targeted only poor families. In the United States, in contrast, the Head Start program serves only low-income children, and it serves less than half of income-

eligible preschoolers (3- and 4-year-olds). Its companion program, Early Head Start, reaches less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers (children under 3).<sup>77</sup>

In addition to preschool, the British government launched a program called Sure Start for infants and toddlers and their parents in the most disadvantaged communities. The program combines high-quality care for the children and support programs for parents in community centers. The program has been so popular and initial outcomes so encouraging that in the early 2000s the government announced its plan to create Sure Start programs in every community by 2010, although the economic downturn later forced the government to scale this back.<sup>78</sup>



Todd Post/Bread for the World

In Cleveland, OH, children in an evening care program. Some of their parents work multiple low-wage jobs to make ends meet.

Early education and Sure Start were part of a broader package that also included work supports that enabled and encouraged parents to work. Within 10 years, the child poverty rate in the U.K. was cut in half. “What implications can the U.S. draw from the British experience?” asks Waldfogel. “In my view, the most important implication is that it is possible to make a sizable reduction in child poverty.... If Britain could cut absolute child poverty in half in ten years, the [United States] and other wealthy nations can too.”<sup>79</sup>

## Out of the Depths of Poverty, Bright Beginnings for Some

“Deep poverty” is a sub-category that means an annual income of 50 percent or less of the federal poverty line (thus, a maximum of \$11,925 for a family of four).<sup>80</sup> “Extreme poverty,” on the other hand, is a term that until recently was applied almost exclusively to poverty outside the United States; it includes incomes of \$2 or less per person, per day. By 2011, according to a study by researchers at the University of Michigan and Harvard, in a given month there were 1.65 million households, including 3.55 million children, in the United States living in extreme poverty.<sup>81</sup>

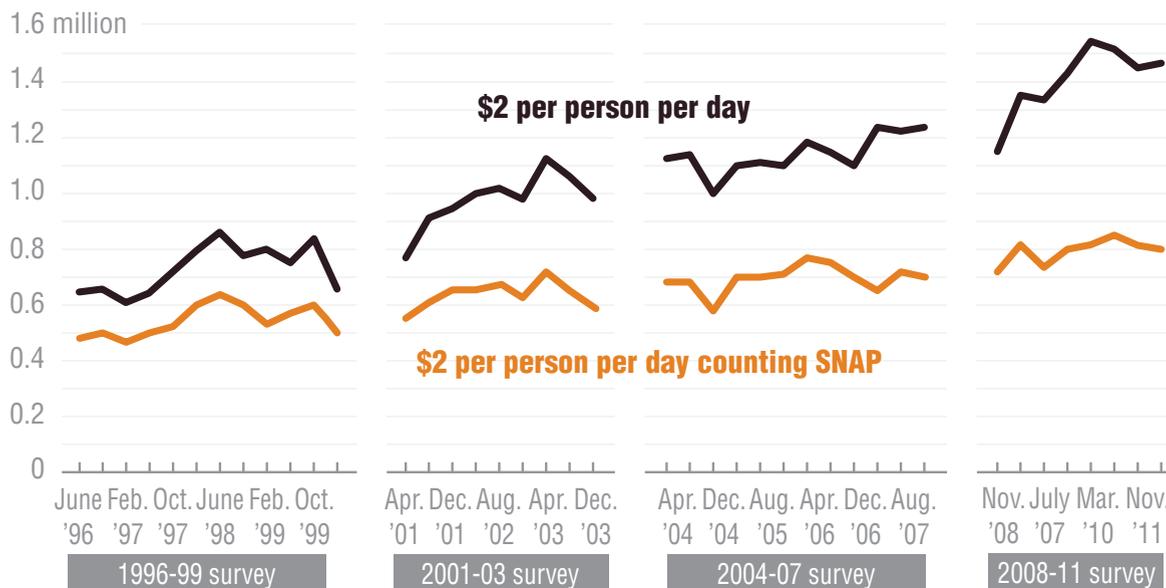
Since 2000, extreme poverty has been rising, particularly among those most impacted by the 1996 welfare reform.<sup>82</sup> See Figure 4.6. Nearly half of people living in deep poverty are under 25, and more than one-third are single mothers and their children.<sup>83</sup> Families headed by a parent under 30 are most at risk of hunger: their poverty rate is more than *five times* as high as that of families headed by an older person.<sup>84</sup> Deep poverty is also frequently accompanied by homelessness. Homeless families are generally young.<sup>85</sup>

Bright Beginnings in Washington, DC, is the only child and family development center in the city that serves homeless children and their families exclusively. In 2013, Bright Beginnings was able to provide services to 135 children, but the waiting list numbered in the hundreds.<sup>86</sup> Many of these children are staying at the city’s largest emergency homeless shelter, a former hospital that in 2014 housed up to 800 people. Homelessness in Washington, DC reached unprecedented levels in 2014 and its emergency shelters were filled to capacity.<sup>87</sup> The end of the Great Recession has not given great relief to the city’s low-income residents struggling to secure affordable housing.

Research shows that affordable housing ends homelessness. In 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, the total number of homeless students in preschool or K-12 was 1,168,354, the highest ever recorded.<sup>88</sup> Among children who stayed at a shelter funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 42 percent were children between the ages of 1 and 5.<sup>89</sup> Nationally, more than 2 million low-income families participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program, the nation’s largest rental assistance program, but cuts to

Figure 4.6 **Extreme Poverty in the United States**

Number of non-elderly households with children with incomes below \$2 per person per day according to U.S. Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation



Source: National Poverty Center

the program have reduced the number of families that were served by tens of thousands.<sup>90</sup> In 2010, before these cuts took place, just less than two-thirds of low-income households in Washington, DC were spending more than half of their monthly income on housing.<sup>91</sup> The lack of affordable housing explains why many of the city's homeless families are also working families.

Housing assistance is “closely linked to educational, developmental, and health benefits that can improve children’s long-term life chances and reduce costs in other public programs,” writes Will Fischer of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities<sup>92</sup>; and so too

is good nutrition, which makes the meals the children receive at Bright Beginnings absolutely essential protection against the risks they face as homeless children. In 2013, 54 percent of the children served at Bright Beginnings were diagnosed with developmental delays.<sup>93</sup> The children are served four nutritious meals each day. The Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP), a federal nutrition program, provides funding that enables early learning centers serving low-income children to provide them with healthy meals.

Today, lunch is fish sticks, cole-slaw, apple slices, and whole wheat bread, washed down with a cup of



Todd Post/Bread for the World

**Bright Beginnings in Washington, DC, provides multiple services to homeless families. Here a mother and daughter shop for food with coupons provided by Bright Beginnings.**

milk. Good hygiene is taught at every meal. Posters in the classroom convey health messages: “What do you eat to stay healthy? I eat vegetables and fruit and drink plenty of water.” The children are expected to wash their hands; the sink stands about two feet off the ground, and teachers kneel to wash their hands. Each day a different child helps one of the teachers set the tables for meals. He or she also counts the napkins—few opportunities to teach math skills are missed. In another area of the room, the rest of the children are singing a song and the lyrics include counting numbers. Naptime follows lunch.

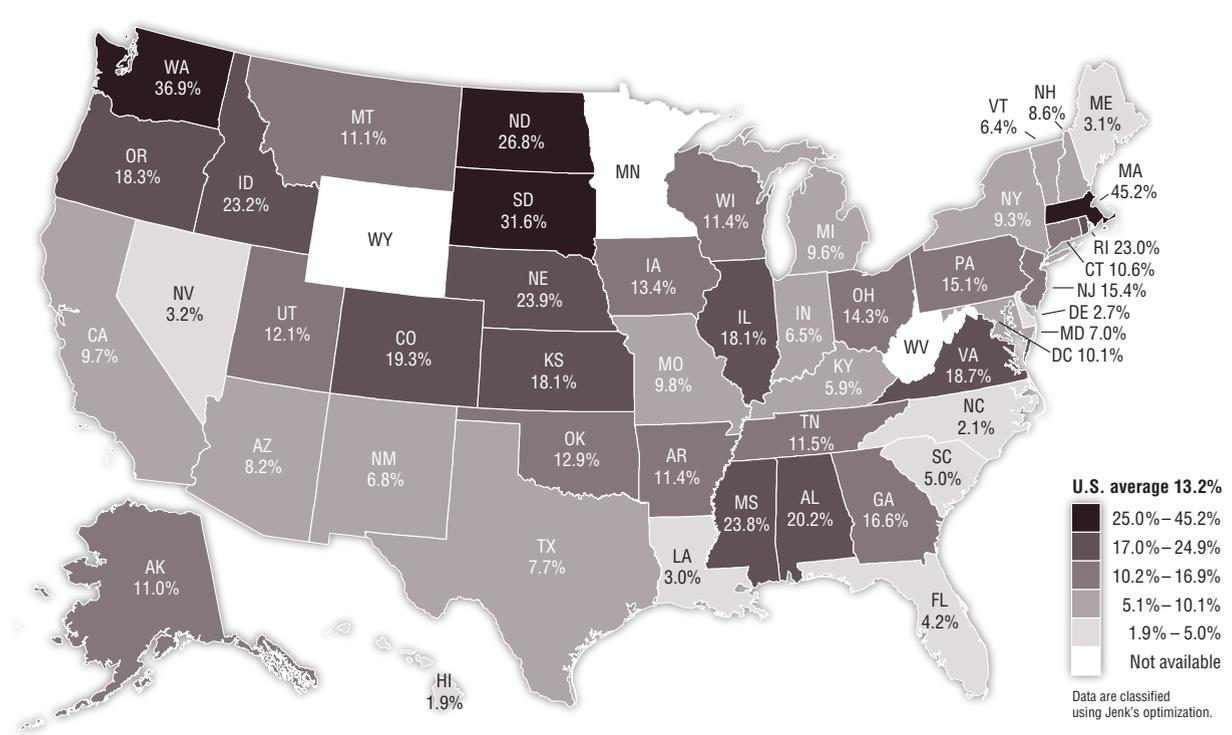
Pictures of children with their mothers are also on the walls. One of the women pictured is Debra (a pseudonym), 30, a single mother of three boys, ages 7, 5, and 2. Debra enrolled her first child in Bright Beginnings in 2010 while they were staying at the large emergency shelter mentioned above. Soon after, she started attending college while also working as a server in restaurants. The evening care program at Bright Beginnings made it possible for her to juggle both school and work. Bright Beginnings also hosted a job fair for parents of its students; Debra landed a job as a teller at a Bank of America branch. In 2014, she graduated from the University of the Potomac with a degree in accounting. She hopes this will lead to a better job soon and finally put an end to the homelessness she has experienced for much of her adult life.<sup>94</sup>

In 2013, 34 percent of the parents of the children attending Bright Beginnings worked during the year; 22 percent were in job training programs; 15 percent were pursuing a high school diploma, GED, or college degree.<sup>95</sup> Bright Beginnings alleviates a major source of anxiety for homeless parents by providing their children with a safe, secure, and nurturing learning environment while they try to stabilize their lives.<sup>96</sup> Social workers help the parents find employment, finish their education, and secure permanent housing. Many of these services are also available through other providers, but the wrap-around care families receive through the center allows its social workers to do the case management needed to address interlocking problems affecting the family. See Figure 4.7.

One in four homeless women are homeless as a direct result of domestic violence, and more than 90 percent of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.<sup>97</sup> Gender-based violence is an enormous problem in the United States as it is around the globe. It spans U.S. socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and generational boundaries, but it is women living in deep poverty, especially those who are young and have children, who have the fewest options to “just leave the guy.” It points to the need for new and renewed efforts to engage men in the conversation about gender equality, violence, family obligations, and male/female relationships.

Sherri Watkins is the Health and Nutrition Manager at Bright Beginnings. One of the activities she conducts for parents is a quarterly supermarket trip to a store within walking

**Figure 4.7 Percent of Unmet Domestic Violence Shelter Requests (2010)**



Source: Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness (October 2011), “Housing Assistance Underfunded but Critical for Survivors of Domestic Violence.”

distance of Bright Beginnings, where she shows parents how to shop for healthy foods on a budget. Each family receives a \$50 gift certificate from Bright Beginnings, and over the course of an hour, baskets fill with bananas, apples, salad greens, oatmeal, and whatever else is possible to store under the living conditions of homeless families. Together they read the labels on processed foods. Sherri explains to parents how to make sense of the information; for example, what sodium, sugar, and other ingredients mean for their family's health and what various vitamins do.

Sherri joined Bright Beginnings in 2008; soon after, she completed her master's degree in health administration. She herself spent the first 12 years of her life homeless. After getting pregnant in middle school and giving birth to her son at age 14, she went on to finish high school and was elected president of her senior class. She doesn't talk about her past with the mothers she helps at Bright Beginnings, but she believes they can tell what they all have in common. Similarly, she uses her intuition to know the times to say, "Don't give up." "Find the strength inside of yourself." "You can overcome this."



Todd Post/Bread for the World

**Sherri Watkins (on left), the Health and Nutrition Manager at Bright Beginnings, shows mothers how to stretch their food dollars and eat healthy.**

To overcome the obstacles she faced, Sherri needed all the help she could get through government programs: TANF, food stamps, WIC, housing assistance, Head Start and school meals for her son, financial aid for herself to go to college—and it paid off. Her son has a mother who is successful and purposeful, and Sherri knows better than anyone that it is possible for the mothers she works with at Bright Beginnings to get back on their feet and move forward in their lives.

The wraparound, center-based support that families receive at Bright Beginnings is much too rare in the United States. Back in 1993, Bright Beginnings was one of 16 Homeless Demonstration grants awarded by Head Start. In an evaluation of the programs, there was general agreement among all the grantees that early education could not be provided effectively without the additional services homeless families need.<sup>98</sup>

The president has proposed making preschool available free of charge to all four-year-olds in low- and moderate-income families through federal-state partnerships that would be paid for with a tobacco tax increase;<sup>99</sup> and both the Senate and House have introduced legislation that would incorporate many elements of the president's proposal. So far, Congress has funded only a small new initiative that provides competitive grants to states to start or expand preschool programs.

In addition, the administration proposed, and Congress funded, a new initiative to encourage partnerships between Early Head Start and child care, aimed at scaling up pro-

grams that provide high-quality early care and education for infants and toddlers and meet the needs of working families. The administration has also proposed revised regulations for the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and the Senate has passed changes to CCDBG. Both of these include provisions that would make the process of accessing and retaining childcare assistance more family-friendly.

The reality is that it will take a substantial increase in federal and state investments in all components of the child care and early education system, as well as revised policies, to make these programs available to all who need them. The most vulnerable are also the most difficult to reach. For example, homeless children are already categorically eligible (“eligible by definition,” or because they are homeless) for Head Start. But less than 5 percent are enrolled.<sup>100</sup> In 2013, less than half of children in Head Start were in programs for six or more hours a day, five days a week.<sup>101</sup> And according to national surveys, 25 percent of mothers who have experienced homelessness reported leaving jobs or school due to lack of child care.<sup>102</sup>

## Care Jobs: Where 21<sup>st</sup> Century Families Meet the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy

As earlier noted, 95 percent of childcare workers in the United States are women. The fact that these workers are generally paid wages that leave them below the poverty line speaks volumes about our priorities as a society. James Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, has shown that every \$1 invested in the education of a child under 3 can produce up to \$9 in future productivity gains.<sup>103</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics identifies child care as one of the fastest growing occupations in the United States,<sup>104</sup> the demand fed by the increasing numbers of families who cannot afford to sacrifice any loss of income.

Childcare workers are joined by direct-care workers for elderly or disabled adults—a field also dominated by women—as some of the lowest-paid workers in the United States. The pay is so meager that nearly half of all direct-care workers rely on safety net programs such as SNAP or Medicaid.<sup>105</sup> The median income for childcare providers is \$19,512, or just over \$9.38 per hour, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>106</sup> At \$19,512 per year, a family of four would fall \$4,000 short of the federal poverty level. Thus, many childcare workers are eligible for the same subsidies as some of the families who rely on their services.<sup>107</sup>

Nearly four in ten in-home childcare workers are women of color.<sup>108</sup> One of these is Odalis Gaskins-Ginarte, who provides child care out of her home in

Odalis Gaskins-Ginarte, an early education specialist in Syracuse, NY, was an architect in Cuba before arriving in the United States with her family as political refugees in 2002.



Jill R. Asencio

Syracuse, New York. Odalis and her family arrived in the United States from Cuba in 2002. Syracuse receives approximately 1,000 refugees per year<sup>109</sup> and is one of the main resettlement locations in New York, the third largest resettlement state in the nation.<sup>110</sup> Families who are resettled in Syracuse come from dozens of countries around the world, most of them fleeing violence and oppression. The West Side Learning Center in Syracuse, New York,

serves new immigrants to the city, providing English language classes and training programs to help families adapt to life in the United States. The center not only provides childcare to the families learning English but also trains women who are interested in making a career of child care.

Soon after moving to Syracuse, Odalis began both English classes and job training that helped her become a licensed childcare provider. Today, Odalis is a member of the Voice of Organized Independent Childcare Educators (VOICES), one of 7,200 registered group childcare providers in Local 100A of the Civil Service Employees Association.<sup>111</sup>



Todd Post/Bread for the World

Hundreds of domestic workers from around the country rallied in Washington, DC, in July, 2013. Domestic workers include caregivers of children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the sick; housekeepers, maids, and other household occupations.

When she left Cuba with her husband and 2-year-old son, Odalis was not expecting to make a career of child care and early childhood education. In Cuba, she was an architect, as was her husband. In the United States, they lived in poverty. The transitional assistance they received from the U.S. government ended after six months, and their immediate concern was to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. They went to the Salvation Army for clothes and to church pantries for food.<sup>112</sup> They could not continue to work as architects because it cost too much money and time to meet U.S. licensing and other requirements.

The skills she acquired as an architect in Cuba she puts to use every day teaching the children under her care. As a leader in her local union, Odalis speaks not only for herself and the other childcare providers, but also for families of the children whom they provide care. It's not that immigrant families can't speak for themselves or don't have the skill; parents are mostly struggling to make a living and scarcely have time to lobby elected officials. There are few better examples than the childcare sector where the livelihood of a service provider is so directly linked to the livelihood of a recipient.

In recent years states have shifted more of the cost of child care to parents, due to budget shortfalls in the wake of the Great Recession and the federal government's own cuts to childcare assistance. The bargaining power that comes with being part of the union has made it possible to forestall attempts to cut government assistance for child care.<sup>113</sup> In 2013 in Onondaga County, where Syracuse is located, the average annual cost of care for one child

ranged from \$7,852 to \$10,491 a year, depending on whether the care was home-based or center-based.<sup>114</sup> Nationally, average annual costs range from \$4,863 in Mississippi to \$16,430 in Massachusetts.<sup>115</sup>

Among childcare workers across the nation, just 6.2 percent are members of a union.<sup>116</sup> Unions clearly benefit workers and women workers in particular. During the period 2009

**“The Equal Pay Act is often presumed to be an accomplishment of the feminist movement of the 1960s. In fact, it was spearheaded by female trade unionists.”**

— Ruth Milkman

to 2013, according to a study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, women workers in unions earned an average of 12.9 percent more than nonunion women.<sup>117</sup> But for women in typically low-wage occupations, the union-wage advantage is even larger—for example, 24 percent or \$2.75 per hour for childcare workers. The study also found that companies with a union presence are 18 percent more likely to provide paid sick leave, 21 percent more likely to provide paid vacation, and 21 percent more likely to provide paid holidays.<sup>118</sup> Belonging to a union does not eliminate the gender wage gap, but it does reduce it by half.<sup>119</sup>

“The Equal Pay Act is often presumed to be an accomplishment of the feminist movement of the 1960s. In fact, it was spearheaded by female trade unionists, who first introduced the bill in 1945 as an amendment to the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act,” says Ruth Milkman, a sociologist with City University of New York. “The bill was defeated, largely because of staunch opposition from business interests, but a coalition of labor activists reintroduced it every year until it finally passed in 1963.”<sup>120</sup>

Domestic workers are excluded from many of the basic protections guaranteed by the Fair Labor Standards Act to most other workers in the United States like a minimum wage, overtime, sick leave, and vacation pay.



Todd Post/Bread for the World

Union membership as a whole has been on the decline for more than 30 years, but this is more the case for men than for women. See Figure 4.8. Women have a bigger stake than ever in the survival of unions and their continued ability to protect workers' rights. At the time the Equal Pay Act was signed, women made up less than 20 percent of the union workforce in the country. By 2013, they were 46 percent of all union workers, and if the current trend continues, they will become a majority by 2025.<sup>121</sup> See Figure 4.9.

Odalis is more than an example of a refugee who transitioned to a successful second

career. She has found not only a career but also a calling in child-care and early education. The United States may have lost a trained architect, but the country gained a committed nurturer and advocate who is helping both her new city and refugees from all over the world.

## National Policymaking and Gender

When women gained the right to vote in 1920, government spending on public health increased dramatically, particularly on maternal health. Policy changed not as a result of a change in conviction, rather because members of Congress knew this was important to their female constituents and would factor in how they voted.<sup>122</sup> U.S. women consistently turn out to vote at higher rates than men.<sup>123</sup> See Figure 4.10. But women are significantly underrepresented as policymakers in government.

Compared to other high-income countries, the United States has a much lower percentage of women elected to government

office. At the start of 2014, women held a total of 18.5 percent of seats in Congress—18.2 percent in the House of Representatives, 20 percent in the Senate. And this is the highest percentage in history.<sup>124</sup> Other high-income countries now average 25 percent women in national parliaments,<sup>125</sup> with Nordic countries closest to equal representation with consistent shares of one-third or more.<sup>126</sup>

Figure 4.8 Unionization Rate, 1983-2013

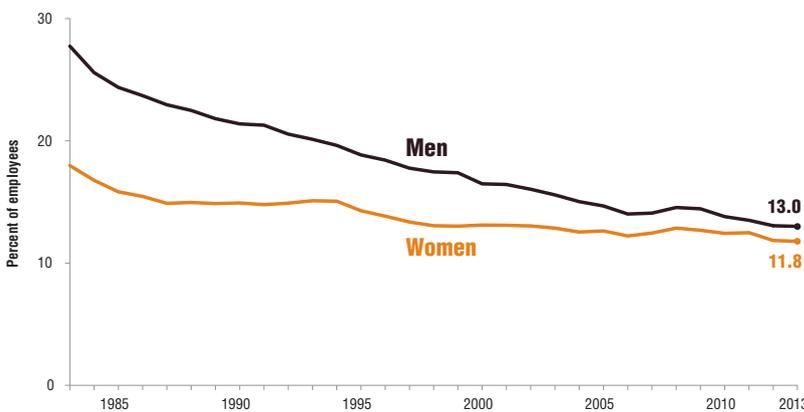
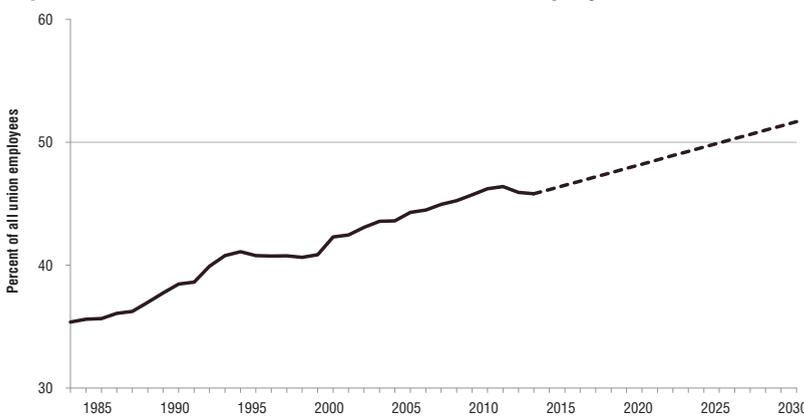


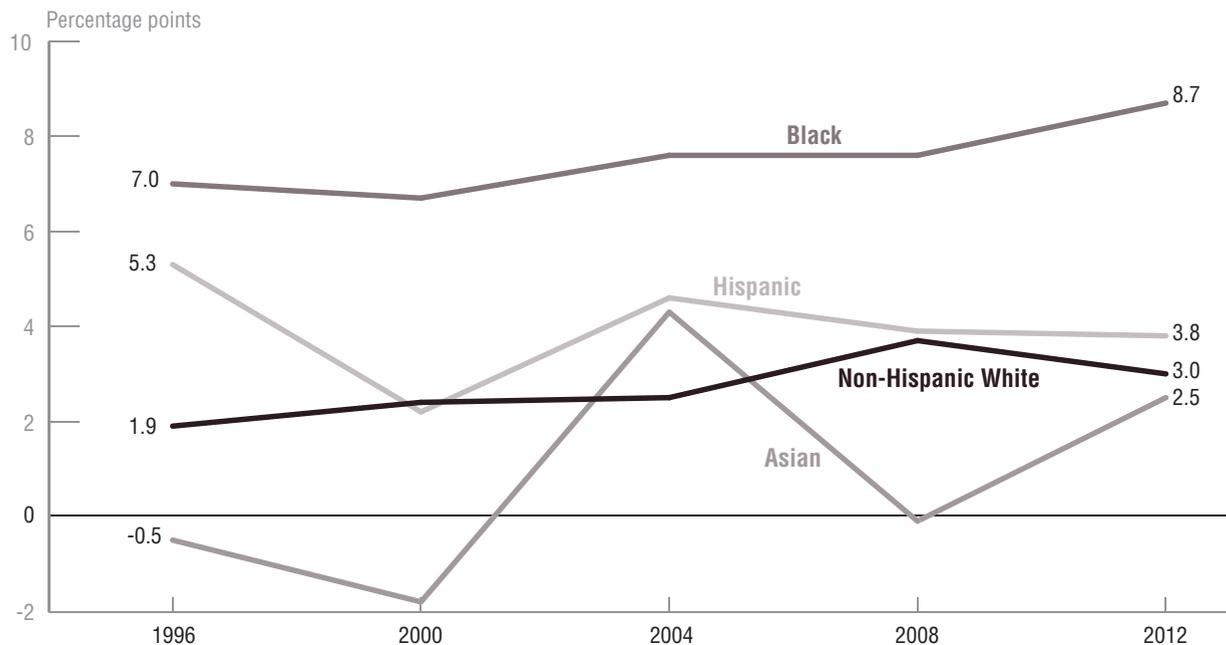
Figure 4.9 Women's Share of Total Union Employment, 1983-2030



Source: Janelle Jones, John Schmitt, and Nicole Woo (June 2014), *Women, Working Families, and Unions*, Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Figure 4.10 Gender Voting Gap Over Time, By Race and Hispanic Origin

(Female voting rates in comparison to male voting rates)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2013), *The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)*.

Many countries around the world, rich and poor, designate a specific share of seats for women in order to help ensure that women are not isolated from political life, but the United States does not do this. High-income countries began adopting reservations in the 1980s, middle- and low-income ones after the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action called for increasing women's participation in government. There are currently 95 countries with larger shares of women representatives in national parliament than the United States, of which 68 use some form of reservation system to increase women's representation.<sup>127</sup> In the United States, people tend to recoil from the idea of "quotas." During the fight over the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, the possibility of legally mandated gender quotas was used to attack the amendment and ultimately helped defeat it.<sup>128</sup> To this day, rarely if ever do policymakers or officials suggest using reservations to increase women's representation in government.

It is interesting—and may sound counterintuitive—that research finds that female candidates generally get just as many votes as men and can raise just as much money.<sup>129</sup> If women stand just as good a chance of raising money and winning elections, why are they so underrepresented? One factor is the incumbency advantage—because almost all members of Congress win their reelection races, it is very difficult for challengers to win seats, and, with so many more male incumbents, women are more likely to be challengers.<sup>130</sup> Other factors are less structural and more a matter of political "culture." Women are less likely than men to consider running for office<sup>131</sup> and they are recruited to run less often.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, women—

particularly women of color—are underrepresented in the types of jobs that traditionally lead to elective office, such as business ownership,<sup>133</sup> military service and leadership,<sup>134</sup> and partnership in large law firms.<sup>135</sup>

Another factor is that women are expected to do most of the child care and housework.<sup>136</sup> Like all working parents of young children, many women in Congress must balance commutes, child care, and careers—but it can be even more challenging when the commute crosses several time zones,<sup>137</sup> or when a business trip requires travel to Afghanistan on Mother’s Day.<sup>138</sup> However, as Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) noted, elected officials have funds and flexibility that many other workers do not. “I don’t have to punch the clock,” she said in 2009, when her son was a toddler, “so I can carve out time to help meet Cole’s needs.”<sup>139</sup>

When women do decide to run, there are several training programs specifically designed for them at whatever level they enter: national, state, or local. Among the nonpartisan options are the Yale Women’s Campaign School, founded in 1993,<sup>140</sup> and Ready to Run,<sup>141</sup> a national network started 15 years ago at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. Of the more than 1,700 Ready to Run alumnae, more than a quarter have run

Eleven of the 20 female senators in the U.S. Congress gather for a bipartisan workshop in 2013. Bipartisan workshops were established in 1992 as an opportunity for newly elected women to learn how to get started in the Senate.



Office of Barbara Mikulski

for office and 70 percent of those won their races. Ready to Run's Diversity Initiative has increased the number of women of color who run for and take elective office.<sup>142</sup>

The evidence shows that women who are elected to office have different priorities and see very different results than their male counterparts. Women legislators introduce many more bills on health care, education, and child care than men do.<sup>143</sup> Women also tend to work harder than their male counterparts to keep legislation they've sponsored alive, and they are more collaborative, seeking consensus so the bills will pass.<sup>144</sup> In a study of the U.S. House of Representatives, these factors made female legislators more effective than males at getting their legislation advanced and passed.<sup>145</sup> Also, the more directly an issue affected women, the more likely female lawmakers were to vote together across party lines; the clearest example of this bipartisan consensus-building is women's health issues.<sup>146</sup>

At a time when it's been hard to find signs of civility between congressional Republicans and Democrats, the female senators have set an example by holding a monthly bipartisan supper club. Dining together in one another's homes helps build the camaraderie necessary to handle the inevitable conflicts over legislation<sup>147</sup> and get things passed.

One example of a time that a collaborative approach led by female legislators proved critical to the whole country was when Congress, by failing to act, caused the entire federal government to shut down in October 2013.

Republican Senators Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire teamed up with Democratic Senators Barbara Mikulski of Maryland and Patty Murray of Washington to discuss some potential compromises. These helped pave the way for a deal that re-opened the government and avoided a default on the national debt.<sup>148</sup> Important portions of the compromise, such as a tax on medical devices and adjustments to the proposed farm bill, were hammered out during a bipartisan meeting of all the women Senators hosted by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH).<sup>149</sup> "The 20 women in the Senate have formed such strong friendships of trust, even though we come from different places," said Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN).<sup>150</sup> Male members of Congress noted their colleagues' success in ending the shutdown. As Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) said, "Leadership, I must fully admit, was provided primarily by women in the Senate."<sup>151</sup>

Although we can't stereotype and pigeonhole all women as more "nurturing," female members of Congress have proven to be more collaborative and more focused on social issues. It makes sense that electing more women could help reduce political polarization and potentially advance an agenda of ending hunger and poverty in the United States.

## State and Local Leadership

In 2014, women held 24.2 percent of seats in state legislatures<sup>152</sup>—a little better representation at the state level than the national level. Five states had female governors in 2014. Smaller cities are slightly more likely than big ones to elect a woman as mayor: 13 of the 100 largest American cities had female mayors in 2014, but 18.4 percent of mayors of cities with 30,000 or more residents were women.<sup>153</sup> Women of color are a minority within a minority in American politics. Of the 238 cities in the United States with more than 100,000 residents,

**"I am very proud that these women are stepping forward. Imagine what they could do if there were 50 of them."**

— John McCain,  
U.S. Senator for Arizona.

48 of them had female mayors in January 2014.<sup>154</sup> Only four were African American, one was Latina, and one was Asian American.<sup>155</sup>

It's not just in Congress that women legislators often act differently than men. Sara Howard was elected to the Nebraska State Legislature in 2012, representing District 9 in Omaha. At 32, she is the youngest woman in the legislature. Of the 49 members of Nebraska's unicameral legislature, 10 are women, making Nebraska 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation for gender parity among legislators.<sup>156</sup>

Sen. Sara Howard was elected in 2012 to serve in the Nebraska Legislature representing District 9 of Omaha.

Youth and a personality that seems to enjoy a brisk pace mean Sara has energy to lead campaigns that would exhaust many of her colleagues. She told Bread for the World Institute about how, in the previous session of the legislature, she had introduced a bill to reduce carbon monoxide poisoning. The risk of poisoning is much higher in areas of high poverty and in properties owned by landlords, so the bill was designed to improve

building codes. She was nervous when she needed to bring together homeowners, landlords, realtors, building code inspectors, and activists to air out their differences on carbon monoxide regulation and reach a compromise acceptable to all. She had never done anything like this before, but she turned out to be good at it. "The theory is that women are better at relationship building," she says, and this has indeed been her experience as a member of the legislature. "Unfortunately people don't think about that as much as they should when they consider who to vote for," she added.

Sara followed her mother into the Nebraska state legislature when her mother's two-term limit, imposed by state law, expired. She had not envisioned herself running for office and shaping public policy directly. Instead, she had finished law school in Chicago and taken a job as a staff attorney with the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, advocating for better maternal and infant health policies. But she became involved in politics when she moved back home to Omaha following a tragedy in her family.

Sara feels that not only does she represent the people in her district, but other constituencies as well—notably a younger generation of Nebraskans who came to adulthood under very different financial conditions than their parents or grandparents. By the time Sara her-



Nebraska Legislature

self finished law school, she had accumulated more than \$100,000 in student loan debt. Of course men have student loan debt too, but women bear heavier debt burdens. See Figure 4.11. Women use a greater share of their salaries than men to pay off education debt.<sup>157</sup> This is not surprising when we consider that women earn less than men. Women are also more likely than men to borrow money to pay for college.<sup>158</sup>

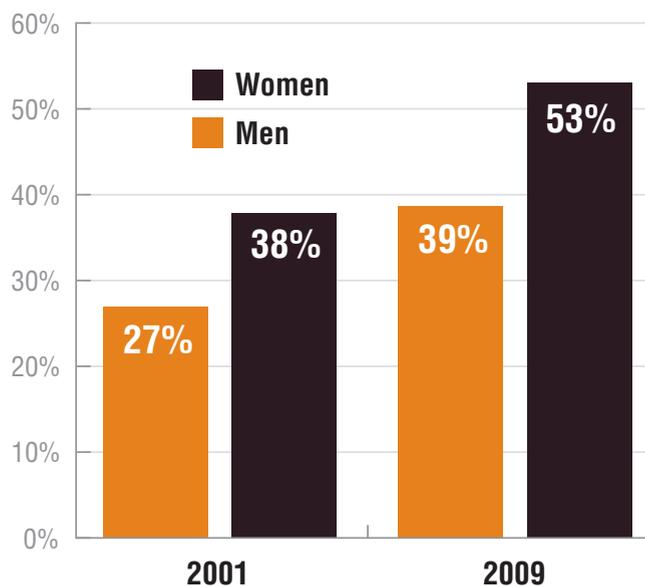
Women worry about their student loan debt more than men, according to a 2013 study by the Urban Institute, and this and other studies have found that they are generally less confident about their financial condition than men.<sup>159</sup> This, too, is not surprising given the pay gap.

But the heavier debt burdens and greater financial uncertainty of women make them less likely to make the commitment to raise money and run for public office. The unprecedented levels of student loan debt carry repercussions nationwide. One of these is that, for years to come, fewer women will be able to run for office.

Sara is planning to run for chair of the legislature's Health and Human Services Committee. Health care is the issue she is most passionate about. During her time as a legislator, she has fought for Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. The law allows states to expand Medicaid coverage to anyone whose income is below 139 percent of poverty. For Nebraska it would increase the number of people with health insurance by 48,000.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, Medicaid expansion would create jobs for an additional 2,200 workers in the state and add \$380 million to the state's GDP.<sup>161</sup> So far Sara has been unsuccessful—at this writing, Nebraska is one of 24 states that have refused to expand Medicaid coverage.<sup>162</sup>

Sara works full-time as the development director of OneWorld Community Health Centers, the largest provider of primary healthcare services in South Omaha. OneWorld was founded in 1970, when it was known as the Indian-Chicano Health Center, providing services to the most underserved members of the community. This remains its mission.<sup>163</sup> Half of the

Figure 4.11 **Share of Women and Men with High Student Loan Debt Burden One Year After College Graduation, by Year**



Notes: Student loan debt burden is the percentage of earnings devoted to student loan payments. This chart shows the share of 1999–2000 and 2007–08 bachelor's degree recipients working full time and making non-zero payments on their student loans one year after graduation who were paying a higher proportion of their earnings toward student loan debts than a typical individual could reasonably afford. We estimate that, in 2009, a typical man could reasonably afford to devote 8.9 percent of his earnings to student loan payments, and a typical woman could reasonably afford to devote 7.8 percent of her earnings to student loan payments. In 2001, those percentages are estimated at 9.5 percent and 8.5 percent for men and women, respectively. This analysis excludes graduates older than age 35 at bachelor's degree completion.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, reprinted in Christine Corbett and Catherine Hill (October 2012), *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation*, American Association of University Women.

children served do not have health insurance, and OneWorld must turn away 500 patients every month because it cannot meet the demand for care.<sup>164</sup>

Omaha is the county seat of Douglas County, where the Latino population increased by nearly 90 percent between 2000 and 2010.<sup>165</sup> Latinos are the group most likely to lack insurance in the United States, and their insurance rates nationwide have grown fastest since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. The Commonwealth Fund reports that by June of 2014, the proportion of people living below the poverty line who lacked health insurance had fallen from 28 percent to 17 percent in states that expanded Medicaid coverage under the law, while the rate remained unchanged at 36 percent in states that did not.<sup>166</sup>

**“The theory is that women are better at relationship building. Unfortunately people don’t think about that as much as they should when they consider who to vote for.”**

— Sara Howard,  
State Senator,  
Nebraska’s District 9

This chapter focuses on how gender bias impedes efforts to end hunger in the United States by 2030. The Affordable Care Act is the biggest advance in social welfare policy in a generation and raises the chances to end hunger. It could make even more progress if the remaining 24 states expanded Medicaid to cover more of the uninsured population. Passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act has also been a bruising political fight that shocked many Americans. Would it have been possible to have a more rational debate about the law, its advantages, and its costs if more women had been in Con-

gress to help steer the debate? Clearly there is no way to know, but at this point, women have the better track record. This may be yet another example of how women’s representation in Congress in proportion to their numbers in the population would be good for the country.

## Looking Forward

At the end of 2015, when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire, U.N. member states are expected to agree to a new set of global development goals. The United States and other developed countries considered their MDG role to be helping developing countries achieve the goals—not achieving the goals themselves. Perhaps not coincidentally, most of the world made steady progress against hunger and poverty during the MDG era, while the United States and some other developed countries went the other direction.

The post-MDG, post-2015 goals should be universal, calling on every country to end hunger and poverty. As we demonstrate throughout this report, doing so means that every country will need to put ending gender discrimination at the top of its priority list

Setting goals along with the rest of the world and working together to find and scale up the best ways of ending both hunger and gender discrimination will give the United States a clearer sense of purpose—a boost in energy and momentum to help us regain the lost progress of the past decade and start to move forward. Gender and gender bias affects the life of every person in the United States. That’s why it will take the engagement of all to remove the barriers to women’s empowerment so that we can at last eliminate hunger in this wealthy country.

## THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE VOICE

Stacy Cloyd

Running for office isn't the only way women can make their voices heard. Advocating for a law or supporting a candidate can be as simple as writing a letter to the editor, and many groups provide advice on how best to do that.<sup>167</sup> A study called *Vote With Your Purse* noted that in 2010, 74 percent of donations to federal candidates, parties, and political action committees came from men. Moreover, the share of contributions made by women has been on the decline since 2006.<sup>168</sup> See Figure 4.12 for additional details from the study.

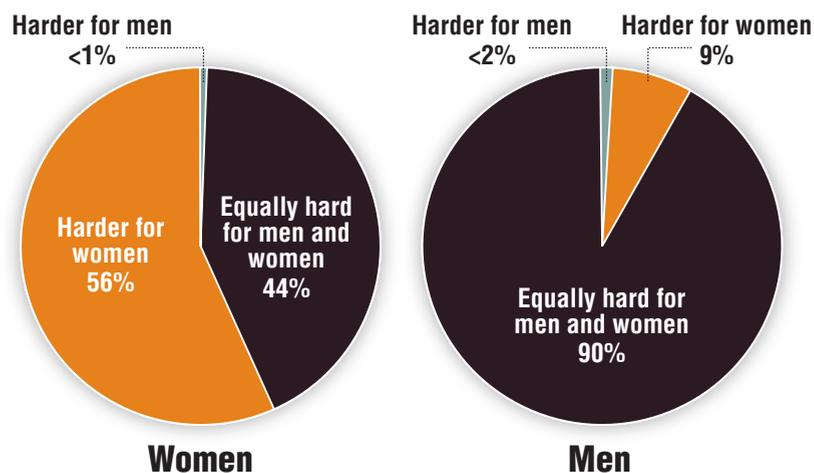
There are many gender-focused advocacy organizations in the United States. One example of women working together to reduce hunger and poverty is Bread for the World's Women of Faith for the 1,000 Days Movement. The Women of Faith, who represent a wide range of religious backgrounds and traditions, facilitate conversations in their own communities about the critical importance of nutrition for pregnant women and young children and about how American women can help ensure that U.S. foreign assistance makes nutrition during this 1,000-day window (from pregnancy to a child's second birthday) a priority.

Another advocacy group is the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network, whose mission is to "link and empower women to build food systems and communities that are healthy, just, sustainable, and that promote environmental integrity." This includes mentoring and training for female farmers and women interested in agricultural careers, as well as a Plate to Politics program that aims to educate Congress and communities about food issues.<sup>169</sup>

Of course, women also make a difference as advocates for organizations and causes that are not gender specific. For example, not all cafeteria workers are "lunch ladies," but many are. In Chicago, both female and male cafeteria workers were able to collaborate to win a contract that secured their employment and wages while allowing more public schoolchildren to enjoy freshly-prepared meals.<sup>170</sup>

*In 2014, Stacy Cloyd served as Senior Domestic Policy Analyst at Bread for the World Institute.*

Figure 4.12 **Women and Men Hold Very Different Opinions About Whether it is More Difficult for Women to Raise Campaign Funds.**



Source: Kira Sanbonmatsu, Susan J. Carroll, and Debbie Walsh (2009), *Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures*, Center for American Women and Politics.

# A PLAN TO END HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES BY 2030

Bread for the World Institute's 2014 Hunger Report, *Ending Hunger in America*, urged President Obama and Congress to lead the country in setting a goal to end hunger in the United States by 2030, and it offered a four-part plan to accomplish this: 1) a jobs agenda, 2) a stronger safety net, 3) human capital development, and 4) public-private partnerships to support innovative community-led initiatives against hunger.

2030 is not an arbitrary date. The international community is planning to announce a set of global development goals once the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expire in December 2015. In 2000, every country agreed to support the MDGs, which included cutting global hunger and poverty rates in half. The exciting news about the MDGs is that we have already achieved the poverty goal and could reach the hunger goal as well with a big push this year.

The United States and other developed countries contributed to the MDGs as donors, but were not expected to reduce hunger and poverty at home as were developing countries. The post-MDG goals should be universal, requiring every country to effectively end hunger and poverty.

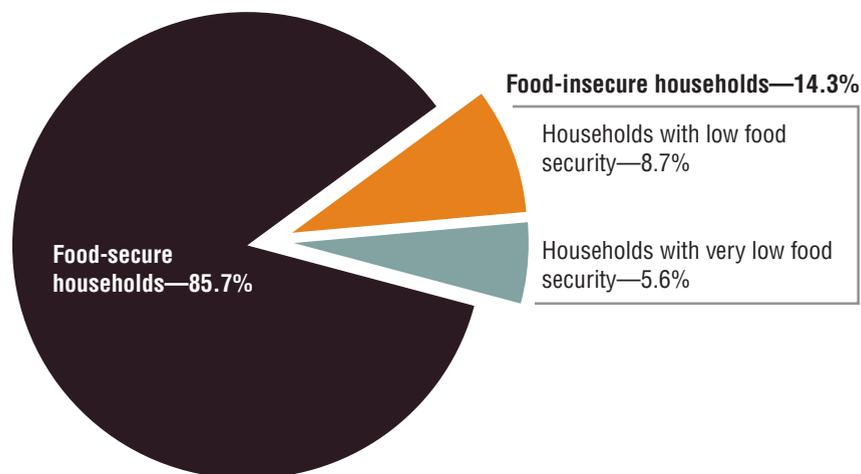
## Part One of Our Plan to End Hunger in America: A Jobs Agenda

When a household's breadwinner is out of work or can't find full-time work, everyone living under the same roof is at risk of hunger. Presently, 14.3 percent of U.S. households are considered less than food secure. See Figure 4.13. "Low food security" and "very low food security" are the terms the federal government uses to describe households that experience hunger or are at risk of hunger. The United States is not a food secure nation because the economic recovery from the Great Recession has been sluggish.

A strong recovery capped by a return to full employment would significantly improve the

U.S. food security rate. The Federal Reserve manages the country's monetary policy; it has a dual mandate of controlling inflation and promoting full employment. Since the start of the Great Recession, the Fed has prioritized increasing employment over reducing inflation. As long as the economy continues to operate well below its full capacity, the risk of inflation is minimal and so the Fed needs to keep the focus on returning to full employment.

Figure 4.13 U.S. Households by Food Security Status, 2013



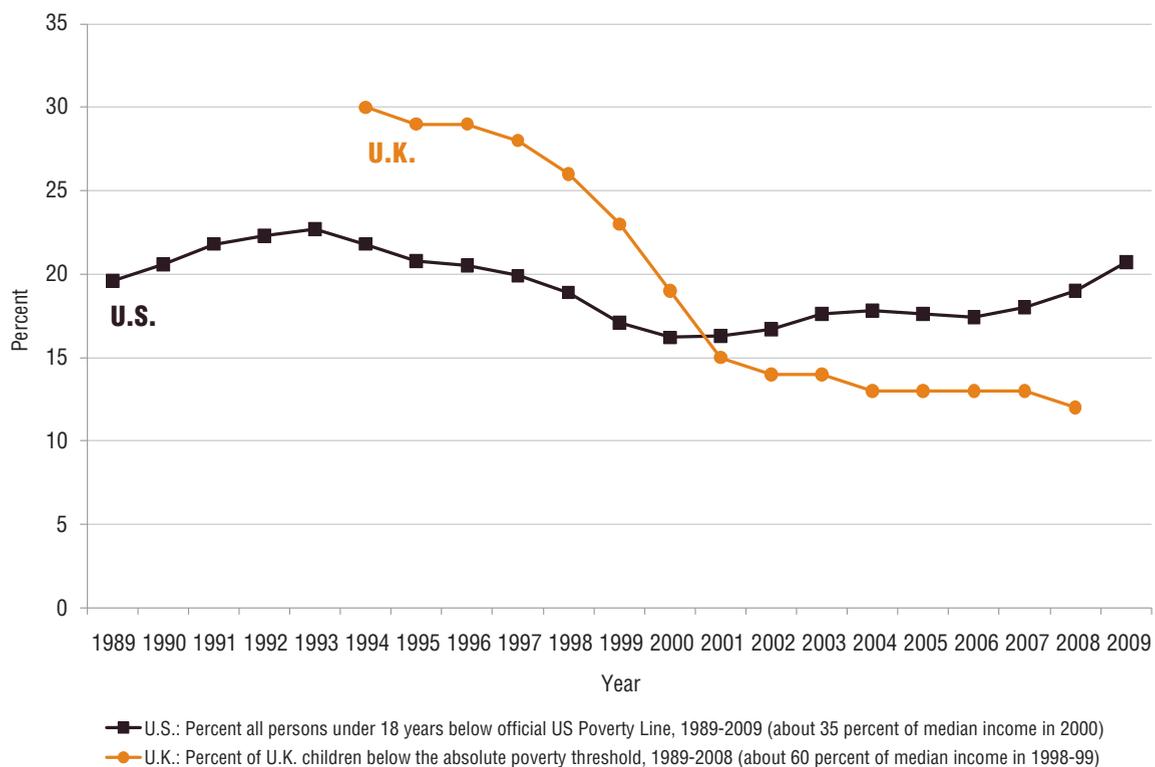
Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the December 2013 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Low-wage jobs pay far too little to ensure food security to any breadwinner with additional mouths to feed. Raising the minimum wage is critical because it sets the floor on all low-wage work. Public opinion is solidly behind a federal increase in the minimum wage from the current level of \$7.25 an hour.<sup>1</sup> In the 2014 Hunger Report, we proposed raising the minimum wage to \$12.00 an hour. In 2014, \$12.00 an hour is what it would take for a single breadwinner to pull a family of four over the poverty line, working full-time, year-round. Currently, about a third of all workers earn less than this.<sup>2</sup>

### RAPID PROGRESS AGAINST HUNGER AND POVERTY IS POSSIBLE

In 1997, the U.K. government launched an initiative to eliminate child poverty by 2020. When the campaign began, the child poverty rate in the United Kingdom was roughly equal to the U.S. rate. Within a decade the United Kingdom cut the child poverty rate in half, while in the United States the child poverty ended up where it had begun. The U.K. example demonstrates that rapid progress mainly requires political commitment. Read more about the U.K. program to end child poverty in the section “Balancing Act at Home and in the Workplace,” in Chapter 4.

Figure 4.14 Child Poverty Rates in the United States and United Kingdom



Source: Jane Waldfogel (December 2010), “Tackling Child Poverty & Improving Child Well-Being: Lessons from Britain,” First Focus.

# A PLAN TO END HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES BY 2030

## Parts Two and Three: A Stronger Safety Net and Human Capital Development

Sustainable reductions in hunger will depend on strengthening the safety net and investing in human capital. Economic downturns are all but inevitable. We all know people who have fallen on hard times—lost a job, suffered an illness, or seen their retirement savings disappear in the Great Recession. And, of course, there are those who cannot or should not work—elderly people, people with disabilities, children.

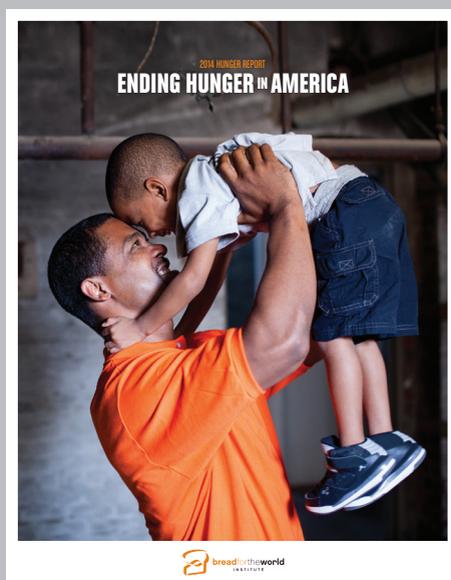
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) is the nation's flagship nutrition program and the main safety net preventing families from going hungry. SNAP enrollment has declined as the economy improved and fewer people remain

unemployed, but improvements in the economy last year were diluted by cuts to SNAP. In November 2013, Congress allowed the SNAP benefit boost that was part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to expire. The nation's food safety net needs to be a *nutrition* safety net, one that offers not only assistance to prevent starvation, but the means to afford the nutritious foods people require to remain healthy. Cuts to SNAP only make it harder for recipient families to maintain good health. A typical food-insecure household spends 26 percent less on food than a typical food-secure household of the same size and composition.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to livable wages, people need to be able to balance their work and family responsibilities. More than two-thirds of poor children

live in families that have at least one wage earner,<sup>4</sup> and 40 percent of low-income parents have no access to any paid time off (no sick days or medical leave, no parental leave, no vacation), making it difficult to care for sick children, or even newborn children.<sup>5</sup> Public opinion strongly supports extending paid sick leave to all workers.<sup>6</sup>

One of the biggest differences between U.S. society today and a half-century ago is the incredible increase in the number of women in the paid workforce. But this major change is not reflected in government policies. The United States lags behind every other developed country in recognizing the need for government to assist families in affording quality child care. And child care that includes an educational component has three payoffs: it strengthens the safety net for low-income working families; adds to children's human capital development; and builds a stronger future for America.



In 2014, the Obama administration proposed, and Congress funded, a new initiative to encourage partnerships between Early Head Start and childcare to provide high-quality early care and education for infants and toddlers and meet the needs of working families. This is a noteworthy accomplishment, but in order to make economic mobility a real possibility for children born to low-income families, human capital development needs to start with early education and go all the way through college.

## Public-Private Partnerships

Ending hunger in the United States will require leadership not only at the federal level but also at the state and local levels. There are countless examples of locally-led initiatives that are achieving great success in their communities. At their core, these initiatives are formed around the belief that to end hunger in a community, a broad range of stakeholders must unite behind a common vision and strategy. Churches may be talking to other churches, but not to anybody else. The heads of key government offices like the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services may not know anybody on the volunteer side.

The 2014 Hunger Report profiled several such initiatives—for example, the Indy Hunger Network (IHN). In a city the size of Indianapolis, any social infrastructure will be fragmented—not by intent, but by sheer numbers and logistics. IHN provided a space for all the parts of the anti-hunger infrastructure in the city to come together and solve problems. Dave Miner, executive director of IHN, has been an anti-hunger activist for more than 30 years. From 2007 to 2012, he chaired Bread for the World’s board of directors. In 2008, he retired after a career with the pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, first in science, then in management. Now, he is using the skills he learned over a career in leadership positions at Lilly and its affiliate company Elanco, plus 30 years of advocacy training through his involvement with Bread for the World, to help Indianapolis become a hunger-free community.

A sense of community ownership is critical to finding sustainable solutions to hunger. Partnerships at the local level, and between local initiatives and state and federal government, build that ownership. Local partners do more than feed people; they feed information to leaders in government, and they make informed suggestions as to how partners can work together to fight hunger more effectively. Setting a national goal to end hunger would place independent local efforts within a wider framework. Connecting community-led anti-hunger efforts would enable them to develop a broadly shared narrative—the story of why it is critical to end hunger in America.

## Reality Check

Ending hunger in America is possible. It is not an impossible dream. If we decided we really wanted to do it, we could wake up one morning in 2030 and be living in a country where hunger is rare and temporary, not the shared experience of millions of Americans as it is today.

**Low-wage jobs pay far too little to ensure food security to any breadwinner with additional mouths to feed.**