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Business

Women urged to tap into green jobs

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By Angela Carter, Register Staff

Launched Wednesday, the new Women's Economic Security Campaign will be advocating nationwide to help women and female heads of household rise out of poverty and tap into job opportunities created by the emerging "green economy."

"Good jobs for women are not only critical for family economic stability, they are a key component of lasting economic recovery for our nation," WESC said in the first of a series of policy briefs called "Creating Opportunity for Low-Income Women in the Green Economy."

The definition of green jobs and businesses is evolving, but generally, the U.S. Department of Labor says "the green economy encompasses any economic activity related to reducing the use of fossil fuels, decreasing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the efficiency of energy usage, recycling materials, and developing and adopting renewable sources of energy."

The Women's Economic Security Campaign is a coalition of four regional women's funds and other organizations such as Wider Opportunities for Women in Washington, D.C.

Women's funds support initiatives that improve the lives of women and girls from education to job training to political representation.

WESC found that green jobs are being created in industries that historically have low female representation, such as construction, electrical contracting or HVAC — heating, ventilation and air conditioning — system installation.

Shante Avant, the grants, program and volunteer director for the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, a WESC organization, said that as of September, 1.1 million female heads of household wanted to work, but had not found employment.

Ninety-eight percent of workers who earn less than \$15,000 a year are women, Avant said, and women earn just 77 cents to every dollar earned by men.

"We see continually that women are underserved in this area and continue to have barriers," she said.

Teresa Younger, executive director of Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, said state and national policies are needed that ensure the health and safety of female workers, eliminate gender discrimination and provide pay equity.

"Not all jobs are created equal," Younger said. "It's about women getting opportunities that actually pay the bills."

The commission works with Wider Opportunities for Women, whose staff have been in discussion with WESC about the new campaign.

Ami Nagle, WESC national facilitator, said the coalition will focus its activities on publishing policy briefs that back certain legislative efforts and programs such as reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the Workforce Investment Act, creating partnerships with community organizations at local levels, undertaking letter-to-the editor writing campaigns and engaging women in policy debates.

Younger said the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women will reach out to women around the state to participate in Women's Day at the Capitol Feb. 9.

"The theme will be around women and leadership and we'll be doing a campaign around equality," she said.

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