

## Business Wire

March 12, 2008

**1.4 million adults in Massachusetts lack education and skills needed to secure family-supporting jobs; Crittenton Women's Union report cites failings in state educational system; Free community college tuition for low-income working adults among key recommendations;**

Massachusetts must make changes in its educational system to provide hundreds of thousands of low-income working adults a better opportunity to gain the skills they need to secure family-supporting jobs in today's competitive, knowledge-based economy, according to a report released today from Crittenton Women's Union.

The report, "Unlocking the Doors to Higher Education and Training for Massachusetts' Working Poor Families," details significant problems in the state's educational system that impede low-income working adults—specifically those supporting themselves and their families—from embarking on and paying for higher education.

In particular, the report calls for more financial aid, better counseling and a more-coordinated education system to meet the needs of low-income working adults.

The report notes that an increasing number of family-supporting jobs in the state require some post-secondary education. However, Massachusetts has more than 1.4 million people between the ages of 25 and 54 who do not have an associate's degree or higher level of educational attainment.

"In other words, nearly half of the state's 3.2 million workers lack the skills required by employers to obtain jobs with family-sustaining wages," the report concludes.

The report focuses on the state's 117,000 low-income working families, defined as those who earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty income threshold (or \$33,200 for a family of three in 2006). Despite having a working adult in the home, these families earn too little to make ends meet or gain economic security. For these workers, skills training provides the surest way to better jobs, but such education is often unaffordable and unmanageable for working adults.

In addition, the report finds that the state's basic educational offerings for adults—geared to students without a high school diploma or GED—are poorly funded and do a poor job of preparing students to move directly into careers or into higher education courses, the main goals of many adult students.

"Across Massachusetts are families that are working hard to support themselves, but the breadwinners lack the educational levels they need to compete in today's economy," said Elisabeth D. Babcock, president and CEO of Crittenton Women's Union and one of the authors of the report. "Those who have the most to gain are women. Seventy-two percent of families living below the federal poverty line in our state are headed by single mothers. Women with an associate's degree earn 47 percent more than those with a high school diploma, while for men the gain is 30 percent. With the state requiring a stronger workforce to remain economically competitive, we have to act now to give these workers—both men and women—a better chance to obtain post-secondary education and develop skills they need."

The report makes recommendations in four key areas to state policymakers:

- Provide two years of community college instruction at no cost, with priority given to low-income working adults. The state should also consider tuition incentives to adults who complete classes and obtain a GED.
- Provide career counseling, guidance and support - including increased childcare assistance - for adult, or nontraditional, students.
- Make permanent and increase funding for the Educational Awards Grant and Loan Programs, which assist part-time adult students. Eligibility for these funds should be expanded to allow more working adults to qualify.

- Align the K-12 and higher education systems to make it easier for students to transition from high school into college-level courses. This should include the creation of a council to better coordinate the state's offering of adult education, college-level and remedial classes.

"Governor Patrick's proposal to make community college free for all Massachusetts residents is a laudable goal and its realization would significantly advance the educational attainment of those residents who need it most," the report concludes. Given the state's budget picture, the report calls on the state to make it the priority to offer free community college tuition to working poor adults, particularly single mothers.

While the report focuses on the state's 117,000 working families earning 200 percent or less of the federal poverty level, it's clear that many more Massachusetts families earn too little to adequately support themselves. The Crittenton Women's Union has studied the cost of living across the state and developed the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard, which indicates that, depending on where they live in the state, a family of three requires an income of between 266 to 350 percent of poverty level, or between \$44,000 and \$58,000 annually, to afford basic needs without public assistance.

"This means that in our state working poor adults with families not only can't make ends meet, but they also can't access programs that would help them get the education they need to lift them out of poverty," Babcock said.

The report was written by Crittenton Women's Union, with support from the Working Poor Families Project, a national initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce and Mott Foundations. The Working Poor Families Project examines state policies that affect low-income working families and recommends changes to strengthen those policies and create more economic opportunity. For more information, visit [www.workingpoorfamilies.org](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org). To view the full report, go to <http://www.liveworkthrive.org/reports.php>.

#### About Crittenton Women's Union

Crittenton Women's Union, a Boston-based nonprofit organization, combines direct service programs, independent research and public policy advocacy in its mission to transform the course of low-income women's lives so that they can attain economic independence and create better futures for themselves and their families. Each year CWU helps more than 2,000 people through its safe housing, education and training programs, and family support services. For more information, visit [www.liveworkthrive.org](http://www.liveworkthrive.org).

**CONTACT:** Crittenton Women's Union  
Stephanie Nichols, 617-259-2946 or 617-365-5931 (Cell)  
Director of Marketing and Communications  
[snichols@liveworkthrive.org](mailto:snichols@liveworkthrive.org)

**URL:** <http://www.businesswire.com>