

Press Statement of Kate Farrar
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Wider Opportunities for Women
“Where CT Stands”

Today, Connecticut does not stand alone. It joins California, Colorado, and Washington State in revealing that almost 3 times as many families cannot make ends meet as are counted by federal poverty statistics. But, having these fellow state peers can't result in a sigh of relief. Instead the response would be better stated as a question to each of us:

“What are the opportunities for Connecticut to build a state economy of shared prosperity for women and their families?”

It is an investment in women's skills and economic opportunity that is a key to state growth, the reduction of poverty and the well-being of future generations.

Currently, four of five women are concentrated in only 20 of 440 Bureau of Labor Standards' Dictionary of Occupational Titles, including some of the lowest paying clerical and service jobs. Research from the Institute for Women's Policy Research shows the lifetime earnings gap for women is a shocking 62 percent; over a 15-year period, the typical woman earns only 38 percent of what the typical man does.

Those concerned about reducing inequality and poverty, shown even clearer in this new report today, should focus on occupational segregation gender and how gender parity can be achieved for women's employment and training for high-growth, high-demand jobs of the future.

For over 10 years, states across the country use Wider Opportunities for Women's Self-Sufficiency Standard to design sound public policy, to develop strong programs, to counsel low-income families about education and training options, and to provide realistic information about whether residents are truly able to make ends meet. Wider Opportunities for Women's engages with its partners in 35 states, New York City, and the District of Columbia, all part of the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project.

In over a dozen states, workforce investment boards view the tool of self-sufficiency as a mechanism to build a comprehensive and systemic response to workforce development in their communities. For example,

- Workforce boards find that structuring their on-the-job training contracts and sector strategies around a self-sufficiency framework greatly assist them in engaging employers and meeting the employers' needs.
 - The Fresno County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) uses a formal employer-rating system to determine eligibility for on-the-job-training (OJT) contracts, including elements that contribute to self-sufficiency, including quality of wages and benefits, opportunities for skill advancement, wage gain and advancement in career ladders within six months of hire.
 - At the Boston Private Industry Council in MA, they operate a multiple health sector program that provides a comprehensive array of services for workers and employers including accessible career ladders that lead to self-sufficiency.
- Workforce boards are investing in staff training to assist One-Stop and other staff to effectively translate the concept of self-sufficiency to their customers. WIBs establish customer progress toward self-sufficiency as a measure of success to track that progress and inform program development.

- In Seattle-King County, WA case managers are required to save data for their customers seeking employment services into an online Self-Sufficiency Calculator. By examining customers who were at 0% of self-sufficiency when entering, 71% exited at 100% or more of self-sufficiency for their family. Now, the Board can identify what services worked to achieve these gains.
- In Pennsylvania, workforce professionals are trained on the concept and data of the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Customers use an online Self-Sufficiency Calculator to learn about their self-sufficiency needs, available work supports, and use this information to make decisions with their case manager about career paths that would lead to economic stability.

These examples represent the focus that the state can place on economic self-sufficiency goals for the state's workforce prosperity.

The workforce system must specifically address the needs of women in training. A new paper by Dr. Susan Crandall in the *New England Journal of Public Policy* questions if workforce development policy is leading to gains for women. Her findings attest that at the national level, four of the six growing occupations recommended for demand-driven workforce approaches are male-dominated. Industries such as manufacturing, transportation, and construction have institutional barriers that prevent successful hiring and advancement of women. Gender biases, including at the labor market, industry, education, and firm levels lead to lower earnings outcomes for women.

But, the workforce system can address these biases with policies that focus on non-traditional occupations, and the provision of support services and case management to ensure women have the opportunities to enter and remain in high-wage, high-growth occupations. Many states including Arizona, Michigan, Florida, and Massachusetts institute innovative practices that address these barriers.

In considering workforce development policy, it must go hand-in-hand with the education system of the state. Education alone is the single biggest factor in determining high job quality. Similar to the workforce development system, by setting household "economic self-sufficiency" as a goal of adult education and career and technical education, the focus can be on preparing women for a long-term sustainable career path according to local wage needs. The federal act authorizing career and technical education, The Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 adopted "self-sufficiency" as a potential performance indicator and as a component to local planning for counselors, schools and community colleges. Community colleges across the country including in Colorado, Indiana, and Oklahoma already use such tools.

Connecticut does not stand alone in its challenge. But, in its solutions it can choose to stand with other states across the country who are embracing innovative approaches to workforce and education policy and programs. These considerations for Connecticut would represent true steps toward economic equity for women, which are a benefit for families' economic self-sufficiency and the shared prosperity of the state.