



Wider Opportunities for Women



National Council
Of Women's Organizations
733 15th Street NW, Suite 1011 Washington, DC 20005
(p) 202-393-7122 (f) 202-387-7915

For Release Oct. 2, 2007

NCWO Contact: Kimberly Otis
Phone: 202-293-4505
otis@ncwo-online.org

WOW Contact: Susan Rees
Phone: 202/464-1596
Cell: 202/550-5733
srees@wowonline.org

Better Jobs Key to Women's Long-term Self-Sufficiency

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Sarah Reynolds might have ended up like so many other girls from Washington, in a dead end clerk's job with no health care, no 401(k), let alone a pension, and not enough in her paycheck to cover taxes, plus the food, rent, transportation and child care she needed for her two sons. But in 1979 she graduated from an unusual training program that led to her employment today as an AA train mechanic with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Jobs such as hers in transportation, auto mechanics, construction, security services, computers and technology – “nontraditional occupations” where women historically have been underrepresented – hold one of the keys to a lifetime of economic self-sufficiency extending well into retirement years, according to researchers who, along with Sarah, Tuesday conducted a briefing for Congress sponsored by Wider Opportunities for Women and the National Council of Women's Organizations.

“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,” said WOW Executive Director Joan Kuriansky. She recommended parity in women's employment and training for high-growth, high-demand jobs of the future, including those generated by federal investments in transportation, renewable energy infrastructure and technology.

Dr. Heidi Hartmann, President of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, described how women are disproportionately poor and well below a standard of economic self-sufficiency, such as WOW's Family Self-Sufficiency Standard, which is now in place in 35 states and the District of Columbia. This condition extends well into old age for many, partly because of how Social Security fails to count time devoted to caregiving. “Our 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 in the nation should focus on occupational segregation by gender.”

“The majority of high-demand, high-paying occupations are male-dominated,” said Dr. Susan Crandall of Boston, author of a recent paper in the New England Journal of Public Policy at <http://www.liveworkthrive.org/reports.php>. She recommended not only training and apprenticeship opportunities for women in nontraditional fields but the creation of career ladders in areas where women have traditionally dominated the workforce.

Rep. Lynn Woolsey who spoke at the briefing and has authored legislation called *the Workforce Balancing Act* (H.R. 2392), said she is, “devoted to passing a bill that would provide financial assistance for child care providers – a field predominantly populated by women - to further their educational qualifications and earning potential.” Her bill also would create new jobs by opening up the financing for the construction of childcare facilities and for the development of a new telework demonstration program.

Besides being penalized by a lifetime without retirement and health benefits, many older women face new workplace barriers as they find they need to stay on the job longer in order to have financial security in retirement, said Dr. Barbara Butrica, Senior Research Associate at the Urban Institute, a labor economist. Age discrimination is persistent, and Medicare rules force employer-based health benefit plans to be the primary payer for older workers. “While many older workers, men as well as women, need or desire part-time, flexible work, such arrangements are uncommon,” she said.

Susan Rees, Director of National Programs and Policy at WOW, identified several bills currently pending that WOW supports: Woolsey’s Workplace Balancing Act (H.R. 2392), which would extend pro-rated health and pension benefits to part-time workers of all ages; the Unemployment Insurance Modernization bills (H.R. 2233 and S. 1871), which would give states incentives to provide benefits to workers who are available only for part-time work; and legislation sponsored by Senator Herb Kohl, chair of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, that would extend COBRA coverage for workers between age 62 and 65 who are phasing down their work schedules. In addition, Kohl’s Health Care and Training for Older Workers Act (S. 708) removes disincentives for Workforce Investment Boards to underserved older workers and would create a clearinghouse of best practices for businesses wanting to hire and retain older workers.

“These legislative initiatives represent true steps toward economic equity for women, said Kuriansky. “Together these bills reflect the value that we, as a society, place on work and family.”

“The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) is pleased to cosponsor this nonpartisan event to help raise awareness on much needed policies responsive to the needs of women and families in their states and districts. This briefing is one of four Congressional Briefings held in 2007 by the NCWO’s Domestic Priorities Task Force,” stated Kimberly Otis, Executive Director of NCWO.

###

The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) is the nation's oldest and largest coalition of women's groups. Our over 230 member organizations represent women from all socioeconomic and demographic groups, and collectively represent over 11 million women nationwide.

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) works nationally and in its home community of Washington, DC to achieve economic independence and equality of opportunity for women and girls. For more than 40 years, WOW has helped women learn to earn, with programs emphasizing literacy, technical and nontraditional skills, the welfare-to-work transition and career development. WOW leads the National Family Economic Self Sufficiency (FESS) Project in 36 states, reaching over 2,000 organizations. The FESS Standard was developed by Dr. Diana Pearce when she was leading the Women and Poverty Project at WOW. Today WOW is piloting the Elder Economic Security Standard TM index with the Gerontology Institute of the University of Massachusetts in 20 states.