

# Economic Justice as a Tool for Sexual Violence Prevention in Nevada

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## ECONOMIC JUSTICE AS A TOOL FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Nationally, nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men in the United States experience rape. It is estimated that 13% of women and 6% of men have experienced sexual coercion, and 27% of women and 11.7% of men have experienced unwanted sexual contact.<sup>1</sup> Nevada is no different. Between the years 2018 and 2019, the number of rapes which were reported to Nevada Law Enforcement increased by 24.34%.<sup>2</sup> Nevada has no statistics on other forms of sexual violence as they are not considered crimes and thus no data has been collected.

The long term impacts of sexual violence have long been identified as resulting in significant psychological issues and in a recent research reported in the Journal of American Medical Association - Internal Medicine<sup>3</sup> researchers drew a clear link not only between sexual trauma and lasting psychological issues, but also physical effects that contribute to disease and even death. The researchers also found that, sexual harassment — which previous estimates say anywhere between 25 and 85 percent of women experience in their lifetimes — also contributes to these poor health outcomes. The study, looked at health outcomes for just over 300 nonsmoking women aged 40 to 60 years old. It found that those who reported a history of sexual assault were more likely to struggle with depression, anxiety and poor sleep. And a history of sexual harassment was tied to higher blood pressure, poor sleep and higher triglycerides — which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

The prevalence of sexual violence and the lifelong consequences for victim-survivors requires us to focus on violence prevention as a significant part of our work. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), strengthening economic supports for women and families is an effective means of prevention of sexual violence. “Provisions of these types of supports to ensure women can remain in and contribute substantially to the workforce not only improves their economic conditions and promotes family stability, but also decreases gender inequality, which has been linked to risk for sexual violence.”<sup>4</sup> Intimate partner violence, including sexual violence, is a power-based issue. Decreasing the power imbalances within a relationship by increasing access to economic opportunity can be used as a means for violence prevention. “To enhance prevention initiatives, policies and

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<sup>1</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>

<sup>2</sup> State of Nevada Department of Public Safety. 2020. Uniform Crime Reporting: 2019 Report. Retrieved from: <https://rccd.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/gsdnv.gov/content/About/UCR/Crime%20in%20Nevada%202019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Association of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault With Midlife Women’s Mental and Physical Health, retrieved from: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-internal-medicine/full-article/2705688>

<sup>4</sup> Basile PhD, Kathleen C. et al. 2016. STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

programs that improve economic security and stability, and provide socio-economically challenged individuals with opportunities to strengthen their education, employment, and income outcomes through microloans, can reduce the power imbalances across multiple levels of the socioecological model, which will ultimately decrease the likelihood that violence will occur.”<sup>5</sup> For low income and economically disadvantaged individuals, lack of economic resources affects their ability to alter their environment or to live self-reliantly, making them dependent on others for their survival, and therefore placing them at risk for violence.

Sexual violence is associated with a variety of risk and protective factors, that include not only characteristics of the individual but also their social and physical environment.<sup>6</sup> To address the prevalence of sexual violence in Nevada, we need to focus on creating a more equitable economy that provides greater opportunities for families, and increases accessibility to resources. Taking steps to increase economic justice, particularly for women and children, is one of the most effective ways in which we can create positive social and environmental changes to prevent sexual violence. Throughout this report we will be referring to women as they are the population of focus for the CDC’s prevention strategy. We acknowledge that victims of sexual violence are comprised of all genders. We further acknowledge that raising the economic status of women will ultimately benefit everyone.

## CURRENT ECONOMIC STATE OF NEVADA

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) in 2004 launched the Status of Women in the States project; this project provides data and analysis on the well-being of women in the states. They provide a state-by-state ranking on equity and earnings; poverty and economic security; reproductive rights and access to health care; as well as political participation and civic engagement in each state.<sup>7</sup> While Nevada has made efforts to increase opportunities for women in our state, Nevada continues to earn poor rankings and grades.

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<sup>5</sup> Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence. August 7, 2020. How Economic Justice Efforts Lead to the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence? VAWnet News Blog. Retrieved from:

<https://vawnet.org/news/how-can-economic-justice-efforts-lead-prevention-sexual-and-domestic-violence>

<sup>6</sup> Basile PhD, Kathleen C. et al. 2016. STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Women’s Policy Research. Status of Women in the States. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/status-of-women/>

Below is a summary table and key bulleted points from the 2018 *Status of Women in the States - Nevada Report*:<sup>8</sup>

Topic of focus	Rank amongst all states	Overall Grade
Employment and Earnings	45	D-
Political Participation	42	D-
Poverty and Opportunity	42	D
Reproductive Rights	17	B
Health and Well-Being	40	D
Work and Family	23	C-

- In Nevada, white women currently make 80 cents on the dollar compared to men. For Hispanic women, they only earn 55 cents on the dollar. At this rate, Nevada will not see equal pay until 2043.
- 27.3% of employed women work in low-wage jobs.
- Only 86.3% of Nevada's women aged 18-64 have health insurance coverage, which is below the national average.
- "If employed women in Nevada were paid the same as or comparable to men, their poverty rate would be reduced by more than half and poverty among employed single mothers would drop by more than two-fifths."
- Nevada ranks 30<sup>th</sup> nationally for the share of women in poverty.
- "The difference between women's and men's median earnings, \$9,000, would pay for 3.2 years of community college tuition in Nevada."
- Nevada is one of the top three states with the lowest shares of women in professional or managerial occupations with only 31.7%.

In January of 2020, the Nevada unemployment rate was 3.6%, whereas in October of 2020, the unemployment rate was 11.9%.<sup>9</sup> Reporting throughout the pandemic suggests that working women have experienced the most impacts. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) reported, "[Women] continue to lag further behind men in getting back to pre-COVID-19 employment levels."<sup>10</sup> Job losses within the current economic downturn

<sup>8</sup> Status of Women in the States. March 2018. The Economic Status of Women in Nevada. Retrieved from: <https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-nevada.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2020. Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST320000000000004?amp%253bdata\\_tool=XGtable&output\\_view=data&include\\_graphs=true](https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST320000000000004?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true)

<sup>10</sup> BUILD(ING) THE FUTURE: BOLD POLICIES FOR A GENDER-EQUITABLE RECOVERY, The Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from: [Policies-for-a-Gender-Equitable-Recovery-Finalism2.pdf](https://www.iwpr.org/publications/policies-for-a-gender-equitable-recovery-finalism2.pdf) ([iwpr.org](https://www.iwpr.org))

have been prevalent among women working in leisure, hospitality, education, retail and health care where women comprise more than 50% of the workforce. These are jobs that cannot be done remotely nor qualify as essential jobs and that represents a high percentage of jobs in Nevada. The current economic disparity and unemployment between men and women also rests on the fact that at-home duties including at home schooling has had a major impact on women's ability to work.

Nevada is also experiencing a housing crisis with high rates of homelessness. While homelessness tends to be a gendered issue, with the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness being male, too many women are also experiencing homelessness. Nevada is one of 14 states where the percentage of women who are unsheltered outpaces the percentage of men.<sup>11</sup> The rates of victimization and assault, including robbery, physical abuse, and sexual assault are much higher for women than men who are unsheltered.<sup>12</sup>

## ECONOMIC JUSTICE PRIORITIES

The Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCEDSV) has identified five economic justice areas that deserve greater focus. This identification is based on both data analysis and discussion with other statewide and regional organizations.

The following sub-sections provide background on each of the economic justice priorities; information about that topic in the context of Nevada; information about best practices from other states and jurisdictions; and, in the final section, suggestions for next steps. They are not listed in any particular order or rank.

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<sup>11</sup> *Demographic Data Project: Gender and Individual Homelessness*, National Alliance to End Homelessness, retrieved from: <https://endhomelessness.org/demographic-data-project-gender-and-individual-homelessness/>

<sup>12</sup> Montgomery, A. E., Szymkowiak, D., and Culhane, D. P. (2017). *Gender Differences in Factors Associated with Unsheltered Status and Increased Risk of Premature Mortality among Individuals Experiencing Homelessness*. *Women's Health Issues*, 256–263.

## ACCESS TO HOUSING

### HOUSING AS PREVENTION

The relationship between sexual violence and housing is complex. Safe and affordable housing is a protective factor against sexual violence (both victimization and perpetration) and a basic need in recovering from a sexual assault. The majority of sexual assaults take place in or near victims' homes or the homes of friends, relatives, or neighbors. Because of this, many victims wish to relocate after their sexual assaults, but often find they cannot do so because of limited resources. Making affordable housing a policy priority is necessary to ensuring that victim-survivors of sexual violence have the opportunity to obtain safe housing. Not only does the availability of affordable housing allow families the opportunity to change their environment, which could be the key to escaping victimization, it is also a tool for preventing homelessness. The effects of sexual violence can create an economic downward spiral for many victims, jeopardizing their access to safe and affordable housing. Homelessness increases the risks for both sexual violence perpetration and victimization.<sup>13</sup> "Homeless individuals (especially women and youth) not only experience sexual violence at higher rates than the general population, but sexual violence and intimate partner violence may be a causal or exacerbating factor in their homelessness."<sup>14</sup> With a greater availability of public housing assistance and affordable housing in the state, individuals are more likely to leave toxic homes, thereby either preventing them from becoming victims or preventing further violence.

### HOUSING IN NEVADA

Affordable housing is becoming harder to obtain, and the uncertainty of maintaining safe and stable housing is a reality that many Nevada families face, especially victim-survivors of sexual violence.

In the past five years, rent prices have increased 19% in Reno and 17.5% in Clark County. With the prices of rent increasing so dramatically, and median household income remaining relatively constant, households are seeing housing costs consume an increasing and unsustainable portion of their household income. "A new report from Apartment List says 26 percent of renters in Las Vegas are severely cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 50 percent of their income toward rent, while 27 percent are moderately burdened,

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<sup>13</sup> <https://vawnet.org/sc/housing-and-sexual-violence>

<sup>14</sup> National Sexual Violence Research Center. Housing & Sexual Violence Research Brief. Retrieved from: [https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_NSVRC\\_ResearchBrief\\_housing-and-sexual-violence\\_0.pdf](https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_NSVRC_ResearchBrief_housing-and-sexual-violence_0.pdf)

meaning they spend more than 30 percent of income on rent.”<sup>15</sup> While those who manage to maintain their housing are struggling, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition estimates that, in Nevada, there is a shortage of 73,158 rental units for extremely low-income households. <sup>16</sup> Low income families applying for public housing through their local housing authority, such as the Housing Choice Voucher, commonly referred to as Section 8 Housing, are experiencing long wait periods for application review, and even longer wait times to receive housing assistance. In fact, most of the waiting lists at Nevada’s three public housing authorities are closed, meaning no new applications are accepted.

When families are able to access the waiting lists, they must also meet strict qualifications to even submit an application. Qualifications include: having social security cards for all household members -which automatically excludes undocumented immigrants, documents to prove family relationships, valid driver’s license or state ID cards for all family members 18 years of age, and have proof of income to prove that when all incomes of household members over 18 are considered, the household is either very low or extremely low income. <sup>17</sup> For an individual that is fleeing an abusive or toxic home, or who is currently experiencing homelessness, they might not have access to these documents, creating another barrier.

If an individual who has already experienced some form of sexual or intimate partner violence chooses to leave/flee their home, they are automatically qualified as homeless by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). <sup>18</sup> However, only one housing authority in Nevada, the Reno Housing Authority, gives higher preference and priority to victim-survivors on their wait list. Preference points within housing authorities grant applicants points based on various qualifying factors such as age, veteran status, disability, currently homeless, etc. Receiving higher preference points places you higher up on the waiting list. Unfortunately, victim-survivors who are fleeing their home to prevent future violence from occurring are not given preference in 2 out of 3 housing authorities within our state.

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<sup>15</sup> Gentry, Dana. October 2019. Rents in Nevada increase at more than twice the rate of inflation. Nevada Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.nevadacurrent.com/blog/rents-in-nevada-increase-at-more-than-twice-the-rate-of-inflation/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Southern Nevada Housing Authority. Application Process. Retrieved from: <https://www.snvrha.org/docs/Application%20Process%20-%20English.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, March 2019. HUD’s Definition of Homelessness: Resources and Guidance. HUD EXCHANGE. Retrieved from: <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/huds-definition-of-homelessness-resources-and-guidance/>



The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) in its “2020 Out of Reach” Report<sup>19</sup> establishes a “Housing Wage”, meaning the hourly wage necessary for an individual to afford a one or two bedroom apartment when the rent is equal to the HUD determined “Fair Market Rent” or FMR. In Nevada, that housing wage for a 2 bedroom apartment, including utilities, is calculated to be \$20.48/hour, while the average Nevada renter’s wage cited in the report is \$17.42. However, FMR always trails behind actual average rents, which have gone up in Nevada even during the pandemic, at the same time as more Nevadans than in any other state have lost their jobs. Using January 2021 data from Zumper.com<sup>20</sup>, and distinguishing between northern and southern Nevada, the housing wage for the average 2 bedroom apartment, including a utility allowance, in the Las Vegas region is \$26.30; in Reno it is a staggering \$29.96 per hour. The average renter wage is only 66% of that amount in Las Vegas, and 58% of that amount in Reno. This housing cost paired with the lack of affordable (subsidized) housing units or vouchers, shows the extreme challenge victim-survivors face in being able to establish safe, independent housing.

Efforts to address housing inequities and the extreme shortage in affordable housing units and vouchers have been two-fold. Formed in 2018, The Nevada Housing Coalition was established to bring communities and stakeholders together to develop strategies and goals to address Nevada’s affordable housing shortfall through action and policy changes.<sup>21</sup> The statewide Coalition is working to ensure that there is a unified voice advocating on these matters. In addition, the Nevada Legislature has also addressed housing needs for victim-survivors. Nevada Revised Statute 118A.515 ensures that a victim-survivor cannot be evicted from their home for calling law enforcement or emergency services to intervene or prevent violence from happening. Landlords cannot claim that calling emergency services is a nuisance to the property, or other tenants, and as such cannot retaliate against the victim survivor for seeking help during an emergency.<sup>22</sup> Nevada Revised Statute 118A.345 allows for victim-survivors of sexual and domestic violence, stalking or harassment to terminate a rental agreement for their safety. They must prove they are a victim-survivor by providing the landlord: (1) proof of a protection order against the co-tenant or household member (2) A copy of a police report or (3) An affidavit from a qualified third party stating the individual is a victim-survivor and identifying the perpetrator.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR\\_2020.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2020.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/reno-nv>, <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/las-vegas-nv>

<sup>21</sup> Nevada Housing Coalition. About Us. Retrieved from: <https://nvhousingcoalition.org/page-1075184>

<sup>22</sup> Nevada Revised Statute 118A.515. Retrieved from: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-118A.html#NRS118ASec515>

<sup>23</sup> Nevada Revised Statute 118A.345. Retrieved from: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-118A.html#NRS118ASec345>



## BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER STATES POLICIES

Safe Housing Partnerships, is a national consortium funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is comprised of technical assistance providers including the National Network to End Domestic Violence, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, to provide resources to address the critical intersections of domestic and sexual violence, homelessness, and housing. They suggest that states and organizations take the following steps to ensure safe housing for at risk individuals and victim-survivors:<sup>24</sup>

- Create state and territory coalitions with housing and anti-poverty advocates.
- Advocate for safe and affordable housing and inform legislators about sexual violence victim-survivors housing needs.
- Advocate for trauma-informed policies and practices in shelters and public housing.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to expand cross-trainings, public policy advocacy, program development, and coordinate client referrals.
- Provide training and resources to local homeless shelters and housing providers about sexual violence prevention intervention.

Aside from collaborations and trainings, there are policy and procedural practices that could be implemented to ensure better access to safe and affordable housing. For those at risk of future violence or escalated violence in their home who are seeking public housing assistance to escape high risk situations, preference should be given to victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence. For example, the preference points given to victim-survivors on the waitlist for public housing assistance at the Reno Housing Authority should be expanded to all housing authorities in Nevada. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in response to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), issued a VAWA Guidance for local Public Housing Authorities (PHA) which clarified that the VAWA Final Rule states that PHA's may establish preference for victims of dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, in addition to domestic violence. The guidance encourages local PHA's to work with local government and community agencies to consider whether to adopt local preference for admission of families that include victim-survivors.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Safe Housing Partnership. Housing and Sexual Violence. Retrieved from: [https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/Publications\\_NSVRC\\_Bulletin\\_Housing-and-sexual-violence.pdf](https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/Publications_NSVRC_Bulletin_Housing-and-sexual-violence.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. May 2017. Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 Guidance. Retrieved from: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/PIH-2017-08VAWRA2013.PDF>

## WORKPLACE EQUITY AND JOB ACCESS

### EMPLOYMENT AS PREVENTION

Simply stated, the more economically stable a woman and her children are, the less likely they are to become victims of sexual violence. Workplace equity, including maternity leave and paid sick time off, and access to better paying jobs is an important tool in sexual violence prevention, as it can increase women's self-sufficiency and decrease power dynamics, which is the base of all abuse. "These policies could have an impact on reducing sexual violence by increasing economic stability of women and their families, given that economic inequality is a known risk factor for sexual violence victimization" (CDC Technical Package).

### EQUAL PAY AND JOB ACCESS IN NEVADA

As of July 2019, Nevada's population was estimated at 3,080,456, with 49.8% of the population female.<sup>26</sup> Women in Nevada represent, 58.6% of the labor force. According to the *2018 Status of Women Report*, white women in Nevada earn 80 cents for every dollar a white man earns, and this number is even lower for Latina and Black women. Below is a table that compares average annual incomes amongst race, ethnicity, and gender for Nevada workers:<sup>27</sup>

Race/Ethnicity	Average Annual Income for	Average Annual Income
	Women	for Men
White	\$42,294	\$54,486
Hispanic	\$30,035	\$32,152
Black	\$34,945	\$36,587
Asian	\$37,582	\$42,284
Native American	\$33,198	\$41,214
Other Race	\$29,472	\$31,325
Two or More Races	\$35,897	\$41,117

<sup>26</sup> United States Census Bureau. Quick Facts: Nevada. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NV>

<sup>27</sup> Status of Women in the State. Nevada – Employment and Earnings. Retrieved from: <https://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/nevada/#employment-earnings>

These current pay gaps not only disadvantage women and their families, but are especially concerning when we factor in the reality that in two-thirds of American families, women are the primary, sole, or co-breadwinners.<sup>28</sup> “While women are taking home less money, there is no ‘women’s discount’ on rent, electricity or anything else, which means it’s easier to fall behind, and harder to do things like pay off credit cards, get out of debt, and set aside money for unavoidable financial emergencies.”<sup>29</sup> For women who are the main source of income, their families are automatically economically disadvantaged.

The Federal Equal Pay Act requires that men and women working equal jobs in the same establishment be paid the same and is codified in Nevada law at Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 613.405. However, it wasn’t until the passage of SB 166 in the 2019 Nevada Legislative Session that there was a formal process for reporting complaints and holding organizations and businesses accountable for pay and work discrimination based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, religion or national origin. SB 166 set up a reporting process that any complaint of unlawful discrimination be reported to Nevada Equal Rights Commission within 300 days after the discrimination occurred. The Commission is then required to notify each party and conduct an interview. If discrimination is found, the Commission may award up to two years’ back pay, and if the employer has over 50 employees, the Commission may impose a fine which gets deposited into the State’s General Fund.<sup>30</sup> The passage of SB166 was a significant step as there is now the opportunity to seek restitution for pay discrimination. Unfortunately, the bill did not require employers to post information in workplaces or make employees aware of the complaint process.

While women make less than men for the same work, income inequality could also be due to the fact that women have fewer opportunities and are often funneled into lower paying occupations and career tracks based on traditional gender roles. Women in Nevada are often employed in hospitality, retail, and entertainment. Jobs in these industries are usually low wage jobs where they are likely to earn minimum wage, which in Nevada is currently only \$9.00 for employees without benefits, or \$8.25 for employees who are offered qualifying health insurance benefits. In the 2019 Nevada Legislative Session, Assembly Bill 456, which went into effect on July 1, 2020, is requiring an increase in the minimum wage

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<sup>28</sup> Erickson, Ryan. February, 2016. Fast Facts: Economic Security for Nevada Families. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/02/16/122483/fast-facts-economic-security-for-nevada-families/>

<sup>29</sup> Kravitz, Courtney. April, 2020. (NOT) Happy Equal Pay Day!. Battle Born Progress. Retrieved from:

<https://battlebornprogress.org/not-happy-equal-pay-day/>

<sup>30</sup> The Nevada Legislature – 80<sup>th</sup> Session. SB 166. Retrieved from: [SB166 Text \(state.nv.us\)](https://legis.nv.gov/legislation.nv.gov?link= bills&bill_id=122483)

in Nevada to \$12 by the year 2024 by raising the minimum wage 75 cents annually.<sup>31</sup> This bill is certainly progress, but does not address the low wages that many Nevadans are living on now, and it is likely that by 2024, \$12 an hour will be an outdated amount. Indeed, returning to the Housing Wage discussion above, a victim-survivor earning just \$9.00 per hour would have to work 97 hours a week in Las Vegas to afford a one bedroom apartment and an impossible 133 hours per week in Reno. A two bedroom apartment at market rates that would house a victim-survivor and their children with decency is clearly out of reach.

Caregiving is another issue. Women are more likely to be the familial caregiver, including birthing/adopting and raising children and taking care of other ill or in need family members. Sadly, though, “Only 19 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers, and just 40 percent have access to personal medical leave through employer-provided short-term disability insurance.”<sup>32</sup> The National Partnership for Women & Families, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works to change policy and culture to achieve equality for all women, graded each individual state based on what they offer employees in terms of paid sick and maternity leave. Without having access to paid leave, including paid maternity leave, women are forced to leave the workforce, leaving behind careers. In comparison Nevada received the grade of F for having no job protections for new parents and no additional benefits beyond the Family and Medical Leave Act.<sup>33</sup> SB 312 of the 2019 session requires employers of 50 or more to provide 40 hours per year of paid leave, it can be used for personal or family; still not enough for maternity leave.

To increase the economic stability of women and decrease their likelihood of becoming victim-survivors of sexual assault, Nevada must value women’s work equally to that of their male counterparts, expand access to paid maternity leave and family leave, and ensure that Nevada’s minimum wage is a livable wage for workers in traditionally low wage paying jobs.

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<sup>31</sup> The Nevada State Legislature – 80<sup>th</sup> Session. AB 456. Retrieved from:

<https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019/Bill/6870/Text>

<sup>32</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families. Paid Leave. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/paid-leave.html#>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER STATES POLICIES

Best practices and practical steps to narrow the wage gap from the Women's Research Institute: <sup>34</sup>

- Form local/regional task forces to track progress of equal pay in Nevada.
- Push companies and organizations to end pay secrecy practices and encourage open discussion of pay among employees.
- End the practice of basing new salaries on a worker's salary history.
- Require state governments and agencies and all contractors to publicly report the details of their gender pay gap.

According to *the Status of Women in the States* report, the top five states for women employment and earnings are (1) The District of Columbia (2) Maryland (3) Massachusetts (4) New Jersey (5) Connecticut. All of these states have adopted various versions of equal pay acts specific to their state. The Maryland Equal Pay for Equal Work Law prohibits all employers from pay discrimination by paying wages to employees of one sex or gender identity at a lesser rate than the wages paid to other employees and prohibits employers from offering less favorable employment opportunities based on gender or identity. Meaning, an employer cannot assign or direct an employee into a less favorable career track, fail to provide information about promotions or advancements or limit or deprive an employee's opportunities that are available to other employees. The Maryland Equal Pay for Equal Work law also states that employers cannot punish or prohibit employees from inquiring about, discussing, or disclosing wages. Employers cannot make employees sign waivers to deny them these rights. If an employee feels that their rights have been violated under this law they can file a complaint through the Maryland Department of Labor and the Commissioner of Labor and Industry will launch and conduct an investigation. <sup>35</sup> Maryland's statute ensures equity in pay and career opportunities and protects the right to discuss compensation without retribution from employers.

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<sup>34</sup> Elyse, Shaw and Heidi Hatmann. June 2019. A Women-Centered Economic Agenda: 8 Policies that Boost the Economy and Work for Everyone. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/a-woman-centered-economic-agenda-8-policies-that-boost-the-economy-and-work-for-everyone/>

<sup>35</sup> Maryland Department of Labor. Equal Pay for Equal Work – Employment Standards of Service (ESS). Retrieved from: <https://www.dllr.state.md.us/labor/wages/equalpay.shtml>

“Research demonstrates that access to paid parental leave is good for business because it is directly tied to employee retention and increased productivity. In addition, when employees have access to paid leave, morale improves and employees show more loyalty toward the company.”<sup>36</sup> If employers were to center the needs of working mothers and offer paid parental leave, those women would be more likely to return to work and excel in their careers, advancing their economic independence and stability. California’s Paid Family Leave (PFL) Program, allows paid benefits for employees who need to take time off, up to 8 weeks, to care for an ill family member, bond with a new child, or to participate in an event because of an immediate family member’s military deployment to a foreign country. The PFL Program will pay employees 60-70% of their income from wages earned 5-18 months prior to taking leave.<sup>37</sup> While the program allows employees the needed time to take off from work, it unfortunately does not guarantee employee retention.

In conjunction with establishing and maintaining job protections, the minimum wage should be increased to keep up with cost of living. Increasing the minimum wage to \$12 per hour would boost wages for 187,000 women in Nevada, and nearly 20 million women nationally. Almost 52% of the workers in Nevada who would be affected by raising the minimum wage to \$12 are women.<sup>38</sup> While many states are increasing their minimum wage, currently only six states offer a minimum wage that is at least \$12 an hour.<sup>39</sup> With the passage AB 456 in the 2019 Legislative Session, Nevada is on track to increase the minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2024, but the fight shouldn’t stop there. With such a dramatic number of women nationally and statewide benefitting from an increase to \$12, imagine how much more economically stable women and their families would be if the minimum wage was increased to \$15. “Enacting a higher minimum wage [\$15] is one of the most surefire paths to lifting the prospects of millions of low-wage workers.”<sup>40</sup> In reality, there will always be low-wage workers in Nevada where much of the work available is in the entertainment and hospitality sectors. One of the ways to ensure that individuals can thrive in Nevada is by enacting a livable minimum wage that increases as the cost of living increases.

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<sup>36</sup> Grant, Jodie, Taylor Hatcher and Nirali Patel. Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Parental Leave Programs. National Partnership for Women and Families. Retrieved from: [https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/79th2017/ExhibitDocument/OpenExhibitDocument?exhibitId=29512&fileDownloadName=0330ab266\\_ParentalLeaveReportMay05.pdf](https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/79th2017/ExhibitDocument/OpenExhibitDocument?exhibitId=29512&fileDownloadName=0330ab266_ParentalLeaveReportMay05.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> State of California Employment Development Department. Paid Family Leave. Retrieved from: [https://edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid\\_Family\\_Leave.htm](https://edd.ca.gov/Disability/Paid_Family_Leave.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Kravitz, Courtney. April, 2020. (NOT) Happy Equal Pay Day! Battle Born Progress. Retrieved from: <https://battlebornprogress.org/not-happy-equal-pay-day/>

<sup>39</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. August 2020. State Minimum Wages|2020 Minimum Wage by State. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> Greenhouse, Steven. 2015. How to Get Low-Wage Workers into the Middle Class. The Atlantic. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/08/fifteen-dollars-minimum-wage/401540/>

## ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES & PUBLIC BENEFITS

### ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES AS PREVENTION

Research suggests that even relatively small infusions of cash, like TANF and SNAP are effective in improving children's academic, health, and economic outcomes.<sup>41</sup> Public benefits can provide economic stability for not only adults, but also children, decreasing their future risk of sexual violence victimization. Social services are not just safety nets, but they can be thought of as launch pads – launching women and children into a better life where they have the opportunity and supports to become financially independent and stable on their own. In addition to cash benefits, access to subsidized child care can be the determining factor in whether or not women can attend college or maintain stable employment, ultimately affecting their economic stability.

### SOCIAL SERVICES IN NEVADA

Nevada operates a variety of social service programs to assist families in need. Government assisted programs include:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)<sup>42</sup>
  - There are five different TANF programs, providing families with financial and self-sufficiency assistance to provide adequate care for dependent children in the home.
  - Each TANF program has stringent qualifications that each family must meet, including the family's assets and incomes.
- Women, Infant and Children Nutrition Program (WIC)<sup>43</sup>
  - A special supplemental nutrition program that serves low income, eligible pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5, who are at nutrition risk.
  - Income-restricted and qualified time frames for mothers as participants – must be pregnant or within one year of giving birth to receive benefits.
- Unemployment Insurance<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Burnside, Ashely and Ife Ford. December 2019. More States Raising TANF Benefits to Boost Families' Economic Security. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/more-states-raising-tanf-benefits-to-boost-families-economic-security>

<sup>42</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Division of Welfare and Supportive Services. TANF Facts and Information. Retrieved from: [https://dwss.nv.gov/TANF/TANF\\_FAQ/](https://dwss.nv.gov/TANF/TANF_FAQ/)

<sup>43</sup> WIC Nevada. About WIC. Retrieved from: <https://nevadawic.org/about/>

<sup>44</sup> Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation. Insurance Facts for Claimants. Retrieved from: [http://ui.nv.gov/PDFS/UI\\_Claimants\\_Handbook.pdf](http://ui.nv.gov/PDFS/UI_Claimants_Handbook.pdf)



- Assists individuals and families with cash benefits to eligible workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own.
- Maximum of 26 weeks of full benefits unless extended by law.
- Benefits are usually around 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the base pay during employment – base pay is calculated by adding all wages earned in the preceding four months leading up to the claim.
- Subsidized childcare <sup>45</sup>
  - Funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) to assist low income families, families receiving public assistance, and those obtaining childcare so they can work.
  - Funds can be used for children from birth until 13 years of age; children over 13 may be covered if they have special needs.
  - Applicants must meet with a case manager to determine eligibility.
  - Eligibility is based off of household income and size, citizenship, and purpose of care.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Provides monthly benefits for individuals and families to help assist with purchasing groceries.
  - Gross income must be at or below 130% of the poverty level.
  - Must complete welfare interview process to prove eligibility.
  - In 2016 only 86% of eligible individuals and families participated in the SNAP program.
- Energy Assistance Program (EAP) <sup>46</sup>
  - Provides qualified low income families with a supplement to assist with home energy – eligible households receive an annual, one-time per year benefits paid directly to their energy provider(s).
  - Program begins on July 1<sup>st</sup> of every year, and applications are taken through June 30<sup>th</sup>.
  - Applicants must have proof of legal citizenship, their lease agreement, proof of identity for head household, proof of all income for every individual living in the home, and copies of the most recent utility bills.

While government assistance programs offer families much needed support, many families are unaware of the programs, or are just outside of the qualifying income brackets. Unfortunately, the benefits ‘cliff’ exists and leaves many struggling families without access

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<sup>45</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Division of Welfare and Supportive Services. Child Care Subsidy Program. Retrieved from: <https://dwss.nv.gov/Care/Childcare/>

<sup>46</sup> Nevada Department of Health and Human Services Division of Welfare and Supportive Services. Energy Assistance Program. Retrieved from: [https://dwss.nv.gov/Energy/1\\_Energy\\_Assistance/](https://dwss.nv.gov/Energy/1_Energy_Assistance/)

to vital assistance programs. As explained in the Indiana Institute for Working Families, “Eligibility for work support programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) are based on income. Generally, eligibility for these programs is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, with benefits phasing out as earnings increase. The unintended consequences in this design mean that an increase in a family’s income can significantly set back a family’s goal towards economic self-sufficiency.”<sup>47</sup> Individuals who are struggling financially and may be close to the benefits cliff may feel inclined to find a lower paying job or turn down a raise or promotion so that they can keep their benefits for the safety of themselves and their families. This is a vicious cycle that may trap individuals in poverty.

In an effort to decrease access barriers, the State of Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services (DWSS) operates Access Nevada, which is a one-stop online portal for individuals to apply for all Nevada government assistance programs for which they qualify, allows them to check the status of their case, and manage their accounts and profiles.<sup>48</sup> Access Nevada is certainly a step in the right direction for Nevada and can help decrease the time to apply for multiple assistance programs for those who can access a computer and internet. : Yet, the explosion in applications for assistance is directly affecting the time to access benefits. The Deputy Administrator of DWSS asked the Nevada Legislature Budget Subcommittee on January 21, 2021 to consider the DWSS budget request for 225 additional staff positions to address caseload growth.<sup>49</sup>

However, this overburdened one-stop shop does not decrease all access barriers; many eligible families do not have stable internet or consistent access to a computer. There are also a number of individuals who may have limited reading and writing capabilities, individuals with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency, for whom the online applications are not accessible. Subsidized child care in particular is an example of limited accessibility. There are only two organizations that process the applications: Las Vegas Urban League and the Children’s Cabinet in Reno. Between the two organizations there are offices located in Las Vegas, Reno, Carson City and Elko. While interviews for subsidized child care can be conducted over the phone, if an individual cannot apply online due to lack

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<sup>47</sup> Indiana Institute for Working Families. 2012. The Cliff Effect: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. Retrieved from: <http://incap.org/documents/iwfw/2012/Cliff%20Effect.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Access Nevada. About Access Nevada. Retrieved from: <https://accessnevada.dwss.nv.gov/public/landing-page>

<sup>49</sup> [https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/welfare-division-requests-more-staff-to-help-with-overwhelming-number-of-applications-for-public-assistance?utm\\_source=The+Nevada+Independent&utm\\_campaign=ba1672c7c6-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2021\\_01\\_18\\_03\\_36\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_15592b5f76-ba1672c7c6-43327829](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/welfare-division-requests-more-staff-to-help-with-overwhelming-number-of-applications-for-public-assistance?utm_source=The+Nevada+Independent&utm_campaign=ba1672c7c6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_01_18_03_36_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_15592b5f76-ba1672c7c6-43327829)

of internet access or necessary language interpretation, the in-person locations are limited and especially difficult to access during the current pandemic.

Along with increasing awareness about social supports and public benefits, there are other measures that Nevada can take to ensure qualified individuals get connected to resources that they need. First, increase the availability and accessibility of offices and advocates who can assist qualified persons in applying for public benefits. For individuals who cannot apply online or need additional supports, such as translation services or disability friendly materials, and for the programs where in-person interviews are preferred, traveling to and from various agencies is not only time consuming, but can be a burden that many families can't afford. The families may not have adequate transportation, or cannot afford public transit, and often don't have child care or the time off of work to complete these applications at multiple locations and within different agencies. It has been found that location of social services does not match the changing demographic compositions of cities.<sup>50</sup> To support low income families, there needs to be an increase in one stop-shop public service agencies, similar to that of the online portal 'Access Nevada'. The Food Bank of Northern Nevada has been working on adopting this principle and their advocates can now help individuals apply for both SNAP and Medicaid assistance at the same time. Secondly, address the qualifying factors and benefits of Nevada social services. For one example, currently in Nevada, if a family reports more than \$6,000 in assets, they are deemed ineligible for support through TANF. This barrier effectively disqualifies many families who would otherwise be eligible. To ensure all needy families can apply, the Nevada Task Force on Financial Security recommends removing the assets limitation for TANF applicants<sup>51</sup> as a step toward equitable distribution of resources.

## BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER STATES POLICIES

Best practices and actions to increase awareness and availability of social supports according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research:<sup>52</sup>

- Simplify applications and eligibility determinations and increase benefit levels for public programs.

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<sup>50</sup> Allard, Scott W. 2004. Access to Social Services the Changing Urban Geography and Poverty and Service Provision. The Brookings Institute. Retrieved from: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20040816\\_allard.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20040816_allard.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Brune, Nancy et al. 2019. A Step Up: Economic and Financial Security for Nevada's Families. Guinn Center. Retrieved from: <https://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Guinn-Brookings-NV-Family-Ec-Report-2019.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Elyse, Shaw and Heidi Hatmann. June 2019. A Women-Centered Economic Agenda: 8 Policies that Boost the Economy and Work for Everyone. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/a-woman-centered-economic-agenda-8-policies-that-boost-the-economy-and-work-for-everyone/>

- Fund informational campaigns so those who need supports know about the programs.

Benefit levels are too low to raise recipients out of poverty and are challenging to increase. For example, between July 2018 and July 2019 just fifteen states increased the amount of monthly benefits distributed to families. While most increases were small, the median state benefit increased from \$450 to \$486. Currently the average monthly benefit for Nevada is \$386 per month just 70% of the national median.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, applicants that receive public benefits often have guidelines for what the benefits can and cannot be used to fund. Ultimately this isn't helpful as each applicant and their family might have unique needs and limiting what the funds and benefits can be used for can end up limiting the effectiveness of the assistance.

College students are also in need and benefit from being connected to social services. Community colleges in 10 states have been partnering with organizations like Single Stop USA to help students with screening and applications for public benefits. "In their evaluation of Single Stop USA, the RAND Corporation found that Single Stop was associated with a material increase in college persistence, and that users of Single Stop attempted schedules with more credits than non-users." <sup>54</sup> Even if women, particularly single mothers, or women of low income, are able to enroll in higher education, without the proper supports and additional help, they may have no other option then to drop out to work a low-wage paying job to support themselves and their families.

One way of ensuring that women are able to participate in the work force and maintain a stable income is by providing affordable and quality childcare. There needs to be strengthened support for working women and their families by offering affordable childcare. In 2018, the federal poverty level for a family of three in the US was \$20,780; if this family were to seek out child care, they would likely pay nearly 88% of their annual income for care of an infant.<sup>55</sup> While child care is wildly expensive for almost all families, low income families are the ones who struggle the most. Child Care Aware, a national organization that works with more than 400 state and local child care resource and referral agencies to create a child care system that effectively serves all families, suggests the following recommendations for enhancing subsidized child care:<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Burnside, Ashley and Liz Schott. February, 2020. State Should Invest More of Their TANF Dollars in Basic Assistance for Families. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/how-states-use-funds-under-the-tanf-block-grant>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Child Care Aware. 2019. The U.S. and the High Price of Child Care. Retrieved from:

<https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

- Reduce work requirements to qualify for subsidized child care. Kansas recently lowered their mandatory work requirement from 28 to 20 hours a week.
- Expand income eligibility. Most states income level must be below 200% federal poverty line. A family of four in Oklahoma qualifies when making \$56,000 and in Maryland eligibility requirement were doubled to \$71,000.

If they have access to subsidized child care, women are more likely to participate in the work force, strengthening their economic stability. “While affordable child care and paid family leave policies have not been directly linked to reductions in SV, the literature suggests they are linked to mothers staying employed, which may be protective against SV victimization, given the links in the literature between unemployment and SV.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Basile PhD, Kathleen C. et al. 2016. STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

### ACCESS TO EDUCATION AS PREVENTION

Education is vital to ensuring that women have access to good paying jobs and have a fair opportunity in the work force. “Degrees are life-changing, especially for women raising children on their own (a disproportionate share of whom are women of color): for every dollar a single mother graduate spends on an associate degree, she and her family get back \$16.45 in increased earnings”<sup>58</sup> Women who obtain a degree or career training are more likely to be better financially situated, and as such, their risk for sexual violence is decreased.

The types of education are also critical. Receiving expansive sex education, which includes information about sexual assault and consent, is one of the most effective ways to prevent sexual violence. “Educating young people is the only true, long-term solution to gender-based violence. However, it must be high-quality, age-appropriate, and evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education.”<sup>59</sup> Without understanding what sexual violence is, individuals are unable to name the act or recognize when they are victims, and puts them at risk for future re-victimization.

### EDUCATION IN NEVADA

Nevada’s K-12 public education system routinely ranks in the bottom tier of U.S. states. In the *2019 Quality Counts Report* by Education Week, Nevada received an overall grade of D- and a ranking of 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation among all 50 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>60</sup> While most Nevada counties are seeing an increase in graduation rates from 2017 to 2019, the state as a whole still only has an overall 84.11% high school graduation rate. For those who do graduate high school, there is a low rate of Nevada high school graduates who enroll in college immediately after graduating. Of the entire Nevada population over 25 years of age, only 86.3% are high school graduates, and of that 86% of high school graduates, 24.2% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Elyse, Shaw and Heidi Hatmann. June 2019. A Women-Centered Economic Agenda: 8 Policies that Boost the Economy and Work for Everyone. Institute for Women’s Policy Research. Retrieved from:

<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-general/a-woman-centered-economic-agenda-8-policies-that-boost-the-economy-and-work-for-everyone/>

<sup>59</sup> UNESCO. 2018. Comprehensive sexuality education to prevent gender-based violence. Retrieved from:

<https://en.unesco.org/news/comprehensive-sexuality-education-prevent-gender-based-violence>

<sup>60</sup> Education Week Research Center. September 2019. Educational Opportunities and Performance in Nevada. Retrieved from:

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/01/16/highlights-report-nevada.html>

<sup>61</sup> United Census Bureau. Nevada Quick Facts. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NV>

To offer additional pathways to graduation, Nevada school districts could strengthen Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. A leading Nevada policy research think tank, the Guinn Center, found “Because CTE dual enrollment programs have shown success in increasing graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment rates, Nevada should consider formalizing a policy that enables students to take CTE enrollment courses at local NSHE institutions. Moreover, CTE courses should be free of charge to students and their families. This policy would likely increase the number of CTE opportunities for students, the number of students who enroll in a CTE program, and the number of students who leave high school better prepared for college and careers.”<sup>62</sup>

Expanding the pathways to a high school diploma can look like:

- (1) Develop two pathways to a diploma instead of a traditional 22.5 credit pathways.
- (2) Expand CTE dual enrollment policies across the state.
- (3) Expand CTE programs in high growth, high wage sectors.
- (4) Expand school district and charter school CTE academies.
- (5) Strengthen guidance and advising programs.

Career and technical training programs are not only a tool to potentially increase K-12 graduation rates, but are also ways to build partnerships, encourage participation in secondary education, engage potential employers, and enhance employment through apprenticeships in fields such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, STEM and computer science, starting in high school.<sup>63</sup>

According to the *Status of Women in the States – Nevada Report*, only 32% of working women in Nevada hold managerial or professional positions which require a 4-year degree and only 24% of women ages 25 and higher have completed a bachelor’s degree in Nevada.<sup>64</sup> In addition to increasing opportunities for K-12 graduation and success, there also needs to be a major focus on making higher education more affordable for Nevadans, particularly women of color. Nevada institutions of higher education should be encouraged to balance merit-based scholarship and needs-based scholarships. Nationwide, in 1995 the majority of institution awards and scholarships went to students in need, but by 2003 that majority shifted to merit-based. This shift has resulted in wealthier students able to get

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<sup>62</sup> Guinn Center. 2017. Stepping Stone. Revisiting High School Graduation Requirements & Strengthening College & Career Pathways in Nevada. Retrieved from: <https://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Guinn-Center-Stepping-Stones-2017-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Perkins Collaborative Resource Network. Career Pathways Systems. Retrieved from: <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/career-pathways-systems>

<sup>64</sup> Status of Women in the State. Nevada – Employment and Earnings. Retrieved from: <https://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/state-data/nevada/#employment-earnings>



more aid than they need, while low-income students are unable to meet even their minimum financial requirements.<sup>65</sup>

The 2019 Legislative Session, Assembly Bill 216 required that the State Treasurer's office create and maintain a scholarship database that is marketed and made readily available to all Nevadans. The intent behind the bill is to increase access to a wide variety of scholarship opportunities. The Nevada Promise Scholarship is a unique scholarship established by the Nevada Legislature for Nevada high school graduates to attend community college. As a last-dollar scholarship, the Nevada Promise Scholarship can cover up to three years of tuition and other mandatory fees not covered by other gift aid. Students who are granted Promise Scholarships are assigned a mentor and must complete ongoing trainings and community service during their scholarship period. Promise Scholarships are designed to make high schools seniors transition into college easier and more successful.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, neither of these resources are well known or utilized.

While education is certainly important, college should not be the only way for women to have the opportunity to become economically stable. There should be an increase in the availability of free or scholarship funded quality job trainings and an increase in mentorships to prepare women for positions in fields such as management or up and coming fields like technology, STEM and trades. A Nevada specific example of scholarship funded job training is the Nevada Women in Trades program. Traditionally a male dominated industry, the Nevada Women in Trades program offers women the scholarship funded job training and mentorship to enter into an apprenticeship into stable and high paying career field. Outside of trades, mentorships can offer women the opportunity to advance within an organization. We know that women are more likely to leave the work force or school to take care of children at home and as such traditionally have less formal experience than men. Mentorships within organizations can help bridge the experience and education gap and offer women the opportunity acquire skills that qualify them for promotions and leadership opportunities.

Additionally, Nevada K-12 schools need to enhance their intervention responses to reported sexual misconduct and strengthen their personal safety education requirements. Without proper and supportive intervention from schools, individuals who experience sexual misconduct in K-12 are more likely to drop-out, greatly increasing their risk factors for future sexual violence victimization. Some progress was recently made through SB 239

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<sup>65</sup> Coker, Crystal and Jennifer Glynn. Making College Affordable. Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.jkcf.org/research/making-college-affordable-providing-low-income-students-with-the-knowledge-and-resources-needed-to-pay-for-college/>

<sup>66</sup> Nevada System of Higher Education. Nevada Promise Scholarship. Retrieved from: <https://nshe.nevada.edu/2018/10/nevada-promise-scholarship-deadline-oct-31/>

of the 2019 Legislative Session in which a school administrator is required to give priority to protecting the victim of reported bullying or cyber-bullying over any interest of an alleged perpetrator when creating and executing a safety plan.<sup>67</sup> It will remain to be seen how well this is implemented when students return to in person instruction in Nevada's middle and high schools. Notably, the need for this statute centered on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students.

Despite SB 239, Nevada law does not require any standardized response to reports of sexual misconduct and each school district is required to draft their own procedures. This lack of standardized procedures results in uneven responses which are often not victim-centered or trauma informed. A recent news story about a reported sexual assault stated that "She [the victim-survivor] was in marching band. Although her alleged assailant wasn't in band, 'he liked hanging out in the band room. Instead of making him stay out of the band room, the solution (provided by the school) was I wasn't going to be in band anymore' she said."<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, this is one of many stories where the victim-survivor is required to change their class schedule, their school, or their activities to avoid their perpetrator. Many individuals who experience some form of sexual misconduct also experience a wide range of academic and behavioral issues. Schools that are not knowledgeable about trauma informed interventions may punish students for these behaviors which negatively affects their success in school as well as sending the message to other students that this is an issue that is not taken seriously.

In 2015, the Nevada Legislature passed Senate Bill 394, which required all Nevada K-12 schools to adopt into their health curricula, age appropriate knowledge about personal safety, including education about abuse and healthy relationships by the year 2020. This is the first school year that personal safety is being taught as part of health education per the Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS). The standards are quite expansive and cover many age appropriate topics about personal safety, including male & female anatomy, identification STIs, illness prevention, understanding differences in sexual orientation and identity, healthy decision making that includes defining & establishing personal boundaries, understanding consent, preventing child and relationship abuse and promoting healthy relationships.<sup>69</sup> It is not however sex education. In Nevada, every parent or guardian must 'opt in' to sex education classes, signing a form allowing their child

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019/Bill/6404/Text#>

<sup>68</sup> Alonzo, Amy. October 2020. Culture of sexual misconduct alleged at Fernley schools. Reno Gazette Journal. Retrieved from: <https://www.rgj.com/story/news/local/mason-valley/2020/10/20/culture-sexual-misconduct-alleged-lyon-county-school-district-fernley-high/5574694002/>

<sup>69</sup> Nevada Department of Education. May 2020. Nevada Academic Content Standards for Health. Retrieved from: [http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/nde.doe.nv.gov/content/Nevada\\_Academic\\_Standards/Health\\_and\\_P\\_E/healthpublicreview.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/nde.doe.nv.gov/content/Nevada_Academic_Standards/Health_and_P_E/healthpublicreview.pdf)

to participate in 'Instruction on the human reproductive system, related communicable diseases and sexual responsibility.'<sup>70</sup> Because of familial beliefs, many children are withheld from sex education and thus are at greater risk, due to lack of knowledge, of some form of sexual misconduct or even violence.

## **BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER STATES POLICIES**

No one would dispute that there has been enormous growth in the use of non-need-based aid at the nation's public and private four-year colleges and universities. But there has been a debate over whether this trend is good or bad for low-income students. Some proponents of enrollment management have argued that colleges are using so-called merit aid to increase the revenues they have to spend on need-based aid. While this may be true at individual colleges, research shows that the increasing availability of merit aid has largely come at the expense of low-income students.

In a study, conducted by researchers at the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, looked at the proportion of Pell Grant recipients at colleges that fund a large number of National Merit Scholarships (NMS) and found an inverse relationship between the two. Schools that increase the share of National Merit Scholars they support tend to reduce the share of Pell Grant recipients they serve. "While our research has focused only on NMS awards, it highlights the tradeoff that may exist more broadly between using institutional grant aid to craft a more selective student body than would otherwise occur and using institutional grant aid to attract more students from families from the lower tail of the family income distribution,"<sup>71</sup> the study's authors wrote.

Using merit aid data from the College Board's "Annual Survey of Colleges," a study published by the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute looked at demographic changes that occurred at 93 private nonprofit colleges that began offering non-need-based financial aid between 1987 and 2005.

The author, found that "the use of merit aid is associated with changes in the socioeconomic and racial composition of the study body." According to the report, within three to five years of introducing a merit aid program, the two top tiers of private colleges saw their share of Pell Grant recipients fall by 6 percentage points. At bottom-tier schools,

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<sup>70</sup> The Nevada State Legislature – 78<sup>th</sup> Session. Senate Bill 394. Retrieved from:

<https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/78th2015/Bill/2018/Text>

<sup>71</sup> Ehrenberg, Ronald G., Liang Zhang, and Jared M. Levin. "[Crafting a Class: The Trade-Off between Merit Scholarships and Enrolling Lower-Income Students](#)." *The Review of Higher Education* 29, 2 (Winter 2006): 195-211.

the proportion of Pell Grant recipients initially rose but ultimately dropped by 2 percentage points within 10 years of the creation of such a program. The study also found that the introduction of a merit aid program led to a reduction in the representation of black students at top-tier schools.

“It is worrisome, given the already low levels of representation of low-income and minority students at four-year colleges, to find that the introduction of a merit aid policy is associated with a decrease in the percentage of low-income and black students, particularly at the more selective institutions in the sample.”<sup>72</sup>

The school climate is another serious issue. The Illinois Ensuring Success in Schools Task Force, a task force created to promote best practices and center the needs of stigmatized youth in Illinois found “Students who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence want to stay in school and graduate, but fear for their safety and well-being often forces them into involuntary homeschooling, forces them to seek alternative programs, or forces them to drop out entirely.”<sup>73</sup> Ensuring proper support requires proper training and procedures. Texas Education Code 37.0831 requires that every school district adopt a procedure around dating violence and must address safety planning, enforcement of protective orders, school-based alternatives to protective orders, training for teachers and administrators, counseling for effected students, and awareness education for students and parents.<sup>74</sup> The Illinois task force suggests that schools adopt the following school policies to ensure victim-survivors of sexual misconduct can succeed in school:

- Exempt victim-survivors from minimum attendance requirements
- Allow victim-survivors to make up missed class work and homework
- Provide necessary in-school accommodations – including a safety plan
- Honor any protection order or no contact order
- Treat school disciplinary procedures separately from findings in the criminal justice system
- Require schools place the burden of making changes on the perpetrator to avoid further victimizing the victim-survivor<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Keeping Up with the Joneses: Institutional Changes Following the Adoption of a Merit Aid Policy*. June 2009, Published by the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, Cornell University.

<sup>73</sup> Illinois Ensuring Success in School Task Force. June 2010. Final Report to the Illinois General Assembly. Retrieved from: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ess-task-force-final-report0610.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Texas Constiution and Statutes. Education Code 37.0831. Retrieved from: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/StatutesByDate.aspx?code=ED&level=SE&value=37.0831&date=5/22/2015>

<sup>75</sup> Illinois Ensuring Success in School Task Force. June 2010. Final Report to the Illinois General Assembly. Retrieved from: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ess-task-force-final-report0610.pdf>

There are many life and social factors that increase an individual's risk of sexual violence victimization, but learning about what consent looks like and being able to name what constitutes sexual violence may be helpful in preventing future violence. "Pre-college comprehensive sexuality education, including skills-based training in refusing unwanted sex, may be an effective strategy for preventing sexual assault in college. Sexual assault prevention needs to begin earlier; successful prevention before college should complement prevention efforts once students enter college." <sup>76</sup>In May of 2019, California passed the Healthy Youth Act, which is an opt-out comprehensive sex education law that requires students to be taught age appropriate definitions and meanings of sexual assault, sexual harassment, sex trafficking, and also includes LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials. <sup>77</sup> Unless there is a written form signed by parents excluding their child from sex education, all students will automatically receive sexual health education.

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<sup>76</sup> Santelli, J. S., Grilo et al. 2018. Does sex education before college protect students from sexual assault in college?. *PloS*. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205951>

<sup>77</sup> Washburn, David. May, 2019. California Approves New Guidance for Teaching Sex Education. EdSource. Retrieved from: <https://edsource.org/2019/california-approves-new-guidance-for-teaching-sex-education/612169>

## ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH EQUITY

### ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AS PREVENTION

Access to healthcare is important to all individuals in ensuring they can live healthy lives. While there is no direct correlation between medical intervention and a reduction in re-victimization, we do know that individuals who experience sexual violence are at heightened risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, which are risk factors for future violence. If healthcare professionals are taught how to ask proper questions to gauge an individual's risk of sexual violence, and to connect them to local advocacy organizations or other resources they can play an important role in prevention. The health care costs that a victim-survivor of sexual violence accumulates over their life time can be a limiting factor to them achieving economic stability. Having access to health care, especially through access to health, insurance can reduce this risk.

### HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH EQUITY IN NEVADA

Unfortunately, not all victim-survivors in Nevada, nor those with elevated risk for sexual violence, have easy, affordable, or equitable access to health care professionals. The Nevada Medical Center, a collaboration bringing together leaders from all industries to strengthen Nevada's healthcare system, produces an annual *Healthcare Report Card*. In the 2019 report, Nevada's overall grade was is a D.<sup>78</sup> The current percentage of the population with health insurance is only 88.8%, with the 6<sup>th</sup> highest rate of uninsured individuals in the nation. While those who are uninsured span all demographics, including social and economic, those who are young adults, Latinos, and have lower education and income levels are disproportionately represented amongst the uninsured.<sup>79</sup> Nevada's population has been increasing and growing at a rate that our infrastructures and systems cannot keep pace. "The magnitude of growth has impacted our healthcare system and created gaps in healthcare access for Nevadans. Healthcare access gaps directly affect health outcomes in Nevada and create disparities within the population."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Nevada Medical Center. 2019. Healthcare Report Card 2019. Retrieved from: [Healthcare Report Card 2019 - Nevada Medical Center \(nvmedicalcenter.org\)](https://nvmedicalcenter.org/healthcare-report-card-2019/)

<sup>79</sup> Guinn Center. Nevada's Uninsured Population. Retrieved from: <https://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Guinn-Center-NV-Uninsured-Population-abridged.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> Nevada Medical Center. Healthcare Report Card. Retrieved from: <https://nvmedicalcenter.org/nevada-healthcare-statistics/healthcare-access/>

While Nevada does offer Medicaid for low income families, to qualify, applicants must have a household income not more than 138% of the federal poverty level. This is roughly \$16,753 per year for an individual, or \$34,638 per year for a family of four.<sup>81</sup> Pregnant women in Nevada whose household income is less than 165% of the federal poverty level can qualify for Medicaid. Unfortunately, though, Medicaid for pregnant women only covers a woman up until 60 days' post-partum. While this can help support birthing persons and their newborn child, many serious complications can occur between 6 weeks and one-year after birth.<sup>82</sup> Birthing persons who are low income, and who do not qualify for traditional Medicaid or cannot afford private insurance on their own run the risk of becoming economically disadvantaged if they were to experience any medical problems following child birth. Families who do qualify for enrollment for Nevada Medicaid have to apply during the open enrollment period which usually takes place from November 1<sup>st</sup> – January 15<sup>th</sup>. But if they miss open enrollment, they are left without insurance until the next enrollment period.

Additionally, women of color and communities of color often experience greater health disparities and have bigger barriers in accessing equitable health care. Health equity can be defined as “the absence of systematic and potentially changeable differences in health (or in major social determinants of health) between socially, economically, demographically, or geographically defined populations.”<sup>83</sup> Social determinants of health, heavily influenced and effected by economic stability and access to health care, greatly impact the overall health and wellbeing of individuals. Because of impacts of social detrainments of health and the historical mistreatment of women of color, communities of color often experience negative health consequences. The National Academy of Science reported, “For racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, health disparities take on many forms, including higher rates of chronic disease and premature death compared to the rates among whites.”<sup>84</sup> In Nevada, roughly 26.1% of our population identifies as a race

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<sup>81</sup> Nevada Health Link. What is Medicaid? Retrieved from: <https://www.nevadahealthlink.com/start-here/about-the-aca/medicaid/>

<sup>82</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 2019. Vital Signs – Pregnancy-related Deaths. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/maternal-deaths/index.html>

<sup>83</sup> Rudolph, L., Caplan, J., Ben-Moshe, K., & Dillon, L. 2013. Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Governments.: American Public Health Association and Public Health Institute. Retrieved from: [http://www.phi.org/wp-content/uploads/migration/uploads/files/Health in All Policies-A Guide for State and Local Governments.pdf](http://www.phi.org/wp-content/uploads/migration/uploads/files/Health_in_All_Policies-A_Guide_for_State_and_Local_Governments.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Health and Medicine Division; Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice; Committee on Community-Based Solutions to Promote Health Equity in the United States; Baciu A, Negussie Y, Geller A, et al., editors. 2017. Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity. National Academies Press (US). Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425844/>



other than white<sup>85</sup> meaning that close to 1/4<sup>th</sup> of our population is at risk for developing higher rates of chronic illness with the potential impact to their earning ability and thus ability to obtain affordable health care. In Nevada it is estimated that 21% percent of the state population has some form of medical debt in collections, which is significantly higher than the 16% national average. And for Nevada communities of color it is even higher with 26% of the population having medical debt in collections.<sup>86</sup>

## **BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER STATES' POLICIES**

Efforts to address access to healthcare and health equity for survivors of sexual violence revolve around four key issues –knowledge, accessibility, affordability and collaboration. For many at-risk individuals, a health care professional might be the first to notice and observe the individuals' risk, and could offer support or a warm hand-off to a local advocacy agency that can assist with safety planning and proper intervention. For others, lack of insurance or the financial ability to pay insurance premiums or the cost of medical care can reduce access. By limiting an individual's access to affordable health care, there is the potential of limiting an at-risk individual from receiving proper intervention. Healthcare is essential for all individuals, especially those who are at risk of experiencing sexual violence or have already experienced sexual violence.

By making insurance affordable and easier to obtain, the Affordable Care Act allows survivors of violence to have access to services that would treat their abuse and many of the resulting conditions of that abuse before they worsen. Victims of violence and abuse were specifically included in several new protections and programs, and the law opened the door to integrating violence and abuse prevention into public health programs, research priorities, and adolescent health initiatives.

Futures Without Violence, a health and social justice organization focusing on training professionals (including healthcare) to improve responses to violence and abuse states, "Health centers and DV/SA advocacy programs are natural partners given their shared mission to improve the health, wellness, and safety of their clients."<sup>87</sup> They have released guidance for health care professionals suggesting the following:

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<sup>85</sup> United States Census Bureau. Nevada – Quick Facts. Retrieved from:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NV>

<sup>86</sup> Usufzy, Pashtana. February 2020. Nevadans with medical debt hit with murky collection practices. Nevada Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.nevadacurrent.com/2020/02/26/nevadans-with-medical-debt-hit-with-murky-collection-practices/>

<sup>87</sup> Futures Without Violence. 2017. Prevent, Assess and Respond: A Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Toolkit for Health Centers & Domestic Violence Programs. Retrieved from: <https://ipvhealthpartners.org/>

- Build partnerships amongst health care centers and domestic and sexual violence advocacy programs to establish regional multidisciplinary care team/approach.
- Prepare practices to be trauma-informed: create and update policies and protocols around domestic and sexual violence.
- Adopt evidence-based intervention: educate all clients about sexual violence and health outcomes. Be a safe space for victim-survivors to have confidential conversations, obtain education and empowerment and offer support.
- Train all staff on the key elements of violence prevention and intervention.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Futures Without Violence. 2017. Prevent, Assess and Respond: A Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Toolkit for Health Centers & Domestic Violence Programs. Retrieved from: <https://ipvhealthpartners.org/>

## CONCLUSION

While prevention of sexual violence is daunting, Nevada is capable of taking practical steps to that end. Centering economic justice for women and children in Nevada is not only an achievable way to prevent sexual violence, it is likely to have other positive impacts on the economy and our communities. It is also clear that these priority areas cannot be addressed or advanced in silos. Each priority area is intertwined within one another. For example, a young, single mother of color who is enrolled in college while working part time at a minimum wage job, cannot stay in school without her scholarship or her connection to and support from public benefits and subsidized child care. Conversely, if she is able to stay in school and finish her degree, she is more likely to obtain a higher paying job, and potentially be put into a career path of obtaining leadership and management roles within her organization, therefore increasing her annual pay. Because of her education and ability to obtain a high paying career, she is now able to afford safe housing and health insurance for her and her children, mitigating the risk of sexual violence victimization. Another example is a low income high school student who struggles with traditional school. She enters into a career and technical training program for a construction trade. She then gets connections to future employers who help mentor her as she finds apprenticeships, and eventually gets offered a union job where she is able to afford safe and affordable housing, and gets health benefits through her employers.

Economic justice is intertwined with sexual violence prevention. Organizations, agencies, and policy makers statewide must center these needs and work towards creating a Nevada that provides economic opportunities to women and children as another way of preventing future sexual violence. Following are a series of next steps that NCEDSV will pursue:

### HOUSING:

- Work with established housing stakeholders to ensure victim-survivor voices and violence prevention are included when identifying statewide or regionally specific target goals to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing.
- Work with every public housing authority in Nevada to give victim-survivors fleeing sexual assault and domestic violence preference points for housing applications as issued by HUD in the *VAWA Guidance*.

### WORKPLACE EQUITY AND JOB ACCESS

- Work to insure that all employees in Nevada are made aware of their protections against employment discrimination and the complaint process through the Nevada Equal Rights Commission.

- Advocate for paid maternity and family leave that includes job protections for all Nevada employees.
- Advocate for increases to Nevada's minimum wage to ensure that all women have access to a livable wage to provide for themselves and their families.

#### **ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES & PUBLIC BENEFITS**

- Advocate for increased marketing and outreach about public benefits and assistance programs, including specific information on where and how to apply.
- Expand Access Nevada and related approach by working with government agencies, community organizations and advocates to create a universal application process across all social service programs, and allow non-traditional organizations, including Colleges and Universities to assist with applications.
- Advocate to raise benefit levels and to ensure the 'benefits cliff' is mitigated so that women can remain in the workforce with access to critical benefits while their incomes increase.

#### **ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

- Advocate for expanded access to academic, career and technical education for Nevada's girls and women.
- Advocate for a balance in merit and income based aid and scholarships.
- Advocate for enhanced policy responses to reported sexual misconduct that are victim-centered and do not mandate reporting to law enforcement before school-based responses are enacted.
- Advocate for expansive sex education with 'opt out' requirements in Nevada schools.

#### **ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH EQUITY**

- Advocate for cross sector relationships, addressing access to Medicaid, health equity for minority communities, and the burden of cost of health care throughout the state.
- Advocate for the expansion of the Affordable Care Act including enhancing protections and prevention programs.
- Partner with local Federally Qualified Health Centers and other health care access points, such as rural hospitals, statewide to promote collaboration and trauma informed prevention and intervention to address the unique health needs of survivors of violence and promote prevention.