

# THE WOMANIFESTO

A Nonpartisan Voter Handbook for Everyone  
Who Wants to Strengthen Colorado

**wo·man·i·fes·to**

*noun: a public proclamation of policy goals, intentions,  
or views, especially one issued before an election;  
a policy statement or platform*



**The Women's  
Foundation of Colorado**

Women Thriving. Colorado Rising.®

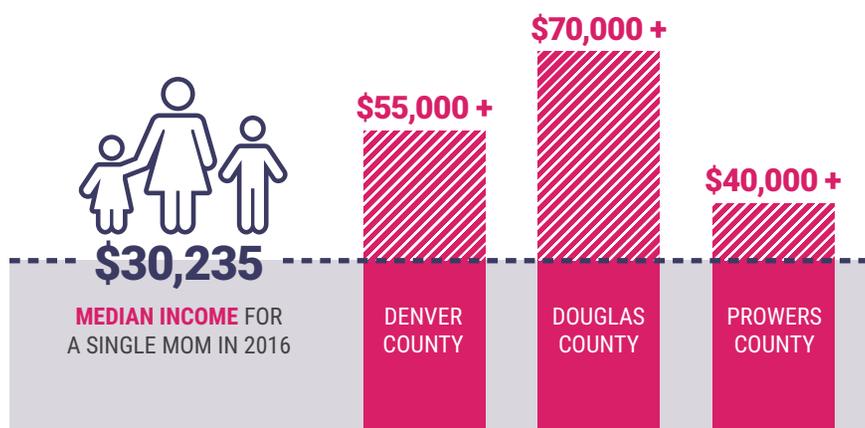
# I. Executive Summary

Imagine a single, working mother of a preschooler and a school-aged child. To cover the costs of basic needs, including child care, rent, food, and transportation, she must make over \$55,000 in Denver County, over \$70,000 in Douglas County, and over \$40,000 in Prowers County.<sup>1</sup> However, the median income for a single mom in Colorado in 2016 was \$30,235, far below what's needed to make ends meet.<sup>2</sup> A small, unexpected change can have seismic consequences. A 10% increase in rent, a car that breaks down, or an aging parent who needs extra care and support, is enough to push her into debt and financial turmoil. Achieving economic security provides freedom from fear of an unanticipated expense, to make choices and progress, and to prepare for the future.

The Women's Foundation of Colorado knows that hardworking Colorado women of all backgrounds juggle many roles and responsibilities, professionally and personally. Women are business leaders and employees; mothers, sisters, and daughters; community leaders, role models, and advocates; caretakers and breadwinners. WFCO believes all women deserve respect, opportunity, and support.

## SINGLE MOM WITH TWO CHILDREN: COSTS OF BASIC NEEDS

Including Child Care, Rent, Food, and Transportation



When economic opportunities improve for women, their families, communities, and the entire economy rise.

- When more women participate in the workforce, wages for women *and* men increase.<sup>3</sup>
- Women reinvest their earnings into families and communities at higher rates than men.<sup>4</sup>
- Companies with greater gender diversity have better financial performance.<sup>5</sup>
- If Colorado women had earned the same as comparable men in 2014, the poverty rate for all working women would have been cut in half and the state economy would have grown by an additional \$9.2 billion.<sup>6</sup>

## IF COLORADO WOMEN HAD EARNED THE SAME AS COMPARABLE MEN IN 2014



Our state and our economy can be strengthened by advancing common-sense, practical policies that create opportunities for women to reach their full potential and remove the barriers standing in the way of their progress. One bill can positively or negatively impact hundreds of thousands of women and families statewide.

We invite and encourage all voters, elected officials, and candidates to consider the following policy solutions that will help women, and Colorado, thrive. We also encourage you to share [The Womanifesto](#).

# II. Introduction

## POLICY PRIORITIES

### ELEVATE CHILD CARE

Advance policies that put high-quality child care within reach for working families.

Improving access and affordability of high-quality child care promotes women’s participation in the workforce, women’s abilities to support their families, and fulfillment of employers’ current and future labor demands.

### MAKE WORK WORK

Pursue policies that make work work for everyone, such as establishing systems for paid family and medical leave insurance for all workers and standards for earning paid sick time, raising wage standards, and prohibiting gender- and race-based discrimination.

Including and supporting all workers benefits employers, the workforce, and the entire economy with improved workforce stability and productivity, and broader economic growth.

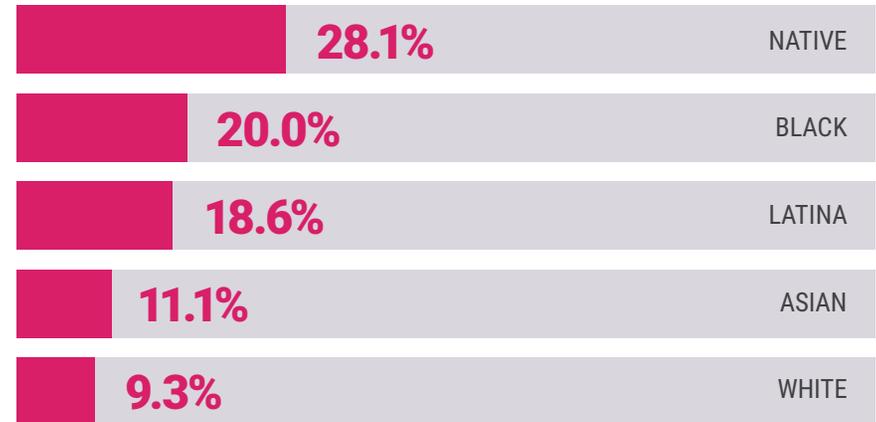
### PROPEL OPPORTUNITY

Strengthen policies that propel educational and professional opportunities for women.

Promoting opportunities for women to prepare for and succeed in careers that pay livable wages advances economic growth for individual women, families, employers, and the state as a whole.

According to *U.S. News & World Report Best States 2018*, Colorado has the number one economy in the country.<sup>7</sup> Indexed on growth, employment, and business environment, we rank ahead of all 49 other states.<sup>8</sup> Women comprise 46% of the Colorado workforce and, therefore, play a significant role in our state’s economic strength.<sup>9</sup> Yet, despite the headlines, not all Coloradans are positively impacted by the state’s economic growth. In fact, women in Colorado are more likely to live in poverty than men, and even though earnings rise as men and women attain higher levels of education, poverty rates are higher for women than men at every level of educational attainment.<sup>10</sup> Women of color also experience much higher rates of poverty than their white peers, with 11.1% of Asian women, 18.6% of Latinas, 20.0% of black women, and 28.1% of Native women in Colorado living in poverty, compared to 9.3% of white women.<sup>11</sup>

### WOMEN OF COLOR EXPERIENCE HIGHER RATES OF POVERTY THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS



## III. The Barriers and Challenges Women Face

Many Colorado families depend on women's earnings to ensure their economic security and stability. Between 2011 and 2013, women were the co- or sole breadwinners in 45.2% of Colorado households with children under 18.<sup>12</sup> A recent report found that it takes two wage earners, with at least one in a professional occupation, for Colorado families to make it into the middle class.<sup>13</sup> In addition to pay disparities, Colorado women face the rising costs and inaccessibility of quality child care, housing, education and workforce training, transportation, physical and mental healthcare, and other key services that contribute toward their economic security.

Women's economic success greatly influences the success of their children, their families, their communities, and the economy as a whole. When we implement policies that optimize women's economic growth, we build a better Colorado for us all.

We encourage you to use this voter handbook as you create your own platform – whether you are a candidate, an elected official, or a community member, in 2018 and beyond.

Every day, Colorado women of varying backgrounds and identities encounter tough challenges as they work hard to support themselves and their families and advance in their careers. High costs for necessities such as child care, housing, and health insurance can devour family budgets. Twenty-two percent of employed single mothers live in poverty<sup>14</sup> and single-parent families headed by women experience hunger disproportionately.<sup>15</sup>

With the average annual cost of child care for a baby at over \$15,000, a safe and secure place for a little one to learn while her mother goes to work is out of reach for too many families.<sup>16</sup> The rapidly rising cost of rent and limited availability of affordable housing forces some women and their families to double up in cramped spaces or leave beloved communities.

As skyrocketing housing costs require women to move farther from their jobs and children's schools, they face ever-lengthening commutes and often must navigate inadequate and expensive public transportation systems. These barriers and challenges are especially pronounced for women of color and their families, who face greater pay gaps<sup>17</sup>, are more likely to live in child care deserts and struggle to find and afford quality child care,<sup>18</sup> and are more vulnerable to being displaced by the lack of quality affordable housing.<sup>19</sup>

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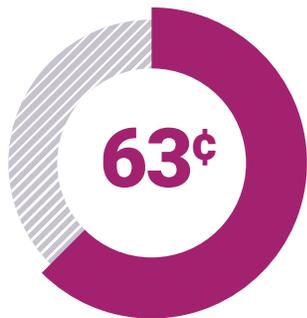
## IV. Policy Solutions for Women (and Colorado) to Thrive

Women are working hard, often in more than one job, but struggle to get ahead because their jobs don't pay livable wages, and they can't access paid sick time or paid leave when they need it. Mothers in Colorado earn 75 cents on the dollar when compared to the typical salaries of fathers.<sup>20</sup> The gender wage gap stubbornly remains even as women gain years of experience and earn advanced degrees across different fields, and many researchers attribute the roots of the gap to sexism.<sup>21</sup> The wage gaps for women of color are even more pronounced, with black women working full time, year-round earning 63 cents for every dollar their white male counterparts make, and Latinas earning 54 cents for every dollar their white male colleagues earn.<sup>22</sup>

While not every woman faces each of these obstacles, even a small combination of these hurdles can prevent a hardworking woman from reaching economic security. Our policy priorities will strengthen pathways to economic prosperity by giving all women a step up over barriers.

At WFCO, policy priorities guide our advocacy work and we count on diverse partners, legislative champions, and our key stakeholders to ensure that effective policies are created and passed to help women advance economically. We hope that the following policies will be considered by community members when completing their ballots and addressed by elected officials in the near future. It is vital that together we advocate for women and their families as we work for a thriving Colorado.

### WAGE GAPS FOR WOMEN OF COLOR Earnings for Every Dollar Their White Male Counterparts Make



BLACK WOMEN WORKING FULL TIME



LATINAS WORKING FULL TIME



#### The Women's Foundation of Colorado applies our gender-lens expertise to the following public policy priorities

- Address root causes of poverty and promote economic security
- Advance opportunities to achieve a livable wage and pay equity
- Expand access to work supports, training, and education
- Improve Colorado's tax and budget policies to allow for sufficient resources to be dedicated to WFCO priorities
- Promote and protect issues and rights aligned with the core values of The Women's Foundation of Colorado

## ELEVATE CHILD CARE

**Improving access and affordability of high-quality child care promotes women’s participation in the workforce, women’s abilities to support their families, and fulfillment of employers’ current and future labor demands. Policies that put high-quality child care within reach for working families strengthen our state economy now and for the future by:**

- Ensuring mothers of young children can work to support their families<sup>23</sup>
- Promoting women’s workforce participation to help meet employers’ labor needs<sup>24</sup>
- Developing a strong foundation for long-term health, educational, and economic success in our state’s youngest children, who will be our future workforce, business leaders, and community leaders<sup>25</sup>
- Stabilizing and strengthening the child care and early education sector, which generates more than 32,000 jobs in Colorado and \$1.4 billion in sales and services annually<sup>26</sup>

**To realize these economic benefits for Colorado women, families, businesses, and the entire state, WFCO advocates for:**

- Investment in child care assistance programs and high-quality early education, including full-day kindergarten, full funding of the Colorado Preschool Program to serve all eligible four-year-olds, support for quality care and education in all provider settings, and family-friendly policies that improve access to such resources
- Targeted tax credits that advance equity and improve outcomes for women and their families by helping families afford high-quality child care, promoting investments in the child care and early education sector, and improving the economic security of its predominately female workforce
- Innovative solutions to enhance and support the preparation, recruitment, retention, professional development, entrepreneurship, and compensation of the early childhood workforce
- Replication of successful models such as the [Denver Preschool Program](#) and [Child Care Assistance Program](#) in Pitkin County that subsidize early care and learning

## MAKE WORK WORK

**Including and supporting all workers benefits employers, the workforce, and the entire economy with improved workforce stability and productivity, and broader economic growth. Policies that make work work for everyone benefit our state economy now and for the future by:**

- Improving workforce stability and reducing turnover, which saves employers money<sup>27</sup>
- Boosting productivity in the workplace<sup>28</sup>
- Encouraging women to return to work after a period of leave, which leads to higher earnings<sup>29</sup>
- Improving health and economic outcomes for children and mothers in the short- and long-term<sup>30</sup>
- Closing pay gaps based on gender and race, which could drive statewide economic growth on the order of \$9.2 billion and reduce the poverty rate for working women by half<sup>31</sup>
- Tapping into the broad economic benefits of more inclusive and equitable workplaces, including higher financial returns and increased innovation<sup>32</sup>
- Reducing state spending on safety net services by promoting individual retirement savings<sup>33</sup>

**To realize these economic benefits for Colorado women, families, businesses, and the entire state, WFCO advocates for:**

- Establishing a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance system
- Creating a statewide standard for earning and accessing paid sick time
- Prohibiting gender- and identity-based employment discrimination and ensuring tools are in place to prevent gender-based and race-based pay disparities and promote equal pay
- Raising wage standards
- Offering tools and incentives to help Coloradans, especially those without employer-based retirement accounts, save for retirement
- Modernizing infrastructure to improve physical and virtual access to work

## V. What's Next? What Can You Do?

### PROPEL OPPORTUNITY

**Promoting opportunities for women to prepare for and succeed in careers that pay livable wages advances economic growth for individual women, families, employers, and the state as a whole. Policies that propel opportunities for women benefit Colorado now and for the future by:**

- Equipping women to meet employers' skilled-labor demand and promoting higher levels of workforce participation among women<sup>34</sup>
- Improving women's earning potential<sup>35</sup>
- Preparing Colorado to navigate technological advances that transform our economy and the ways people work in the transition to the digital economy
- Building pathways to economic security for more women
- Empowering women to further their educations and careers by choosing whether or when to start a family, which results in significant cost savings for individuals and the state<sup>36</sup>

**To realize these economic benefits for Colorado women, families, businesses, and the entire state, WFCO advocates for:**

- Replicating and expanding existing two-generation strategies (a two-generation approach focuses on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both children and the adults in their lives together) to support parents as employees and caregivers while also ensuring children's needs are met, such as the **Strengthening Working Families Initiative**<sup>37</sup> that helps parents pursue postsecondary education to prepare for in-demand jobs and navigate child care resources<sup>38</sup>
- Improving women's affordable, equitable access to and successful completion of postsecondary education and apprenticeships, especially for education and training for in-demand careers that pay livable wages
- Investing in job skills training resources that prepare women for the work of today and tomorrow
- Maintaining state investments in the **Colorado Family Planning Program** to ensure women can access a full range of family planning resources, including long-acting reversible contraception<sup>39</sup>

For a better future for all Coloradans, we encourage you to share **The Womanifesto** so others can also learn more about ways to strengthen economic opportunity for women and their families. As an elected official, we urge you to consider these policy recommendations in your own policy platform. We encourage business leaders to use this resource as you make internal decisions related to pay, policies, and benefits to enhance the vitality of your business and workforce. It is critical for individuals to consider these policies carefully as voters and constituents. Together, we can prioritize the smart investments in women that cultivate promise, advance opportunities to realize potential, and yield dividends for generations. Together, we can improve our tax and budget policies to ensure Colorado can invest in stronger communities for us all.

Together, we can make sure that women and Colorado thrive.

**We invite conversation about the recommendations included here. Please contact our programs team for questions and discussion:**

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## VI. About The Women's Foundation of Colorado

Since our founding in 1987 as the only statewide community foundation focused on advancing and accelerating economic opportunities for Colorado women and their families, nearly 70,000 gifts from generous donors have fueled our work, which includes more than 30 research reports, the passage of nearly 50 pieces of legislation, and grants totaling more than \$18 million to nonprofit organizations throughout Colorado that support and align with our mission. A 501c3, nonpartisan public foundation based in Denver, we work in communities throughout the state with diverse stakeholders (individuals, businesses and corporations, nonprofit organizations, and elected officials) who are committed to ensuring all women in Colorado, regardless of background or identity, can achieve economic security.

## VII. Acknowledgements

The *Womanifesto* is based on WFCO's more than 30 years of experience and research, combined with the knowledge of almost 70 diverse reviewers across the political spectrum. We are grateful for the valuable input from reviewers from across Colorado who generously contributed their time and expertise to help develop this handbook. To learn more about the reviewers, please visit [wfc.org/womanifesto](http://wfc.org/womanifesto).

Additionally, we learn daily from our 23 grantee partners who comprise our *WAGES (Women Achieving Greater Economic Security) cohort* and their deep understanding of the issues Colorado women face through their work providing opportunities in local communities and at the systemic policy level. Through our cohort we learn of the key issues challenging Colorado families and how they can be addressed to advance and accelerate women on the path to economic security. Direct-service grantees provide career-focused training and education, employment navigation, and holistic supports to ensure needs are met for the women they serve and their families. Public policy grantees advocate for changes to our state-level systems, improving opportunities for women to pursue education, training, employment, and access the resources they need to make progress on the path to economic security, such as affordable, high-quality child care; equitable pay; and paid family leave.

Our *WAGES* public policy work is made possible with the support of the Women's Funding Network; WomenGive – United Way of Larimer County; The Chambers Fund, a donor-advised fund held at The Women's Foundation of Colorado; and our generous donors.

- <sup>1</sup> *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2015*
- <sup>2</sup> *Census Data Historical Income Tables: Families*
- <sup>3</sup> *When More Women Join the Workforce, Wages Rise – Including for Men*
- <sup>4</sup> *Thriving Communities*
- <sup>5</sup> *Engineering the Future: The Socio-Economic Case for Gender Equality*
- <sup>6</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2015*
- <sup>7</sup> *U.S. News & World Report Economy Rankings*
- <sup>8</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2018*
- <sup>9</sup> *Colorado Department of Local Affairs Data: Labor Force*
- <sup>10</sup> *State of Working Colorado 2017 Edition*
- <sup>11</sup> *Poverty Rates State by State, 2016*
- <sup>12</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2015*
- <sup>13</sup> *Colorado's Middle Class Families*
- <sup>14</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2018*
- <sup>15</sup> *Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger*
- <sup>16</sup> *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2017*
- <sup>17</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2018*
- <sup>18</sup> *Child Care Deserts*
- <sup>19</sup> *Gentrification Study: Mitigating Involuntary Displacement*
- <sup>20</sup> *Motherhood Wage Gap for Mothers Overall: 2016 State Rankings*
- <sup>21</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2015*
- <sup>22</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2018*
- <sup>23</sup> *Parents Will Do More Good with an Effective Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit*
- <sup>24</sup> *A Humble Proposal to Help Working Parents*
- <sup>25</sup> *Parents Will Do More Good with an Effective Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit*
- <sup>26</sup> *Bearing the Cost of Early Care and Education in Colorado: An Economic Analysis*
- <sup>27</sup> *Paid Sick Days Benefit Employers, Workers, and the Economy*
- <sup>28</sup> *Paid Sick Days Benefit Employers, Workers, and the Economy*
- <sup>29</sup> *Paid Parental Leave in the United States*
- <sup>30</sup> *The Child Development Case for a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Program*
- <sup>31</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2015*
- <sup>32</sup> *Gender Equity in Colorado's Stem Industries: The Case for Focused Workforce Investment*
- <sup>33</sup> *AARP Utah Commissions Study on Cost of Retiring Poor in the State*
- <sup>34</sup> *The Role of Gender Equity in Mobilizing Colorado's Untapped Talent*
- <sup>35</sup> *The Economic Status of Women in Colorado 2015*
- <sup>36</sup> *Taking the Unintended out of Pregnancy: Colorado's Success with Long-Acting Reversible Contraception*
- <sup>37</sup> *Strengthening Working Families Initiative*
- <sup>38</sup> *What is 2Gen?*
- <sup>39</sup> *Taking the Unintended out of Pregnancy: Colorado's Success with Long-Acting Reversible Contraception*



**OUR MISSION**

**WFCO.ORG**

Catalyzing community to advance and accelerate economic opportunities for Colorado women and their families.