

## **The Status of Women in West Virginia Report: What Did We Learn? What Do We Do Now?**

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The 132-page *Status of Women in West Virginia* report is part of a series that began in 1996, when the Institute for Women's Policy Research, a nonpartisan independent not-for-profit scientific research organization, initiated its Status of Women in the States study.<sup>2</sup> The study provides comparative data for the fifty states and the District of Columbia in the areas of political participation, employment and earnings, social and economic autonomy, reproductive rights, and health and well-being. The report is based on data that can be acquired for each state, so it relies heavily on data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and other sources including the reports of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers-The State University of New Jersey, the Council of State Governments, Annual Demographic Files from the Current Population Survey, the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, among other sources.

The staff of the IWPR, under the leadership of Dr. Amy B. Caiazza, prepared the report with the assistance of the West Virginia Advisory Committee. The West Virginia Advisory Committee is a group of women from around the state who reviewed the report, wrote sidebars/focus boxes about West Virginia issues, and compiled the list of resources for the state at the end of the report. The advisory committee

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<sup>1</sup>One version of this paper will appear in the *West Virginia Public Affairs Reporter* in the winter of 2003, and we are grateful to Dr. Robert Dilger, director of the WVU Institute for Public Affairs, for his support in distributing information about the report and for his permission to use materials here that are similar to those printed in the *West Virginia Public Affairs Reporter*.

was also responsible for soliciting co-sponsorships for the report. Advisory committee members, in addition to the authors as co-chairs, were Adrienne B. Biesemeyer, Mildred Bright, Bettijane Burger, Susan Burt, Charlene Byrd, Phyllis Carter, Dinah Courier, Chris Hedges, Judy Higgs, Susan Julian, Cinda Kinsey, Susan Landis, C. Jane Moran, Ivin Lee, Diane Reese, Judith Seaman, Clare Sulgit, Linda Tate, and Debra Weinstein.

IWPR has published forty-two state reports to date, along with biennial summary reports entitled *The Status of Women in the States*. Major funding for the study has come from the Ford Foundation. *The Status of Women in West Virginia* can be downloaded from the IWPR web site at [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org) or ordered from IWPR at 1707 L Street, NW, Suite 750, Washington, D.C., 20036. The phone number is 202-785-5100, and the fax is 202-833.4362. Since this paper can only begin to touch the complexity of issues, we encourage you to examine the report in full.

### **The Status of Women in West Virginia**

It is important to keep in mind some of the basic demographic data about West Virginia women that could impact the findings of this report. West Virginia women are older than the national average, with an average age of 40.2 years compared to the national average of 36.6 years. The percentage of females who lived in metropolitan areas in 1990 was only 52.5 percent, compared to a national average of 83.1 percent. The proportion of women aged 21 to 64 with a disability was 20.4 percent, compared to just 13.9 percent nationally (2001 data). In 2000, fewer women 15 and older were single (19.0 percent compared to 24.4 percent nationally), but more were widowed (13.3 percent compared to 10.2 percent nationally). At the same time, 17.7 percent of West Virginia women were 65 and older in 2000, compared to 14.4 percent nationally. 94.7 percent of the state's females were white in 2000, compared to a national rate of 69.3 percent. Only 3.0 percent were African-American, compared to 12.4 percent nationally, and only 1.0 percent were foreign-born, compared to 7.9 percent nationally.<sup>1</sup> Finally, 30 of the state's 55 counties share a border with another state - Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland, or

Pennsylvania. 54 percent of the state’s population lives in these border counties and may rely on services in neighboring states.<sup>2</sup>

If statistics do not lie, the status of women in West Virginia is terrible - at least as reported in *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, published in November 2002. According to the IWPR, West Virginia rates a grade of F in the IWPR’s composite employment and earnings and composite social and economic autonomy indices. In the composite political participation and composite health and well-being indices, we earn grades of D-. In the reproductive rights index, our score is B-. No state merited a grade above B in the composite political participation index, and B+ was the highest in the country on the social and economic autonomy index. Except for the reproductive rights score, which is a good score only if one is pro-choice, West Virginia would undoubtedly rank as one of the worst states in the country for women.

As the only state fully within Appalachia, regardless of how one defines “Appalachia,” these scores, unfortunately, are not totally out of line with those that reflect the status of women elsewhere in the region. We recognize, of course, that the comparative data is state-wide and that there can be many more variations within some states than there are within West Virginia, but it is still important to see how other Appalachian states compare to West Virginia. For these purposes, we will use the states where the Appalachian Studies Association holds its annual meetings.

**Grades for Appalachian States<sup>3</sup>**

State	Political Participation	Employment & Earnings	Social & Economic Autonomy	Reproductive Rights	Health & Well-Being
Georgia	D	C+	C-	B-	C-
Kentucky	D-	D	D-	D+	F
North Carolina	D	C-	D+	B-	C
Tennessee	F	D	D	D	D

Virginia	D-	C+	B-	D	C+
West Virginia	D-	F	F	B-	D-

What do these grades mean? Why should we care about them? And, more importantly, what do we do about the situation? While we will explain what the grades mean below, we feel it is important to start by saying that it is imperative that those who are interested in gender in Appalachia pay attention to these ratings and *The Status of Women in West Virginia* report because, in one concise format, the report sets forth a blueprint of where we are and where we might go to improve the status of women in the state. And, if we do not address the obstacles that are keeping women from achieving their fullest potential, we will not progress as a state, for women are the majority (51.4 percent) of the population of the state. While opinions will surely vary on issues like access to abortion, there are many more issues discussed in this report on which decision-makers and administrators should be able to find common ground, based on the idea that a healthy prosperous state means having healthy women who have positive for their future.

The following chart summarizes the specific findings of the report for West Virginia and indicates the kind of data available for each state in its report:

**Chart I: How West Virginia Ranks on Key Indicators<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>National Rank<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Regional Rank<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Grade</b>
<b>Composite Political Participation Index</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>D-</b>
Women's Voter Registration, 1998 and 2000 (64.4%)	35	6	
Women's Voter Turnout, 1998 and 2000 (44.4%)	43	6	
Women in Elected Office Composite Index, 2002	39	6	
Women's Institutional Resources, 2002	20	7	
<b>Composite Employment and Earnings Index</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>F</b>
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 1999 (\$22,176)	45	9	
Ratio of Women's to Men's Earnings, 1999 (70.0%)	38	8	
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2000 (51.3%)	51	9	
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 1999 (27.8%)	47	9	
<b>Composite Social and Economic Autonomy Index</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>F</b>

Percent with Health Insurance Among Nonelderly Women, 2000 (81.3%)	42	8	
Educational Attainment: Percent of Women with Four or More Years of College, 1990 (10.9%)	51	9	
Percent of Businesses that are Women-Owned, 1997 (27.1%)	12	4	
Percent of Women Above the Poverty Level, 1999 (83.2%)	47	8	
<b>Composite Reproductive Rights Index</b> (See below for components of this index.)	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>B-</b>
<b>Composite Health and Well-Being Index</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>D-</b>
Average Annual Mortality Rate Among Women from Heart Disease (per 100,000, 1996-98)	49	9	
Average Annual Mortality Rate Among Women from Lung Cancer (per 100,000, 1996-98)	47	8	
Average Annual Mortality Rate Among Women from Breast Cancer (per 100,000, 1996-98)	33	4	
Percent of Women Who Have Ever Been Told They Have Diabetes (2000)	48	8	
Average Annual Incidence Rate of Chlamydia Among Women (per 100,000, 2000)	5	1	
Average Annual Incidence Rate of AIDS Among Women (per 100,000 adolescents and adults, 2000)	13	1	
Average Number of Days per Month on which Women's Mental Health Is Not Good (2000)	46	9	
Average Annual Mortality Rate Among Women from Suicide (per 100,000, 1996-98)	25	5	
Average Number of Days per Month on which Women's Activities Are Limited by Their Health (2000)	50	9	

<sup>1</sup>Includes 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Political Participation indicators do not include the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup>Includes eight states (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia. The Political Participation indicators do not include the District of Columbia.

Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, D.C. *Note: The sources of statistics for each indicator are given in the report but not reproduced here due to space constraints.*

The components of the reproductive rights index include access to abortion services, whether West Virginia provides public funding for abortions, the percentage of West Virginia women living in counties

with an abortion provider, whether the governor and legislators are pro-choice, whether the state requires health insurers to provide coverage for infertility treatments, whether the state allows the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple to adopt his/her partner's child, and whether the state requires schools to provide sex education.<sup>5</sup>

IWPR assigned the grades for each index, using the criteria noted above in each index, usually looking for equality between opportunities for men and opportunities for women. For instance, under "women in elected office composite index," a state would merit the highest ranking if women held 50 percent of elected positions. Under the employment and earnings index, the standards included how women's median annual earnings compared to men's median annual earnings of \$36,960 for the country and whether women's labor force participation equaled the 74.7 percent labor force participation rate for men. The criteria of educational attainment for women was whether the same percentage of women as men (24 percent) had four or more years of college. The health and well-being index used goals set by Health People 2010, a study of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>6</sup>

Based on these criteria, the best states for women in the country are Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Vermont (all tied for 1<sup>st</sup> place), Connecticut and Washington (tied for 4<sup>th</sup> place), Alaska, and Maine and New Hampshire (tied for 7<sup>th</sup> place); each of these states appeared in the "top ten" at least once, and none appeared below the midpoint of all states on any of the composite indices. The worst states are Indiana (43<sup>rd</sup>), Florida, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi (51<sup>st</sup>) because each state appeared in the bottom ten at least once and was below the midpoint of all states on all of the composite indices.<sup>7</sup> Note that sections of several of these states, including Alabama, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, are part of most definitions of Appalachia, while only Maine is the only one of the best states that is included in some definitions of Appalachia.

West Virginia escaped being listed in the "worst state" category only because of the relatively high grade on the reproductive rights index. If looking only at the other four categories, the only states lower

than West Virginia in the political participation index are Pennsylvania, Kentucky, New Jersey, and Tennessee, with Virginia immediately ahead of West Virginia. The top four states in this index are Washington, Maine, Minnesota, and California.<sup>8</sup> On the employment and earnings index, the states ranked immediately above West Virginia are Arkansas (47<sup>th</sup>), Wyoming (48<sup>th</sup>), Mississippi (49<sup>th</sup>), and Louisiana (50<sup>th</sup>), while the top four states are Maryland, Alaska, Minnesota, and Colorado.<sup>9</sup> In the social and economic autonomy index, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas rank below West Virginia, while Kentucky is immediately ahead of West Virginia. The District of Columbia has the highest score in this index, followed by Maryland, Colorado, and Connecticut.<sup>10</sup> In the health and well-being index, West Virginia ranks ahead of just Mississippi, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia, while Louisiana is immediately ahead of West Virginia. The highest ranking states are Utah, Hawaii, North Dakota, and Minnesota.<sup>11</sup>

Among the indicators that IWPR found most promising were the fact that one of West Virginia's three members of the House of Representatives (Shelley Moore Capito) is a woman, while one-third of all the state's high-level appointed executive officials are women. Also, in West Virginia, children who are eligible to receive child care subsidies under federal rules are twice as likely to get this benefit as they are nationally. The state is one of eleven states that requires health insurance companies to cover infertility treatments and one of sixteen that provides public funding to eligible women for abortions. And, West Virginia women are among the least likely in the country to have chlamydia or AIDS. West Virginia women own 27.1 percent of the state's businesses, which gives us a ranking of twelfth in the nation in terms of the percentage of women-owned businesses, although the number of people employed in these businesses is only about 1.1 per firm, compared to a national average of 1.3 employees per woman-owned firm.<sup>12</sup>

There are far more areas, unfortunately, where West Virginia women do not have the same status as their sisters elsewhere. To date, the state has had no woman elected to a state-wide office, other than to

the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. West Virginia women have the lowest percentage of women with four or more years of college in the country and are much more likely to live in poverty than women nationally. The poor status of women's health is also a great concern, especially the high rates of lung cancer, diabetes, and mortality from heart disease.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, West Virginia women are among the least likely to work as professionals and managers, and they have the lowest overall labor force participation rate in the country. That labor force rate is for jobs identified in the official records and does not include all the women who do babysitting for family and friends, clean houses for others, or have other jobs that are part of the informal economy and not otherwise recorded. This is not a new issue, however, for, as early as 1880, only the sparsely settled state of Nevada and territories of Arizona, and Idaho had lower percentages of women in the paid work force than did West Virginia. The low level of work force participation and low number of professionals and managers surely contributes to the fact that West Virginia has a larger wage gap (30 cents per dollar) between women's and men's wages than the national average of 27 cents. The wage gap is also due to the fact that women and men are concentrated into different job categories, with varying salaries. According to the West Virginia Bureau of Employment Programs, using 1990 data, the top occupations for men were operators, fabricators, and laborers as one group; precision production, craft and repair jobs as one group; and transportation and material moving jobs as the third group. For women, those categories were numbers 9, 14, and 15, respectively, while the top three categories for women were administrative support positions, service occupations, and professional specialty occupations. Those groups rank as 12, 4, and 8, respectively, for men.<sup>14</sup>

In 2002, Pay Equity Day was April 16<sup>th</sup>, meaning that West Virginia women had to work, on average, until that day to earn as much as men had earned in 2001. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity, "Pay Equity is a means of eliminating sex and race discrimination in the wage-setting system. Many women and people of color are still segregated into a small number of jobs such as clerical,

service workers, nurses and teachers. These jobs have historically been undervalued and continue to be underpaid to a large extent because of the gender and race of the people who hold them. Pay equity means that the criteria employers use to set wages must be sex - and race-neutral.” The two states that have implemented pay equity to date, Minnesota and Washington have done so at a cost of 3.7 percent of the state’s payroll over four years and 2.6 percent of the state’s personnel costs over eight years, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the problems are interrelated, and it is difficult to know where to start. Women who have poor health will find it hard to hold steady jobs and may have difficulty getting access to health insurance. Women who do not have good job skills or formal education will find it difficult to find high-paying jobs, the kind that are more likely to come with health insurance and retirement programs, and are thus more likely to be unemployed. For example, women with professional degrees like law and medical degrees earned a median income of \$59,904 in the United States in 1999, while those with less than high school educations had a median income of just \$16,469. The unemployment rate for women with professional degrees, in 2000, was just 1.1 percent, compared to 7.8 percent for women with less than a high school education.<sup>16</sup>

Women who live in rural areas, without access to public transportation or child care facilities, will find it difficult to get to jobs. As of 2002, 58 percent of the state’s rural residents had no access to public transportation, while 23 percent had below-average access to transportation services. In 2000, 4 of the state’s counties (Mason, Mercer, Mineral, and Mingo) had no licensed child care facilities, and 6 (Braxton, Doddridge, Pleasant, Tucker, Tyler, and Webster) had only 1 each. There are 14 domestic violence shelters in the state, but 9 are located in border counties. While most of the state’s largest cities have these shelters, including Beckley, Bluefield, Charleston, Fairmont, Huntington, Martinsburg, Morgantown, Parkersburg, and Wheeling, as well as smaller cities like Elkins, Keyser, Lewisburg, Sutton, and Williamson, women in 41 counties do not have shelters in their counties.<sup>17</sup>

It is also hard to provide social services to women in rural areas, but it is imperative that social

service agencies, both public and private, cooperate wherever possible to share information and consolidate transportation services. For instance, the Beckley and Lewisburg “Work for West Virginia” programs have as their goal to consolidate rehabilitation, job service, unemployment compensation, and adult education programs in one building.<sup>18</sup> To facilitate this communication, the advisory committee recommends that each community identify and publicize public buildings such as public libraries, town halls, senior centers, National Guard armories, churches, and volunteer fire department buildings as recognized community centers that are handicapped accessible, available on weekends and in evenings, and are centers where residents can get information about a variety of social service agencies. Some of this information can be made accessible via computers, although we must also recognize that not everyone is computer literate.<sup>19</sup>

Those who live in areas without good health care - and most counties in the state are considered to be medically underserved areas - may find it harder to maintain their own good health or get adequate care for their children. Clearly, the medical malpractice insurance crisis further exacerbates the problem. An older population requires more health care and more assistance in daily living, which often comes from women family members or women health care providers because the state does not have a large network of retirement facilities.

### **Women’s Resources and Rights Checklist and West Virginia Women**

IWPR is “dedicated to informing and stimulating debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families,” with particular interests in “issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, the economic and social aspects of health care and safety, and women’s civic and political participation.”<sup>20</sup> The Status of Women in the States project supports this debate by providing both statistics that document the current status in a state and policy recommendations, many of which are based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995. These

recommendations include “the need for policies that help prevent violence against women, promote women’s economic equality, alleviate poverty among women, improve their physical, mental, and reproductive health and well-being, and enhance their political power.”<sup>21</sup>

Based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, IWPR developed a “Women’s Resources and Rights Checklist” that includes subcategories of violence against women, child support, welfare and poverty policies, employment/unemployment benefits, family leave benefits, sexual orientation and gender identity, reproductive rights, and institutional resources. There are a total of 31 possible policies in these categories, and West Virginia has adopted 12.<sup>22</sup>

In the area of violence against women, West Virginia has adopted a domestic battery statute that complements assault laws, as have 33 other states). West Virginia also requires that new police recruits and health care professionals receive domestic violence training and prohibits domestic violence discrimination in insurance. However, the state does not make first stalking a felony offense in cases of violence against women, and state law does not require sexual assault training for police, prosecutors, and health care professionals.<sup>23</sup>

Under welfare and poverty policies, West Virginia extends Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) benefits to children born or conceived while a mother is receiving welfare, as do 27 other states. We also allow receipt of TANF benefits for a 60-month limit, as do 43 other states. Our TANF plan has been certified or submitted for certification under the Family Violence Option or makes other provisions for victims of domestic violence. In determining welfare eligibility, the state disregards the equivalent of at least 50 percent of earnings from a full-time minimum wage job. The policies we do not have in place are those that allow welfare recipients at least 24 months before requiring participation in work activities (13 states allow this) and we do not provide transitional child care under TANF for more than 12 months, as do 14 states. Nor do we have a state Earned Income Tax Credit.<sup>24</sup>

In the area of employment and unemployment benefits, family leave benefits, and sexual

orientation and gender identity policies, West Virginia has not adopted any of the Beijing Platform policies. These employment and unemployment benefits policies are a minimum wage higher than the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour; mandatory temporary disability insurance; unemployment insurance benefits to low-wage earners, workers seeking part-time jobs, workers who leave their jobs for “good cause quits,” and adjustments to achieve pay equity in state civil service positions. In the area of family leave benefits, the state has not proposed legislation extending unemployment insurance benefits to workers on temporary leave to care for infants and newly adopted children; no other states have enacted this type of benefit, although 20 states have proposed it. Nor has West Virginia proposed legislation allowing the use of temporary disability insurance to cover periods of work absence due to family care needs. Only one state has enacted this, while three have proposed it. In the area of sexual orientation and gender identity, West Virginia does not have civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, although amendments to the state’s hate crimes bill have been proposed in several legislative sessions that would prohibit this discrimination, as well as discrimination against those with disabilities. Nor has West Virginia adopted legislation creating enhanced penalties or a separate offense for crimes based on sexual orientation, although 28 states have done so. Finally, West Virginia has not avoided adopted a ban on same-sex marriages.<sup>25</sup>

In the area of reproductive rights, West Virginia allows access to abortion services without a waiting period but not without mandatory parental consent or notification. The state does provide public funding for abortions under any or most circumstances if a woman is eligible. West Virginia requires health insurers to provide coverage of infertility treatments but does not require these insurers to provide comprehensive coverage for contraceptives, although it does require that at least one method of contraception be covered for all state employees. The state also requires that schools provide sex education, including both abstinence and contraception. Twenty-five states allow the non-legal parent in a gay/lesbian couple to adopt his/her partner’s child, usually as a result of court decisions. No case has been

tried to date here.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, West Virginia joins 39 other states in having a commission on women. In fact, the West Virginia Women's Commission celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on November 18, 2002. Its important publications, including *West Virginia Women: In Perspective, 1970-1985* and *West Virginia Women: In Perspective, 1980-1995*, provided important historical perspective for The Status of Women in West Virginia. The commission's *Women and the Law: A Legal Rights Handbook*, published in cooperation with the Women Lawyer's Committee of the West Virginia State Bar, has also been an important resource.

### **What do we do with this information?**

Not everyone will agree on the priorities or on the need to implement the Beijing policy recommendations that West Virginia lacks. Funding is clearly a barrier to implementing some policies, for a recent U.S. Census study showed that West Virginia ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> in the nation in terms of taxes compared to the population but 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the percentage of income paid to state taxes, with 8.7 percent, a particularly difficult situation for low-income people.<sup>27</sup> But, even if funding were available, legislation dealing with reproductive rights has long been contentious in the state legislature. And, outside the framework of government, traditional ideas about women's status in the family may mean that some women will not want to work outside the home. Child-raising or other family commitments also may mean that women will want to stay in their home, and that should be their choice.

But, what happens if these women want to have a job outside the home or want to work at home? What if they want to be self-employed? Will there be one for them that pays a decent wage and allows them to use their knowledge and skills to the best of their ability? Where will they get the training or education to hold a good-paying job? Does the lack of professional high-paying jobs in the state mean that West Virginia women who earn their college degrees here leave the state, leaving behind a more poorly educated population? Do they cancel out the highly educated women who move into the Eastern Panhandle and commute to jobs outside the state, who are included in the employment figures here

because they live in the state?

If economic development is key to the future of the state, what do those words mean for women who want or need to find employment to support their families and how to we lower the barriers for women who wish to work but now cannot? One option would be to invest resources to develop child care centers at all the state's colleges and universities that do not presently have these facilities so that it is easier for women (and men with child care responsibilities) to get the education they need for better paying jobs. Do we encourage companies opening plants in West Virginia to include child care facilities in their plans if they receive benefits from the state?

The West Virginia Advisory Committee feels that it is critical that we make every possible effort to insure that employers whom we are recruiting into the state through tax advantages are paying wages that are in line with those published in *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for West Virginia* that the West Virginia Community Voices Partnership published in 2002. "The Self-Sufficiency Standard was developed for Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc., as part of the Family Economic-Self-Sufficiency Project, by Dr. Diana Pearce, who was the Director of the Women and Poverty Project at WOW at the time of the Standard's creation." Wider Opportunities for Women describes itself as "a multi-faceted women's employment organization, recognized nationally for its skills training models, technical assistance, and advocacy for women workers," with a goal "to achieve economic independence and equality of opportunity for women and girls."<sup>28</sup>

The Ford Foundation provided funding for the original development of the self-sufficiency standard, which "measures how much income is needed for a family of a given composition in a given place to adequately meet its basic needs—without public or private assistance."<sup>29</sup> This standard, therefore, includes "income sufficient to meet minimum nutrition standards . . . and to obtain housing that would be neither substandard nor overcrowded," while factoring in local and regional variations in costs, particularly for housing, and available tax credits such as the earned income tax credit, child care tax credit, and child

tax credit. It assumes that all adults in the household are working full-time and therefore includes transportation, taxes, and child care for families with young children. It does not provide for “longer-term needs, such as retirement, college tuition, purchase of major items such as a car, or emergency expenses.”<sup>30</sup> Nor does it include allowance for any “take-out, fast-food, or restaurant meals,” entertainment, savings, or recreation. Due to the lack of public transportation in West Virginia for large numbers of workers, the standard for this state assumes each adult worker needs a car. The standard also assumes that workers will have health insurance provided by their employer, for “families cannot be truly self-sufficient without health insurance”; the costs of the employee’s contributions to health insurance and other health care costs are included in the standard.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, with self-sufficient incomes, workers pay more taxes on their salaries and need fewer social services provided through public funds.

For instance, while we do not pay wages based on family size, the study notes that wage-earner in a family of one parent, one preschooler, and one school-age child in Kanawha County (Charleston and Dunbar) needs to earn an hourly wage of \$15.27 per hour for an annual income of \$32,256 to have a self-sufficient income, compared to the federal poverty level annual income of \$15,020 and the income from a full-time minimum wage job of \$13,605.<sup>32</sup> The same family needs to earn at least \$12.37 an hour in Fayette County, far above the minimum wage of \$5.15, or an annual income of \$26,121.<sup>33</sup> However, in Monongalia County, the same family needs \$19.68 per hour or an annual income of \$41,556.<sup>34</sup> In West Virginia, 10.7 percent of the households in 2000 were female-headed families (with or without their own children), compared to just 3.7 percent of households with a male head. However, 18.9 percent of families with children under the age of 18 are headed by females, compared to a national average of 20.6 percent.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the issue of self-sufficient wages is very much an issue of importance to the advancement of women and their families, even though West Virginia fares better than the national average in that 41 percent of single-mother households receive child support or alimony (compared to 34 percent nationally), and, in 48 percent of child support cases with orders for collection, support was collected (compared to 39

percent nationally).<sup>36</sup>

Self-sufficient wages are also critical for people who do not have families to support, for single-person households make up 27.1 percent of West Virginia households, including households comprised of single, divorced, and widowed women. While the state has a lower-than-average percentage of single women aged 15 and older (19 percent compared to the national average of 24.4 percent) and of divorced women (10.4 percent compared to 11.1 percent), it has a higher percentage of widows (13.3 percent compared to the national average of 10.2 percent).<sup>37</sup> Using the same examples as above, a single person would have to earn \$7.67 per hour or \$16,204 annually in Kanawha County (Charleston and Dunbar), \$6.91 per hour in Fayette County, or \$6.92 per hour in Monongalia County to have a self-sufficient income.<sup>38</sup>

Providing the funding to make pay equity a reality for public employees would help these employees have a self-sufficient wage for pay equity would mean that women workers with comparable levels of skill, training, and responsibility would receive pay equal to the salaries of men, even if they are employed in different positions. It would also mean that these workers are paying more taxes and perhaps using fewer social services, thereby saving costs to local governments. Fortunately, through the efforts of Del. Barbara Evans Fleischauer (D-Monongalia County) and others, there are efforts underway in the state to provide funding for pay equity for state employees.

We also need to be sure that economic development includes microenterprise tax credits from public sources and loans from private or public sources that are available for women and that women's needs are not lost as the state's banks continue to consolidate, with headquarters often out of state.<sup>39</sup>

But women also need to have the proper education or other training to get good paying jobs. We feel West Virginia needs a statewide system of community colleges to deliver community and technical training to women within a reasonable commuting distance from their homes. Distance education can also provide some opportunities, assuming women have access to computers to take web-based courses or

access to sites that provide downlinks for satellite courses.<sup>40</sup> We realize these might be considered audacious recommendations at a time when all of higher education is being asked to take a 10 percent cut for the FY 2004 fiscal year and when some public colleges might be closed. But, without education, we cannot solve our problems.

The most surprising, and perhaps the most easily addressed, aspect of the report is the low level of political participation among West Virginia women. In the best state in the country, North Dakota, 91.1 percent of the eligible women are registered to vote, while West Virginia's percentage is just 64.4 percent. The highest percentage of women voted in 1998 and 2000 in Minnesota, where 67.9 percent of women voted, compared to West Virginia's 44.3 percent.<sup>41</sup>

When the suffragists argued for women to have the right to vote, they argued that women would vote differently than men, that women would support issues related to families, social services, and health, for instance, more than would men. When women across the country first voted in 1920, suffragists were disappointed that there was no difference in the way women and men voted. But, in 1980, it was clear that there was a gender gap across the country, with women supporting Jimmy Carter for president more than did men, who favored Ronald Reagan. Now, politicians on the national level realize that women can have a different agenda when casting their ballots than do men, and they must address this agenda if they wish to have women's support.

If we expect the state and local governments in West Virginia to be responsive to women's issues, we must find ways to increase the percentage of the state's women who exercise their right to vote, for politicians have to listen to voters and be responsive to them if they wish to continue in office. For a state that supported the ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment shortly after Congress passed it in 1972 and that has a tradition of organizing on issues as wide-ranging as the right to join labor unions or protecting the environment and limiting the weights of coal trucks, it was disappointing to see that West Virginia women do not participate in the formal political process as frequently as do their sisters

elsewhere. Participation figures are based on the general elections, and, frequently, contests are more heated at the primary level, especially if candidates are running unopposed in the general elections. Politics are personal in West Virginia, and it is not difficult for residents to know their local government officials or to participate in the political process if they so desire by volunteering for candidates' campaigns, serving on local boards and commissions, or running for office themselves.

Still, to encourage more political participation, the state's political parties, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and state government offices need to find ways to increase women's political participation. West Virginia's media need to carefully and thoroughly cover government issues so that people can get the information they need - and encourage people to vote. We also need, as a state, to increase the number of women on appointed boards, commissions, committees, and other non-elective bodies to give more women the opportunity to influence public policy and to gain experience in government that may then encourage them to run for office.<sup>42</sup>

### **Where Do We Go Now?**

Throughout the country, these reports have been used to "encourage policy changes designed to improve women's status," using the policy recommendations identified in the report from the Beijing agenda. They have also been used to "educate the public about issues concerning women's status; inform policies and programs to increase women's voter turnout; and make the case for establishing commissions for women, expanding child care subsidies for low-income women, strengthening supports for women-owned businesses, developing training programs for women to enter non-traditional occupations, and improving women's access to health care."<sup>43</sup> No one will argue that this will be easy to do in an era of state budget cuts, but what are the consequences of a failure to act?

As one attempt to address some of these issues, and to provide a stronger voice for women, the West Virginia Women's Commission called together a group of women in September who represented a wide variety of organizations and interests around the state, including the West Virginia Federation of

Women's Clubs, Girl Scouts, League of Women Voters, and Young Women's Christian Association, among many others. On November 17, this group decided to create the Coalition for West Virginia Women to be an advocate for women's issues, with membership open to any interested individuals and groups. The group adopted a mission statement saying that "The Coalition for West Virginia Women works to enhance the status of women in West Virginia through partnering, collaboration and advocacy." Initially, the group will function with a volunteer steering committee, with decisions made by consensus after open discussion.<sup>44</sup> For more information on this coalition, and to get on the mailing list for notices of future meetings, please contact the West Virginia Women's Commission at Capitol Complex, Building 6, Room 850, Charleston, WV 25305; phone: (304) 558-0070; fax: (304) 558-5167; e-mail: [wvwc@wvdhhr.org](mailto:wvwc@wvdhhr.org).

We also have some important initiatives in place that can lead to positive change. The Third Women's Health Policy Conference, held November 19, 2002, in Charleston, brought together women from across the state who are interested in health policy issues to develop an agenda for legislative action. For further information on this conference, please contact Cheri Heflin at [cheri@chandcompany.com](mailto:cheri@chandcompany.com) or Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer at [barbaraf@mail.wvnet.edu](mailto:barbaraf@mail.wvnet.edu). Because so many West Virginians and their families are covered by the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA), it is important that PEIA uses its *PEIA News* to provide information about wellness issues like healthy eating. The December 2002 issue, for instance, highlighted the PEIA campaign to remind us that "Super Size Food = A Super Size You!", including a call to restaurants to "discontinue promoting supersized meals."<sup>45</sup> Lower life insurance and health insurance premiums for tobacco-free PEIA members are clearly designed to address the high rate of tobacco use in the state and the consequent health problems.<sup>46</sup> West Virginia also requires insurance companies to cover screenings for cervical cancer but not for osteoporosis. Women are allowed to identify a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology as their primary care physician or have direct access to such a specialist.<sup>47</sup>

In the area of education, the PROMISE scholarships certainly ought to encourage more high school students to continue their education at the college level. Programs like West Virginia Women Work, including Step-Up for Women, encourage women to pursue skilled trades such as construction work and are also critical to our future because Step-Up serves women who are displaced homemakers, single parents, and women in transition.<sup>48</sup> West Virginia University's Health Sciences Technology Academy is also an important initiative to encourage young people for careers in health sciences, and that program has just graduated its first group of students from college. On a per capita basis, West Virginia invests heavily in education at all levels, compared to other states, and it is important that this investment continue. It is also important to note that the West Virginia Department of Education, under the leadership of Sallie Harrington, serves many learners through the Displaced Homemaker Programs, Non-traditional Education Programs, Pregnant Single Women's Program, Sex Equity Programs, Single Parents Programs, Single Pregnant Women's Program, and Work Based Learning Programs.<sup>49</sup>

To improve women's employment opportunities and provide support for women executives, Betty Ireland, president and CEO of Jackson & Kelly Solutions in Charleston, started the Female Execs Club in June 2002. The goal was to provide a networking and support system for women who are presidents, CEOs, and chairs of their companies. As of November 2002, Ireland had only identified fourteen women to be in the club, a reflection of the low number of women in professional and managerial positions in the state.<sup>50</sup> One of the consequences of these low numbers is the lack of mentors for women who wish to become executives. According to Ireland, "Typically, in order to rise through the ranks, you not only need experience but also a mentor. . . . And women in high ranks are few and far between in West Virginia. There are few women who could mentor those coming along'."<sup>51</sup>

Another encouraging program are the Women's Business Centers in Keyser and Fairmont. The West Virginia Small Business Administration received a grant from the Women's Business Institute in Maryland, and the Fairmont center opened on January 31, 2003. Most encouraging was the fact that, at

that opening, David Satterfield, chief of economic development for the state, publicly stated that “\$13,000 jobs,” i.e., jobs that pay only a little more than minimum wage, did not represent economic development, and that we had to have good paying jobs if we were to get economic development for women. These two centers, and others that might open elsewhere in the state, “offer technical assistance, mentoring and networking opportunities,” as well as free business consulting advice.<sup>52</sup> Since West Virginia already has a high percentage of women business owners, these centers could be particularly useful in helping women grow their businesses and in helping others start successful businesses that would be large enough to provide benefits such as health care and retirement programs for their employees. “From 1997 to 2002, the number of women-owned firms in the U.S. grew at twice the rate of all U.S. firms, employment grew at 1.5 times the national average and sales rose at the same rate.”<sup>53</sup> Through taxation policies and appropriate zoning decisions, state and local governments can support the development of women-owned businesses.

We also have the opportunity, through West Virginia Public Radio and West Virginia Public Television, to disseminate information throughout the state, and both media have a long tradition of public service reporting on important issues throughout the state. It would be good to be able to use these media, as well as other non-partisan organizations like the West Virginia Humanities Council, as well as the commercial media to disseminate the information in this report and start discussions at the local level.

While the present most definitely looks bleak, we are heartened by the efforts underway to improve women’s conditions and the concern that “something has to be done.” But, we are also concerned about the so-called “Woman’s Right to Know” bill now wending its way through the West Virginia legislature, with a reportedly much better chance of getting the governor’s signature this year than did last year’s version. In two years, when the next set of state reports comes out, we want to have a better showing than we do now. We do not want to rank lower in the area of reproductive rights.

This is a small state. Through the networks and initiatives now underway and with the data and

ideas in *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, we have a blueprint of what is possible in other states. The West Virginia Advisory Committee recommends the appointment of a nonpartisan blue ribbon panel to review the report recommendations and decide which are appropriate to adopt and who can help implement the recommendations. There is more than enough work for everyone interested to be involved.

We also have the opportunity in a small state to be sure that everyone knows about the report. In addition to the publicity that surrounded the release of the report, we have been able to present the report through the *West Virginia Public Affairs Reporter*, which goes to 2800 government officials around the state; to the AFL-CIO Union Women's Institute; through a small article in the March *West Virginia Lawyer*, reaching 4000 lawyers; and through presentations at professional meetings like the Appalachian Studies Association (with colleagues from the Kentucky advisory committee) and Southern Conference on Women's History (with colleagues from the Alabama advisory committee), Valdosta State University's 8<sup>th</sup> Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Conference, Auburn University's Women's History Month Program, and the West Virginia Department of Education's "Diversity Works!" conference on meeting the challenges of a complex and changing workplace, in addition to the "Appalachia Wired" conference.

Are all these recommendations idealistic? Perhaps some are, but, if we are going to make long-term improvements in the status of women, we have to start somewhere. Change comes one person at a time, so we are particularly heartened by the fact that Barb's students, young men and women at West Virginia University, are concerned about the report's findings and want to do something to help because they love the state and want to stay here. We trust they are representative of young people around the state. They will be the state's future leaders, so we trust that we can all find ways to welcome their ideas, assistance, and enthusiasm, for they are the state's future.

Finally, we want to thank the co-sponsors for this report because the range of co-sponsors reflects the diversity of parties who are concerned about the future of West Virginia women and the diversity of interests that need to be involved in the solutions. Co-sponsors include: American Association of

University Women-West Virginia; Bethany College; Crandall, Pyles, Haviland & Turner Foundation, Inc.; Jackson & Kelly PLCC; Marshall University Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia and Office of Academic Affairs; Marshall University Graduate School of Educational and Professional Development and Humanities Program; Mountain State University; Professional Women's Council of North Central West Virginia; Shepherd College Women's Studies Program; Steptoe & Johnson PLLC; University of Charleston; West Virginia Bureau for Public Health Office of Maternal, Child, and Family Health; West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence; West Virginia Community Voices Partnership, a project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; West Virginia Federation of Democratic Women, Inc.; West Virginia Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families; West Virginia Junior College; West Virginia University Center for Women's Studies, Division of Social Work, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, Extension Service, Institute for Public Affairs, President's Office for Social Justice, Regional Research Institute; West Virginia University-Potomac State College; West Virginia Women's Commission; and YWCA of Charleston. Bishop William and Mary Lou Grove, retired, United Methodist Church, provided additional support.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if, in our promotional material for the state, we could advertise that, in addition to our spectacular scenery, unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities, and low crime rate, we offer the best opportunities in the country for women to hold good-paying jobs that make use of their training and education? That women participate in the political process at a very high rate and that they are healthy because they have access to adequate health care and health advice? For these changes to occur, we must work together through government agencies, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. As we noted in the conclusion to the report, improving the status of women "will not be cheap. It will take time. But now is the time to start."<sup>54</sup> The *status quo* cannot be acceptable if West Virginia is to enjoy a bright future and if the state's daughters are to prosper.

Notes

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1. Amy B. Caizza, ed., *The Status of Women in West Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2002), 78.
  2. U.S. Census Bureau data from American Fact Finder web site.
  3. Caiazza, *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, 92, 94, 96, 98, 100.
  4. Ibid., 5. Details on Health and Well-Being Composite Index are on p. 61.
  5. Ibid., 56.
  6. Ibid., 82.
  7. Ibid., 11.
  8. Ibid., 93.
  9. Ibid., 95.
  10. Ibid., 97.
  11. Ibid., 101.
  12. Ibid., 6, 48.
  13. Ibid., 6, 34.
  14. [www.state.wv.us/bep/lmi/AFFACT/SUPPLEME/Occwv.htm](http://www.state.wv.us/bep/lmi/AFFACT/SUPPLEME/Occwv.htm)
  15. For more on the National Committee on Pay Equity, see its website at [www.feminist.com/fairpay/f\\_qape.htm](http://www.feminist.com/fairpay/f_qape.htm).
  16. Diana Pearce and Jennifer Brooks, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for West Virginia* (Charleston, W.Va.: Diana Pearce and Wider Opportunities for Women, 2002), 16. These figures come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, unpublished data & Bureau of the Census. This report was prepared for the West Virginia Community Voices Partnership.
  17. Caiazza, *Status of Women in West Virginia*, 34.
  18. Ibid., 74.
  19. Ibid., 74.
  20. Ibid., inside front cover.
  21. Ibid., 9.

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22. Ibid., 10.
23. Ibid., 10. In the Women’s Rights and Resources Checklist, the total number of states with a policy includes the District of Columbia, with no distinction made in the total to identify if the District of Columbia is included in a particular count.
24. Ibid., 10.
25. Ibid., 10-11.
26. Ibid., 11.
27. “Study: West Virginians face a taxing burden,” *Morgantown Dominion Post*, 8 May 2002.
28. For more on Wider Opportunities for Women, see its website at [www.wowonline.org/default.htm](http://www.wowonline.org/default.htm).
29. Pearce and Brooks, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for West Virginia*, preface, 1.
30. Ibid., 3.
31. Ibid., 6, 7.
32. Ibid., 12, 14. The minimum wage income “includes the net effect of the addition of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the subtraction of taxes” (12).
33. Ibid., 8.
34. Ibid., 62.
35. Caiazza, *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, 78.
36. Ibid., 10.
37. Ibid., 78.
38. Pearce and Brooks, *The Self Sufficiency Standard for West Virginia*, 14, 8, 62.
39. Caiazza, *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, 75.
40. Ibid., 74.
41. Ibid., 92.
42. Ibid., 76.
43. Ibid., 3.

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44. Coalition for West Virginia Women, Summary of Meeting November 17, 2002, 1.
45. "Think Before You SUPERSIZE," *PEIA News* 4 (December 2002): 2.
46. "2003 Will Be The Perfect Time To Kick The Habit For Lower Premiums," *PEIA News* 4 (December 2002): 2.
47. Caiazza, *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, 69.
48. Mary Claire Johnson, "Thirteen women Step-Up to better jobs during graduation," *Morgantown Dominion Post*, 31 May 2002.
49. [wvde.state.wv.us/directory/more/Harrington/Sallie/](http://wvde.state.wv.us/directory/more/Harrington/Sallie/)
50. Danny Forinash, "West Virginia Women Strive to Make Their Mark in Business," *The State Journal*, 29 November 2002, 13.
51. *Ibid.*, 15.
52. *Ibid.*, 14.
53. *Ibid.*, 14.
54. Caiazza, *The Status of Women in West Virginia*, 76.