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CALIFORNIA BLUEPRINT FOR WOMEN'S PANDEMIC ECONOMIC RECOVERY RELEASED

California Women are Essential to Economic Recovery

(SACRAMENTO, CA) – The California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CCSWG) releases the California Blueprint for Women's Pandemic Economic Recovery (Blueprint) today. The Blueprint is a comprehensive plan that adopts, for the first time, a gendered lens on the state economy, and offers critical policy solutions that center women as key drivers of industry and as essential workforce participants. The Blueprint sheds light on the systematic erosion of women's well-being, human rights, and economic status that have been profoundly accelerated by COVID-19 and will undoubtedly continue unless halted by deliberate interventions needed now.

"The pandemic dramatically shifted the full burdens of caregiving and domestic work onto the shoulders of mothers working full time," said **First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom**. "I am grateful the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls has taken on the critical work of understanding how gender-specific investments- particularly in our caregiving infrastructure- are critical not just to the health of California women and their families, but to California's economic growth and long-term prosperity."

In partnership with the California Policy Lab (CPL), CCSWG examined pre-pandemic economic conditions for women, women's labor-market outcomes during the height of the pandemic, financial indicators during the peak of the pandemic government response period, and overall safety net usage by women. CCSWG reviewed the outcomes and conducted an extensive review of current literature to generate a snapshot of women's economic well-being and offer an estimate of the likely outcomes for the state economy moving forward. The Blueprint describes the collective trajectories of groups of women who entered the pandemic already in economic difficulty and explores opportunities to chart new paths based on impact data from federal and state support programs and interventions since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Then, it imagines a future-forward state economic model that presupposes the value of women's labor in the workforce and at home while contending with a virus that appears to be here to stay.

"At the onset of the pandemic, we knew women were bearing the brunt of the impact both at work and in the home. As the crisis continued, the Commission raised concerns and advocated for an immediate response," said **CCSWG Executive Director Holly Martinez**. "The Commission invested funds in women-specific research to examine the economic impact of COVID-19 on California's women and girls which produced the California Blueprint for Women's Pandemic Economic Recovery. The Blueprint centers the economic needs of women and girls as critical to the state's economic recovery and takes a close look at points of pain and bright spots of hope for a more equitable economic recovery for women."

The Blueprint confirms that California women went into the pandemic worse off due to existing systemic inequities in the workforce, with employment rates at 20% lower than men, a persistent pay gap of 78 cents on the dollar, and the inequitable practice of occupationally segregating women of color, who hold nearly half of all low paying jobs.

“Rising inflation impacts women disproportionately, as does the persistent gender wage gap and limited representation in leadership positions,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer Kahan's (D-Orinda)**. “We believe that it is critical to face the future with a gender lens - prioritizing women not as an afterthought or a special interest but as half the population and half the workforce, deserving of half the state’s investment.”

At the height of the pandemic, women were disproportionately burdened with school closures, family caregiving and lack of childcare options. Female-dominated occupations such as retail, hospitality, and education had the largest share of job loss, which largely impacted women of color who experienced lower employment rates as compared to white women. Nearly 8% of women with disabilities were jobless during the acute phase of the pandemic and 1 in 4 non-citizens lost their job as compared to 1 in 6 naturalized citizens and 1 in 7 native-born U.S. citizens.

“Women entered the pandemic more economically disadvantaged compared to men due to existing systemic inequities, particularly impacting women of color,” said **CCSWG Chair Lauren Babb**. “Women of color were the first to lose jobs and last to regain them, causing long-term financial stress to their households. Many women are the primary breadwinners and backbone of their families. As California’s economy recovers, women of color have been slower to bounce back. To improve economic equity, solutions must include an intersectional approach that centers those most impacted and prioritizes policy that provides opportunity and relief for the most vulnerable Californians with an emphasis on women and girls in the state.”

The pandemic significantly increased the share of labor at home that fell on women, even those working full time. More than 60% of mothers of children under 12 taking on the majority or entirely of extra care work in 2020, compared with 22.4% of fathers. Professional caregivers were also significantly impacted by shutdowns, an impact that continues for an industry experiencing a slower rate of recovery and a severe workforce shortage. Women employed in the care industry are among the lowest paid workers at about \$13.43 an hour, employing predominately women of color.

Overall, women reported experiencing disproportionate rates of psychological stress with 47% of women in California reported symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic. About 75% of women who specifically reported experiencing economic hardships, also reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic.

California’s pandemic response through government safety-net programs helped women meet life’s basic needs. Unemployment benefits helped low wage workers weather the crisis. 183,000 more women relied on food assistance during the early pandemic. Safety-net programs helped women pay down debt, see a rise in credit scores, and significantly reduced child poverty, highlighting a clear path forward to an equitable economy that has now been demonstrated to be feasible.

As safety-net supports are withdrawn, measures of economic struggle are returning to pre-pandemic levels. We cannot be satisfied with a return to pre-pandemic normalcy. The growing needs and challenges for women resulting from the current global pandemic demand an urgent response and deliberate ongoing policy interventions. The pandemic added an estimated 36 years to the time it will take for women to make the same amount as men, bringing the total to 135 years. In California, if all working women and working single mothers earned the same as men in comparable roles, the state’s poverty rate would be reduced by about 40%.

The Blueprint also considers the growing body of research that indicates women are disproportionately impacted by Long COVID. An estimated 14.9% of all adults living in California have experienced symptoms consistent with Long COVID. At the high end, that is roughly 5,960,000 people. Roughly 257,000 workers are out of the workforce due to Long COVID, amounting to an estimated \$17.61 billion in annual lost earnings.

“Women face an elevated risk of Long COVID and significant impacts to their workforce participation, long-term economic health, and ability to build wealth over time,” said **CCSWG Communications Director and Blueprint co-author Darcy Totten**. “As California’s economy recovers, Long COVID coupled with

workplace bias, wage gaps, and the disproportionate impact of inflation and debt will hold back recovery for nearly half of the state's workforce without significant intervention.”

As we build a post-pandemic future, gender is a substantive element of the health of the state's overall workforce and capacity for economic growth and must be considered as an essential element in state resource stewardship. When you invest in women you invest in everyone – because California women are essential to California's economic and global competitiveness.

About the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

For more than 50 years, the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls has identified and worked to eliminate inequities in state laws, practices, and conditions that affect California's women and girls. Established as a state agency with 17 appointed commissioners in 1965, the Commission regularly assesses gender equity in health, safety, employment, education, and equal representation in the military, and the media. The Commission provides leadership through research, policy and program development, education, outreach and collaboration, advocacy, and strategic partnerships. Learn more at www.women.ca.gov.

About the Blueprint

The Blueprint is a comprehensive plan based on the research CCSWG conducted in partnership with California Policy Lab (CPL) to shed light on points of pain and bright spots of hope amid COVID-19 pandemic for a more equitable economic recovery for women. It describes the collective trajectories of groups of women who entered the pandemic already in economic difficulty and explores opportunities to chart new paths based on impact data from federal and state support programs and interventions since the Covid-19 pandemic began. To review the full Blueprint, visit www.women.ca.gov.

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“At the onset of the pandemic, we knew women were bearing the brunt of the impact both at work and in the home. As the crisis continued, the Commission raised concerns and advocated for an immediate response,” said **CCSWG Executive Director Holly Martinez**. “The Commission invested funds in women-specific research to examine the economic impact of COVID-19 on California’s women and girls which produced the California Blueprint for Women’s Pandemic Economic Recovery. The Blueprint centers the economic needs of women and girls as critical to the state’s economic recovery and takes a close look at points of pain and bright spots of hope for a more equitable economic recovery for women.”

“Rising inflation impacts women disproportionately, as does the persistent gender wage gap and limited representation in leadership positions. Said **CCSWG Commissioner Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer Kahan's (D-Orinda)**. We believe that it is critical to face the future with a gender lens - prioritizing women not as an afterthought or a special interest but as half the population and half the workforce, deserving of half the state’s investment.”

“Women entered the Covid - 19 pandemic more economically disadvantaged compared to men due to existing systemic inequities, particularly impacting women of color,” said **CCSWG Chair Lauren Babb**. “Women of color were the first to lose jobs and last to regain them, causing long-term financial stress to their households. Many women are the primary breadwinners and backbone of their families. As California’s economy recovers, women of color have been slower to bounce back. In order to improve economic equity solutions must include an intersectional approach that centers those most impacted and prioritizes policy that provides opportunity and relief for the most vulnerable Californians with an emphasis on women and girls in the state.”

“As women continue to disproportionately experience the economic and health challenges of the pandemic, we must strengthen the state’s systems of support and elevate the needs of women,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Assemblymember Lisa Calderon (D-Whittier)**. “This Blueprint centers the economic needs of women and girls, recognizing women as key drivers of industry, integral participants of the workforce, and drivers of the small business economy.”

“There are many eye-opening takeaways from this blueprint. One, in particular, stood out to me to highlight the important work ahead; in California, if all working women and working single mothers earned the same as men in comparable roles, the state’s poverty rate would be reduced by about 40%,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton)**. “The pandemic brought long-existing economic disparities into full view and also underscored the importance of a strong safety net. As pandemic economic assistance is ending, it is important that we redouble our efforts in California to support a modern and gender equitable workforce.”

“The pandemic took a toll on female dominated occupations in retail, hospitality, childcare and education, disproportionately impacting already underpaid workers, prominently women of color, who still suffer today to seek reliable, steady jobs,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Dr. Akilah Weber**.

“California’s women and girls, those most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, must be front and center in leadership roles as we rebuild, revitalize, recreate, and redefine a future post-pandemic world.”

“Pandemic unemployment affected poor women, and women without college degrees, hardest. Frontline and service sectors, referred to as essential workers, were the most impacted where many of these sectors’ women are occupationally segregated, making up in some cases more than 70% of a particular industry’s workforce,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Quinn Delaney**. “It is critical to understand that it is not just certain professions or service workers that we lauded as essential - it was women who dominate those sectors as employees, and it is women who are essential to the economy.”

“Women face an elevated risk of Long COVID and more significant impacts to their workforce participation, long term economic health, and ability to build wealth over time,” said **CCSWG Communications Director and co-author Darcy Totten**. “CCSWG found that at this moment in time there are an estimated 257,000 full-time equivalent workers out of the California workforce due to Long COVID. This amounts to roughly \$17.61 billion in annual lost earnings. As California’s economy recovers, Long COVID coupled with workplace bias, wage gaps, and the disproportionate impact of inflation and debt will hold back recovery for nearly half of the state’s workforce without significant intervention.”

“Pandemic response through government safety-net programs helped women meet life’s basic needs,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Joelle Gomez**. “Women were able to pay down debt, credit score increased, and in turn, child poverty was significantly reduced, highlighting a clear path forward to an equitable economy that has now been demonstrated to be feasible.”

“Historically marginalized and underserved women, particularly women of color, have experienced greater disparities in economic security, health, and financial well-being throughout the pandemic,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Dr. Joely Proudfit**. “California must rebuild a more equitable and comprehensive support system for the long term to alleviate poverty and support economic vitality for all women.”

“California’s unemployment rate fell to 3.9% in September - a record low, but some industries that predominantly employ women (like childcare) are still struggling, which has a disproportionate impact,” said **CCSWG Commissioner Lisa Greer**. “Women employed in the caregiving industry were significantly impacted by shutdowns and a slower industry-wide recovery. According to recent articles by the NYT and Washington Post, the childcare industry is missing roughly 100,000 workforce members - possibly *because the average rate of pay is less than that of animal caregivers*. We must look closely at the uniquely gendered nature of economic recovery and use this moment to fix disparities that existed even before the pandemic that kept women disproportionately occupationally segregated in low wage positions.”

“In California, if all working women and working single mothers earned the same as men in comparable roles, the state’s poverty rate would be reduced by about 40%. That equates to an additional \$68.45 billion or 2.2% to the state’s economy,” said **CCSWG Commissioner LTC Erica Courtney**. “On top of that, the pandemic added an estimated 36 years to the time it will take for women to make the same amount as men, bringing the total to 135 years. We must do better to bring stability, peace and security to half of California’s population.”