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## Supporting Working Mothers in California

The share of women balancing work and family life has risen dramatically over the past half century, and now more than ever women's paid work is critical to the financial well-being of their families.<sup>1</sup> In California, the share of mothers in the labor force has increased from 38% to 66% since the late 1960s (Figure 1). As a result, the percentage of mothers who are either the sole breadwinner, primary breadwinner, or co-breadwinner in their family has more than doubled, from 26% to 55% (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> The growing share of working mothers means that there are more California households in which all parents are employed, requiring parents to balance paid work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities.

Balancing paid employment and family life is especially difficult for parents with low incomes, as they commonly have jobs with limited benefits and are often subject to unfair scheduling practices.<sup>3</sup> This has been the case for women of color, who were working to support their families – often in low-wage jobs – long before white women began to enter the workforce in large numbers.<sup>4</sup> Currently, due to ongoing gender- and race-based discrimination, women overall are more likely than men to earn low wages, but this is especially true for women of color, who are then particularly affected by workplace practices that impede parents' ability to work and care for their families (Figure 3).

Policymakers should adopt or strengthen policies that support the balancing act families engage in every day: caring for family members while participating in the workforce. These policies would recognize the value of caregiving and allow parents to better balance work and family obligations. Further, policymakers should structure these policies so that individuals with low-incomes benefit the most, which would promote economic security. Supporting working mothers means valuing caregiving, expanding access to affordable child care, and addressing unfair scheduling practices.

### KEY POLICIES

Policies that recognize the value of caregiving include the following:

- While California leads the nation in paid family leave policy, the state and the nation lag other wealthy countries. State policymakers can **expand California's paid family leave** by increasing the duration of paid leave to six months (from the current six weeks) and by boosting wage replacement levels – particularly for caregivers with low incomes.<sup>5</sup> These changes would put California on par with other nations.
- State policymakers can **extend the CalEITC to include family members who are not working for pay, but are caring for children younger than school-age, elderly dependents, and dependents with disabilities**. Allowing families with these types of dependents to claim a credit would be an easy-to-implement strategy to recognize unpaid caregiving as a valuable form of work.

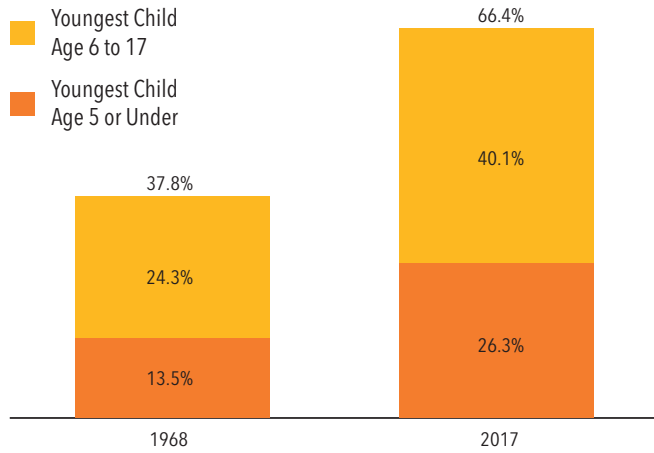
Policies that expand access to affordable child care include the following:

- State policymakers can **increase funding for California's subsidized child care and development programs**, which help families with low or moderate incomes make ends meet and allow them to avoid difficult choices about where to leave their children while they are at work. Funding for these programs as a whole remains below pre-recession levels, after adjusting for inflation, and far fewer children receive subsidized child care today than before the Great Recession began in 2007.
- Local jurisdictions can follow the lead of Alameda and San Francisco counties by putting forth **local ballot measures to fund additional subsidized early care and education slots** in their county. Only a small fraction of families eligible for the state's subsidized child care and development programs receive services. Local funding for subsidized child care could help address the shortage of affordable care for working families.

Policies to address unfair scheduling practices include the following:

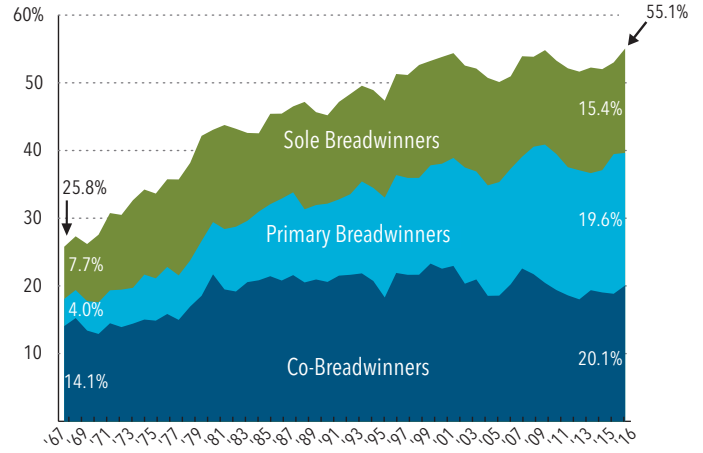
- State policymakers can pass **comprehensive fair-workweek legislation** that gives employees predictable schedules with stable hours. Without a predictable schedule with consistent hours, families have difficulty arranging child care and balancing their household budget. Unpredictable work schedules also make it hard for parents to go back to school or engage in job training, limiting economic mobility.
- In the absence of state action, local jurisdictions can follow the lead of Santa Clara and San Francisco counties and Emeryville and San Jose by **passing ordinances that support fair-workweek policies**.

**FIGURE 1 Percentage of Mothers in the Labor Force in California**



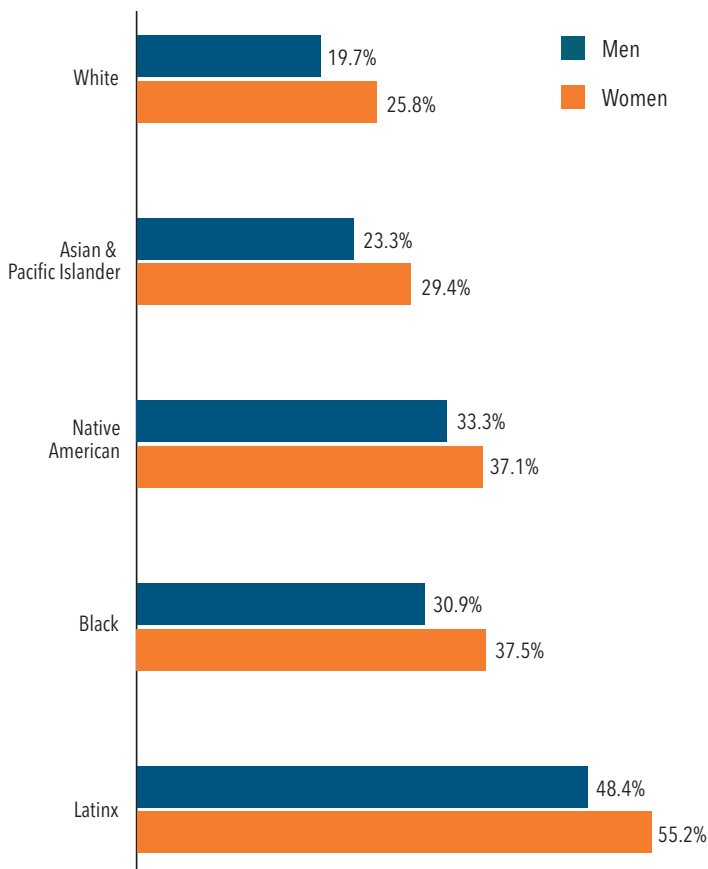
Note: Data are for the civilian, non-institutionalized population ages 16 to 64.  
 Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey data

**FIGURE 2 Percentage of Mothers Who Are Breadwinners in California, 1967-2016**



Note: Data are for the civilian, non-institutionalized population ages 16 to 64.  
 Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey data

**FIGURE 3 Percentage of Workers Earning Low Wages in California, 2016**



Note: Race and ethnicity categories are mutually exclusive. Data are for the civilian, non-institutionalized population ages 16 to 64 and exclude self-employed individuals. Low wages are defined as less than \$14.71 per hour, which was two-thirds of the median full-time, hourly wage in California in 2016.  
 Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey data

**ENDNOTES**

- 1 Heather Boushey and Kavya Vaghul, *Women Have Made the Difference for Family Economic Security* (Washington Center for Equitable Growth: April 2016).
- 2 "Mothers" refers to women who are living with at least one of their own children who is under the age of 18. Sole breadwinners are single mothers with earnings who are the head of household without a spouse or cohabitating partner present. Primary and co-breadwinner mothers are either the head of household or married to the head of household with a spouse present. Primary breadwinners earn more than 50% of the total earnings of the mother and her spouse. Co-breadwinner mothers earn more than 25% and less than 50% of the total earnings of the mother and her spouse.
- 3 Julie Vogtman and Karen Schulman, *Set Up to Fail: When Low-Wage Work Jeopardizes Parents' and Childrens' Success* (National Women's Law Center: January 2016).
- 4 For an in-depth discussion of race and work-life balance, see Jocelyn Frye, *The Missing Conversation About Work and Family: Unique Challenges Facing Women of Color* (Center for American Progress: October 2016).
- 5 Women may also receive State Disability Insurance (SDI) for up to four weeks before their due date and up to six weeks after the birth of the child. Combined with SDI, women in California can take 12 weeks of paid, post-partum leave for the birth of a child.

Additional analyses focusing on Boosting Income, Building Wealth, and the Safety Net can be found at <http://calbudgetcenter.org/womens-well-being>. We are thankful to a number of individuals who provided comments on policies to boost women's economic security, employment, and earnings in California. A full list can be found at <http://calbudgetcenter.org/womens-well-being/about>.