

# TOWARD EQUITY:

*Investing in Women and Girls for Connecticut's Future*

# AURORA

Women and Girls Foundation

*Celebrating 25 Years*

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this report focuses on specific areas where increased equity can make a difference in the lives of women, girls, their families and their communities. Those areas include: **poverty, education, economic opportunity and labor force participation, childcare and caregiving, and safety.** Our research takes a comparative view over time of key markers to ask how the status of women and girls has changed over the first 25 years of the twenty-first century and what strategies and policies can be put in place to accelerate the pace of change toward gender and racial equity.



- ◆ Women in Connecticut have made considerable advances in the last 20 years but still face inequities that often prevent them from reaching their full potential.
- ◆ Since 2010, there has been only minimal improvement on the percentage of women in the state living in poverty (in 2023: 11%, approximately 198,000 women). Poverty rates for women aged 18 and over in the state's three largest cities were more severe (in 2023: Bridgeport: 21%; Hartford: 27%; New Haven: 25%).
- ◆ Since 2000, a higher percentage of women have bachelor's degrees. In 2023, 44 percent of women aged 25 and older in Connecticut have a bachelor's degree or higher, an increase of about 8 percentage points since 2000. Nationally, 1 in 5 female students are mothers and 71% of student mothers take out student loans. The average student loan debt per borrower is \$35,971 in Connecticut.
- ◆ As of 2023, 78 percent of women in Connecticut aged 25 to 64 were in the labor force, compared with 86 percent of men. These numbers have fluctuated but there has been minimal change for women since 2010. Women make up 48% of Connecticut's labor force.
- ◆ A growing share of employed women in Connecticut are in managerial or professional occupations, which tend to require a four-year degree and often have higher wages and employment benefits. In 2023, about 47 percent of these positions were held by women. However, a significant gender pay gap exists for these positions, with women making only 74% of the median salary of men in similar jobs.
- ◆ STEM is the fastest-growing occupational category in Connecticut, but the proportion of women in STEM has declined (2010: 28%; 2022: 26%). The median woman earns 81% of the median man in STEM.
- ◆ 42% of working mothers in Connecticut would look for a higher-paying job if they had adequate and affordable childcare. Connecticut ranks fifth highest for childcare costs in the US, with the average annual childcare cost in 2023 being \$15,000.
- ◆ One in four Connecticut women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lifetime. Member organizations of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence serve nearly 40,000 violence survivors and their children annually.

**1 in 5**

*female students in the U.S. are mothers*

**48%**

*of Connecticut's labor force are women*

**1 in 4**

*Connecticut women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lifetime*

## A CALL TO PHILANTHROPY

*Toward Equity* represents a collaborative effort among three women's funds in Connecticut. Providing vital data on the status of women and girls to the nonprofit sector, the legislature, and to our corporate partners, we intend to offer information that will help to direct resources in a way that builds equity and opportunity. Women's funds exist to address a fundamental inequity—only 1.8% of charitable giving is directed to programs serving women and girls, and less than 0.5% is directed to programs serving women and girls of color. Programs that are targeted are more effective, serving the specific needs of underserved populations. When innovative and creative programs address the needs of women and girls, they benefit the entire community as women share the resources with their families and their communities. The case studies included in *Toward Equity* are meant to show the impact of sustained philanthropic investment in programs designed to increase economic and educational opportunity for women and girls. Women's funds have a decades long history of making these types of investments, and *Toward Equity* calls for the philanthropic sector to take our commitment and the demonstrated effectiveness of our investments as a model and join us to increase the dollars focused on women and girls to build a better and more equitable Connecticut. Centering women and girls, and particularly women and girls of color, when making philanthropic investments does not shortchange men and boys, but builds a thriving economy and sees opportunities extending to two generations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

- ◆ Increase philanthropic dollars targeted to programs specifically serving Connecticut's women and girls, including funding for general operating needs and multi-year support.
- ◆ Create innovative cross sector philanthropic efforts to address economic disparities, such as low-interest loan funds for women entrepreneurs, or expanding and replicating YWCA New Britain's Childcare Incubator.
- ◆ Fund research efforts to determine the obstacles and opportunities for increasing gender and racial equity and convene key stakeholders, community, and decision-makers to propose strategic solutions and policy recommendations and advocate for implementation.

## A CALL TO POLICY MAKERS

Connecticut innovates with policies to build equity—now more than ever, we have a chance to show national leadership and demonstrate the impact on all residents of policies that reduce barriers to success for women and girls.

Connecticut's history of policymaking designed to build equity can show the way forward. Past legislation that has focused on increasing economic participation and alleviating poverty can serve as a model and starting point for further improvement. Policies and strategies that build equitable access to opportunity can address the continuing economic, educational and leadership barriers for women, and particularly women of color, in Connecticut.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

- ◆ Strengthen support systems for vulnerable Connecticut residents to address persistent poverty and benefits cliffs, increase access to food and housing assistance, increase affordable housing options, establish a statewide child tax credit, fully fund the Menstrual Equity bill, provide safe housing for domestic violence survivors, and protect residents regardless of their citizenship status.
- ◆ Increase equitable pathways to high-wage, high-growth jobs with a commitment to closing gender and racial wage gaps, require fair work scheduling, and prevent discrimination and harassment to build economic security for women and their families.
- ◆ Prioritize supports for caregiving to the ultimate goal of universal childcare - from increased childcare spots, subsidies to make care affordable, increased pay for childcare and healthcare workers, expanding innovative business incubators for childcare business owners. These are necessary to support the full economic participation of a diverse, twenty-first century workforce.

**WOMEN'S FUNDS EXIST TO ADDRESS A FUNDAMENTAL INEQUITY—ONLY 1.8% OF CHARITABLE GIVING IS DIRECTED TO PROGRAMS SERVING WOMEN AND GIRLS, AND LESS THAN 0.5% IS DIRECTED TO PROGRAMS SERVING WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR.**