



About the California Commission on the Status of Women

Governor Pat Brown initially established the Commission as an Advisory Committee in 1965. It was made a permanent Commission by the Legislature and Governor Ronald Reagan in 1971. It is the only state agency that looks specifically at all issues impacting women and provides a gender analysis of proposed legislation and other state action.

The Commission is an independent voice within state government for California women and girls. It serves as an important link between many communities and the government, including working families, incarcerated women, immigrant women, and those with least access to state government and services.

The Commission serves women and girls by seeking their input through public hearings across the state. The testimony from the hearings helps shape the Commission's public policy agenda.

The Commission facilitates the development of coalitions of diverse organizations around various issues such as reproductive rights, paid family leave and incarcerated women.

The Commission is an important source of information and data on women and girls for the Legislature, private organizations, individuals and state agencies.

In the last year alone, the Commission has:

- Convened public meetings in three different cities to hear from California women about the issues, concerns and needs facing them. These hearings resulted in testimony from more than 200 people, many represented large membership organizations.
- Published our Public Policy Agenda, with legislative and administrative recommendations, which reflects the voices we heard during the public hearings to the Legislature.
- Sponsored three bills and took positions on more than 80 measures intended to benefit women and families throughout the state.
- Screened every legislative proposal introduced and provided a gender analysis to Legislators and to women's groups around the state.
- Organized and held numerous policy briefings for Legislators, legislative staff, and advocacy groups on a variety of issues important to women and girls.
- Maintained a website that is a critical resource for women and organizations around the state to link to state government. (www.women.ca.gov)
- Collaborated with various state agencies, foundations, private institutions and non-profit organizations around the state to develop tools, education and programs focused on issues impacting women, from financial literacy to women veterans to health care and access to reproductive services.

Why the Commission is Needed

18.7 million women and girls call California home, comprising just half over all its residents. More than 12% of the women and girls in the United States live in California.

California is the one of the most diverse states in the country, with the highest foreign-born population and among the highest percentages of nonwhite and mixed-race populations. With such diversity, the issues of race, language, and ethnicity make advocacy for all women even more important. More than half of California women are women of color.

Women have made tremendous progress in the years since the Commission was created but full equality has not yet been achieved.

- Women in California make only 84 cents for every dollar earned by men; African American women earn only 68 cents and Latinas only 59 cents.
- Domestic violence continues to be a major problem in California. Women account for 85% of the victims of intimate partner violence with 40% of women experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Women 18-24 years of age are most at risk, as are pregnant women. Seventy-five percent of victims have children under the age of 18 at home.
- Women are most often the primary caregivers for children. Women also comprise 59-75% of all long-term caregivers in California, providing primary care for individuals with disabilities and the elderly. Caregivers frequently face challenging time restraints and must balance job and caregiving responsibilities, often resulting in lower income and barriers to career advancement.
- Women are underrepresented as CEO's with California's 400 largest companies, holding just 3.3% of those positions.
- Women continue to be underrepresented in elective office in California, holding 28.3% of State Legislature positions, 24% of County Board of Supervisor positions, and 38% of Congress (House and Senate).
- Women hold less than 25% of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) jobs. While there is a growing need in these fields, women continue to be underrepresented in large part because of sex stereotyping and bias, lack of supportive faculty and counselors, and workplace bias.

The current budget crisis and the economy are having a disparate impact on women and their families, making the work of the Commission even more important as the State moves forward.

- Women make up the vast majority of adults who participate in the state's health care and safety net programs that provide essential benefits and services to low-income Californians and their families. Women and their children have been disproportionately impacted by the repeated budget cuts in recent years. Often families are enrolled in multiple programs, including health coverage, childcare, CalWORKS, IHSS, mental health and substance abuse programs. The effect of budget cuts in such cases is devastating.
- The percentage of California's single mothers with jobs dropped by more than 10 percentage points between 2007 and 2010. The recession erased all employment gains that followed state and federal welfare reform.
- Seventeen percent of California women and girls live in poverty. The poverty rate for women of color is even higher; for African American women it is 24% and for Latinas it is 25%. For single mothers with children, the poverty rate is 35.4%.