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New Report: More Illinois Working Mothers Are Low-Income

*Forty Percent of the State's Low-Income Working Families
are Headed by Working Mothers*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Nationwide, there are now 4.1 million low-income families headed by working mothers, with more than 160,000 of those in Illinois, according to the new report, “Low-Income Working Mothers and State Policy: Investing for a Better Economic Future.”

The report, which was released by the [Working Poor Families Project](#) and utilizes the latest data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, finds that Illinois ranks 19th in the nation for the number of female-headed low-income working families. As of 2012, there were 404,108 low-income working families in the state, with 163,341 headed by working mothers.

“Forty percent of Illinois’ low-income families are headed by women. Women in our state are concentrated in the least-stable, lowest-paying jobs with the fewest benefits,” said Anne Ladky, Executive Director of Women Employed. “We need to make these jobs better by ensuring that everyone who works is paid a decent wage, earns paid sick time and can count on a stable schedule. We must also make sure that more low-paid working women can enter and succeed in postsecondary education, a proven pathway to economic advancement. What’s good for women is good for Illinois—and the country.”

Many of the factors keeping working mothers in poverty can be addressed at the state level, the report found. State governments have significant authority and opportunity to help low-income working mothers gain the education and skills they need to provide for their children, as well as provide important supports that can assist them as they strive to become economically secure.

The report found that 48% of women heading low-income working families in Illinois have no postsecondary education. According to the report, improving access to and success within postsecondary education by providing need-based financial aid to part-time students along with affordable child care is among the most meaningful reform that can help low-income families. Other reforms states can take include improving the quality of low-wage jobs by raising the minimum wage and assuring all workers have paid sick leave and paid family leave; and facilitating a strong network of work supports, such as a state-refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and expanded Medicaid eligibility.

“Without access to the necessary educational and training opportunities, the number of low-income families across Illinois will continue to grow and their communities will suffer,” said Carrie Thomas, Associate Director of the Chicago Jobs Council. “Sensible policy will lead to a pathway out of poverty for thousands of low-income working families across the state.”

The report defines “low-income working families” as earning no more than twice the federal poverty income threshold; in 2012, the low-income threshold for a family of three with two children was \$36,966.

“Too many female-headed working families have no pathway out of poverty,” said Deborah Povich, co-manager of the [Working Poor Families Project](#) and one of three authors of the report. “Public policy can and must play a critical role in increasing opportunities so families can achieve economic security. Addressing the needs of low-income working mothers will benefit their children and future generations.”

“Low-Income Working Mothers and State Policy: Investing for a Better Economic Future,” can be found on the WFPF website at <http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org>.

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Women Employed mobilizes people and organizations to expand educational and employment opportunities for America’s working women.

The Chicago Jobs Council is a policy and advocacy organization that works with its members to ensure access to employment and career advancement opportunities for people living in poverty.

The Working Poor Families Project is a national initiative designed to help working families achieve economic security by strengthening a variety of policies at the state level. The WFPF is supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, Joyce Foundation and Kresge Foundation.