

Executive Summary: "Fund the Future: A Call for Durable & Coordinated Investment in Child Care & Women's Economic Health in San Mateo County"

Introduction

The report underscores the economic challenges faced by women in San Mateo County, especially single mothers and women of color. It highlights the financial strain, emotional toll, and systemic barriers that these women encounter, particularly in areas like child care, wage equity, and wealth accumulation.

Background

Women make up over 50% of San Mateo County's population. However, a significant portion, particularly single mothers, live below the "Real Cost Measure" despite the region's overall wealth. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing systemic issues, such as the lack of access to affordable child care, the wage gap, and rising living costs.

Community Engagement and Research

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conducted extensive research and community engagement, including surveys, interviews, and feedback sessions, to gather data on the economic challenges women face. The findings highlighted the intersection of low wages, expensive child care, and the financial knowledge gap as key drivers of economic inequity.

Key Findings

Child Care and Caregiving: The child care crisis in the county is severe, with a shortage of nearly 3,000 early educators and over 17,000 child care spaces. Women, particularly those in caregiving roles, face significant career and financial penalties due to the high cost and limited availability of child care.

Women's Wealth Health: Women in San Mateo County, especially single mothers and women of color are disproportionately affected by low wages, career interruptions due to caregiving, and a lack of financial literacy. This contributes to a substantial wealth gap.

Recommendations

- **Create and Invest in an Office of Women & Children:** A centralized office to coordinate efforts related to child care, pay equity, and financial literacy is essential. This office would address the interconnected issues impacting women and children, facilitating access to crucial services.
- **Develop a Blueprint for Child Care:** To address the shortage of child care services, a comprehensive plan outlining specific goals and actions to improve accessibility and affordability is needed.
- **Promote Pay Equity:** Continued efforts toward achieving and promoting pay equity across businesses and nonprofits are crucial for economic stability in the region.
- **Increase Awareness of Savings Programs:** Programs like CalSavers and CalKIDS need to be more widely promoted to help residents, especially women, build wealth and save for future education.



- Support Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) Programs: Expanding GBI programs for vulnerable populations, such as young mothers and survivors of domestic violence, can provide much-needed financial stability.
- Enhance Financial Literacy and Career Pathways: Financial literacy programs need to be integrated into adult education, and career pathways need strengthened to provide women with the tools to achieve long-term economic stability.

Conclusion

The report calls for meaningful action and investment in women's economic health in San Mateo County. By addressing the root causes of economic inequity—such as inadequate child care, pay inequity, and the wealth gap—the county can create a more equitable and prosperous future for all residents.

