



# REPORT OF THE 2022 ARKANSAS WOMEN'S COMMISSION

ANALYZING THE ROLE OF ARKANSAS WOMEN IN THE  
LABOR MARKET AND ECONOMY





## STATE OF ARKANSAS

ASA HUTCHINSON  
GOVERNOR

December 7, 2022

ALISON R. WILLIAMS  
CHIEF OF STAFF

Governor Asa Hutchinson  
State Capitol, Room 250  
500 Woodlane Avenue  
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Governor Hutchinson and Members of the General Assembly,

On behalf of the members of Governor Hutchinson's 2022 Arkansas Women's Commission, I am pleased to submit our findings and actionable recommendations for your consideration. Chairing this Commission has been a highlight of my time working in Governor Hutchinson's Administration, and I am grateful for his confidence in me and the nineteen other professionals he and Legislative Leadership appointed.

It will likely come as no surprise that the challenge of finding quality child care underlies many of the other challenges facing women in Arkansas since the burden of care largely falls to women. Improving access to basic physical and mental health services and resources, including those that support victims of domestic violence, will create a positive cascading effect, ensuring that those who provide care to others can continue to do so without risk to their own well-being. COVID-19 exacerbated these long-standing challenges, especially for those women in rural communities who may already have had difficulty accessing resources.

You will note that the Commission's recommendations ask for engagement from the business and philanthropic communities as well as government. This was intentional. The challenges women in Arkansas face require a concerted and coordinated approach among many parties. I hope the conversations we began this year, especially those that look for ways to take the most advantage of a terrible global pandemic, find their place in the conversations of policymakers as well.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alison R. Williams".

Alison R. Williams  
Chief of Staff to the Governor  
Chair of the 2022 Arkansas Women's Commission



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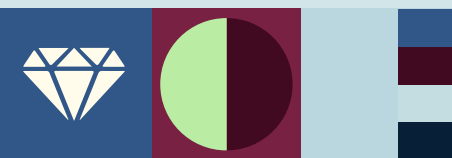
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**On February 17, 2022, on the heels of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Asa Hutchinson signed an executive order forming the Arkansas Commission on the Status of Women (“Arkansas Women’s Commission” or “Commission”). Governor Hutchinson’s commitment to identifying barriers for women is rooted in similar Commissions that date to the President John F. Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women, which was established in 1961.**

In Arkansas, the first Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1964 by Governor Winthrop Rockefeller. As the Women’s Movement gained momentum in the early 1970s, Governor Bumpers reinstated the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women in May 1971. Although Governor David Pryor also instituted his own Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women, Governor Bumpers’s 1973 report was the last report to be issued ... until today. Thus, with Governor Hutchinson’s announcement in early 2022, it had been nearly fifty years since an Arkansas Governor explored the experience of the State’s women.

In the [proclamation](#) creating the Commission, Governor Hutchinson tasked its members with analyzing barriers to entry for women in the Arkansas workforce, and he asked for a specific focus on single mothers, women entrepreneurs, STEM field recruitment of women, and perhaps most importantly, the child care economy in the State. In appointing citizens to the Commission, Governor Hutchinson paid special attention to ensuring the members represented various demographics of the state, including age, social class, geographic location, and race/ethnicity.

Supported financially and substantively by the Women’s Foundation of Arkansas, the 2022 Arkansas Women’s Commission kicked off its work in late February 2022, with the goal of meeting the Governor’s mandate that a report be delivered to him and the General Assembly by the end of 2022. Guided by Chair Alison Williams, the Commission took a multifaceted approach to ensure maximum engagement with citizens across the State, including holding monthly regional meetings, conducting a statewide telephone survey of

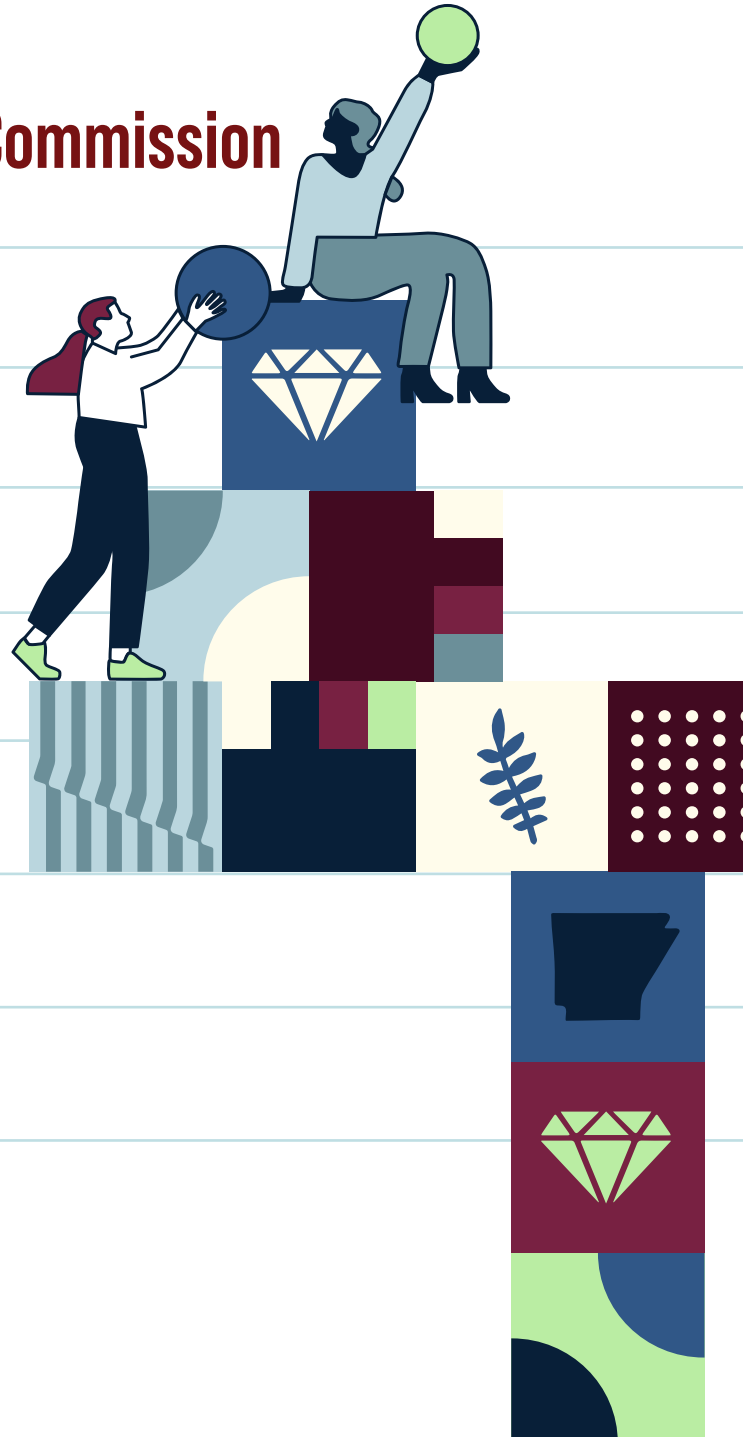
more than 400 women over the age of 18 living in Arkansas and hosting a continuously available on-line survey on the Women's Commission website ([www.women.arkansas.gov](http://www.women.arkansas.gov)), which garnered more than 80 detailed responses. The surveys enjoyed the financial support of the Women's Foundation of Arkansas and the subject matter expertise of the J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville

The Commission also created subcommittees focused on the areas identified in Governor Hutchinson's Executive Order. Commissioners self-selected to at least one subcommittee, and a volunteer chaired each one. The subcommittees held their own meetings with experts on matters related to their respective group or conducted a research review to develop their findings and propose actionable recommendations for the final report. The subcommittees' findings and recommendations form the basis of this report, and significant effort was undertaken to ensure that recommendations had the support and commitment from those organizations who could best execute on them.

The most significant findings of the 2022 Arkansas Women's Commission are not revelatory: Women in Arkansas continue to bear the greatest burden of family care, which includes child and elder care, and COVID-19 further brought this open secret into stark relief. The Commission's recommendations are equally unsurprising. There is not much about reducing the barriers to women in Arkansas – in wages, in professional advancement, in access to child care, or in terms of access to health care – that is novel. What deserves continued vigilance is working together to address them.

# Summary of Recommendations of the 2022 Arkansas Women's Commission

- 01 Meaningfully engage the business community to address child care challenges
- 02 Increase access to women's and mental health resources, especially in rural communities
- 03 Increase equity in the labor force and in entrepreneurship
- 04 Increase mentorship for women
- 05 Incentivize Arkansans to enter or remain in the early childhood education profession
- 06 Increase awareness of programs designed to assist single parents
- 07 Increase equity in STEM education
- 08 Provide technical assistance and capacity building for expanding existing child care businesses



# INTRODUCTION

In organizing the 2022 Arkansas Women's Commission, Commissioners agreed to create the following subcommittees:

- Research and Writing
- Family Caregiving
- Impact of COVID-19
- Barriers to Entry and Labor Force Participation and Retention

Commissioners were asked to self-select into at least one subcommittee and many Commissioners elected to serve on more than one subcommittee. This cross-pollination of Commissioner attention ensured awareness across the subcommittees and allowed for quick deconfliction of any real or perceived overlap. The subcommittees received information, based on the Governor's mandate, about the role of their subcommittee and expectations for it. Each subcommittee was chaired by a volunteer from the Commission, with the Research and Writing Subcommittee co-chaired by two members of the Commission.

The Research and Writing Subcommittee kicked off its work by developing an on-line survey that was continuously-available at [www.women.arkansas.gov](http://www.women.arkansas.gov). More than 80 Arkansans responded to this survey, providing rich, anonymous anecdotes about their own personal experience. Sample responses can be found throughout this report, and complete results are available online. In September 2022, funded by the Women's Foundation of Arkansas, expertly shepherded by Dr. Todd Shields, and on behalf of the Commission, Issues & Answers Network Inc. completed 408 telephone interviews among a random sample provided by Marketing Systems Group<sup>1</sup>. Similar to the online survey, the complete responses to this survey are available online.

In early discussions, the Commission agreed that the initial moniker "Child Care Subcommittee" was too limiting, since the burden of elder care also tends to fall to women, and the name of the subcommittee was changed to "Family Caregiving Subcommittee." As research progressed, however, the Family Caregiving Subcommittee realized that they would not be able to competently make recommendations for both child and elder care. The subcommittee name remained, but the focus returned solely to the challenges of child care.

Given the pandemic's ubiquity, the Impact of COVID-19 Subcommittee had an equally difficult task of limiting its focus to things that could be adequately researched within the timeframe allowed. In most cases, COVID-19 simply exacerbated existing problems. Child care became virtually impossible to secure even for those who had easy access to it before COVID-19 struck. Many women were disproportionately struck with the double-whammy of working in industries



that required in-person contact (health care, service) that were also deemed “essential,” putting them at greater risk of contracting the virus because their work could not be conducted remotely.

On the other hand, women tended to take up work in the “gig economy” at greater rates than men, with the exception of the transportation industry (e.g., Uber or Lyft). Companies that allowed women to make their own schedule without engaging directly with their clients (e.g., Etsy or DoorDash) saw significant increases of women joining their ranks, especially when compared to men, during the height of the pandemic. It is still too early to tell if these shifts have staying power, but they do give a glimpse into how women’s preferences in the labor force could evolve longer-term.

The Barriers to Entry & Labor Force Participation & Retention Subcommittee’s research largely confirmed the experience of many women: Bias still exists when considering promotability, the quality of a new business idea, and whether a business idea borne from a woman’s experience deserves investment. Social mores still weigh heavily in some industries and communities. Until there are more women in leadership across all industries and government sectors, women will continue to struggle to have their experience validated.

Despite the deep commitment of Commissioners over 10 months of activity, there is still much research and advocacy that could be done. This report touches on the most significant challenges to women, and it starts with the findings of the Family Caregiving Subcommittee.



## SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

### FAMILY CAREGIVING SUBCOMMITTEE

The Family Caregiving Subcommittee conducted research related to the continuing challenges Arkansas women face regarding child care<sup>2</sup>. Lack of child care is a barrier to success in the workforce for women of working age, and the quality of early learning services and care for the next generation of workers is fundamental to the long-term economic prosperity of our state. Child care hangs over every discussion of the status of women and their economic prospects and was touched on by all three subcommittees. What's more, accessing reliable, quality child care is not limited to low-income families. Households in the highest-income neighborhoods in Arkansas are situated in child care deserts at double the rate of those in the lowest-income neighborhoods (41% compared to 20%).<sup>3</sup>

### High-quality early learning:

- Is critical to human development and supports healthy families. “The most critical period of human brain development occurs in the first 5 years of life. Having high-quality care and stimulating environments in that first 5 years can influence how well children will learn in school, how well they will be able to find employment and support their own families, and how much they will give back to their communities.”<sup>4</sup>
- Improves labor force participation for all, but especially for women. It unlocks talent for employers because parents cannot go to work without high-quality, accessible, affordable care for their children.
- Improves economic outcomes for all – state, communities, and families. Conversely, the lack of access to child care is an economic drain. Arkansas employers lose an estimated \$865 million annually due to absences and employee turnover, the state loses an estimated \$200 million in tax revenue due to child care issues. Child care is a major reason parents leave jobs, change jobs or decline job opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PAYS

The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program was created in 1991 to offer high-quality early education services to children birth to age five. A 2016 study conducted by the Arkansas Research Center documented the following return on investment:<sup>11</sup>

- Arkansas public school students in the free lunch program who participated in ABC Pre-K averaged 4% higher proficiency in the six years of testing data available.
- Schools spend an average of \$11,500 more on proficient students who did not participate in ABC pre-K than on proficient students who did participate, far exceeding the ABC pre-K cost of \$4,860 per student. The 3rd grade cost savings of \$2.37 for every \$1 spent on ABC pre-K grows to \$2.85 in 4th grade and \$3.10 in 5th grade.
- Almost a quarter (23.7%) of free lunch students who did not participate in ABC pre-K repeat a grade between kindergarten and 5th grade, but only 18.5% of free lunch students who participated in ABC were held back.

## Supply & Demand

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014-2018 American Community Survey<sup>6</sup>, there are 227,529 children under age 5 in the state of Arkansas<sup>7</sup>, and half of them are in non-parental care at least 10 hours per week.<sup>8</sup>

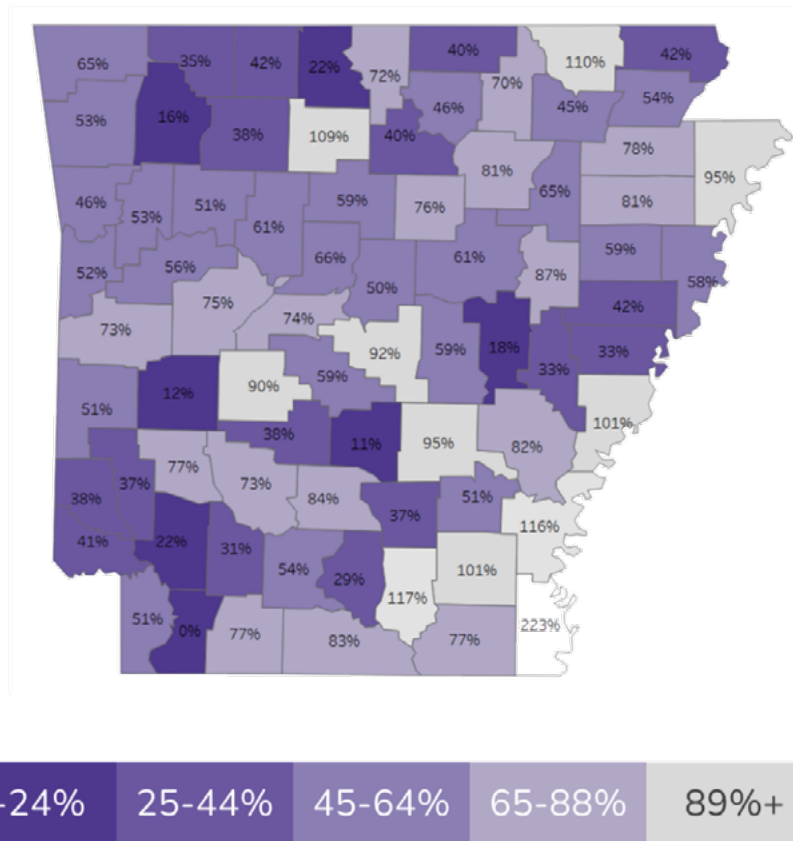
According to the Arkansas Department of Human Services' Division of Child Care & Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) there are 1,574 Centers, 229 Family Child Care Homes, 9 Registered Family Child Care Homes, 143 School Age/Out of School Time Centers, and 173 Early Intervention Day Treatment Centers. Child care providers are businesses. They are often small woman-owned businesses and are often excluded from conversations about entrepreneurship. While some child care centers are operated as nonprofits, the majority are privately owned small businesses.

Over the past 18 years, there has been a reduction in Family Child Care Homes and an increase in center-based care. There are a number of contributing factors to this shift, including changes at the local and municipal level for building regulation and safety – the lack of capital or families to improve their homes has caused many Family Child Care Homes to close. This can create a challenge for finding care close to home. As the number of parents working remotely or working from home long-term rises, demand may shift away from center-based care and toward more convenient Family Child Care Homes in closer proximity to their own homes.

DCCECE is actively working to expand both centers and homes through the American Rescue Plan Act funding. The Division has focused specifically on the expansion of infant/toddler and school-age care and to date has added 3,874 infant/toddler slots, 2,964 school age slots and 80 slots in Family Child Care for a total of 6,918 new slots. While most states across the nation lost child care slots during the pandemic, Arkansas actually gained slots and today has a greater availability of child care slots than prior to the pandemic.

More slots does not, however, mean *enough* slots. Only a handful of Arkansas counties come close to meeting the demand for infant and toddler care. In fact statewide, just 4 in 10 working parents can find licensed care for their infants and toddlers.

No counties come close to meeting demand for high-quality infant toddler care. The state rates the quality of child care centers through a quality rating improvement system called Better Beginnings. Currently, there are three levels, and Arkansas assesses quality using two national tools: the Environment Rating Scale, which focuses on program quality and the Program Administration Scale which focuses on administrative function. At this writing, just 36% of child care slots in the state are at the highest quality rating (Level 3). The age group with the largest percentage of quality slots is preschool, with almost half (46%) of slots at Level 3. This is largely due to the number of preschool age slots that are funded by Arkansas Better Chance for School Success and Head Start, which pay per child rates that allow programs to meet quality standards. On the other hand, only a quarter (26%) of infant and toddler slots are in programs with the highest quality rating.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 1: Percentage of infant and toddler care met with high-quality child care.**

Since 2005, the Arkansas Department of Human Services' Division of Child Care & Early Childhood Education has provided an online child care finding tool to allow families to see the care available in their community and to research the quality and history of the provider.<sup>10</sup> The tool is helpful, but it does not create additional access to quality care. Instead, transparency has contributed to long waiting lists for the highest-rated providers.

**TABLE 1: 2020 AVERAGE ANNUAL COST OF FULL-TIME FAMILY CHILD CARE IN ARKANSAS<sup>12</sup>**

INFANT	TODDLER	4-YEAR	AFTER-SCHOOL
<b>\$7,498</b>	<b>\$7,134</b>	<b>\$6,575</b>	<b>\$4,159</b>

## Affordability

Access is one thing; affordability is another. “The average annual price of child care in America has increased over 220% over the past three decades — considerably faster than other essential family expenses — with significant annual increases in more recent years.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite these price increases, the child care industry depends on investment from government sources. According to The First Five Years Fund, a national organization dedicated to advancing access to high-quality early learning, “Parent fees alone are not enough. Early childhood programs operate on razor thin margins, often relying on federal, state, and local funding to stay afloat. Due to decades of underinvestment, child care providers cannot afford to raise prices, as it may result in families who are already struggling to pay for child care leaving their programs. Unlike other industries, there is not currently a market-based solution to America’s child care crisis.”<sup>14</sup>

In Arkansas, the DHS reimbursement rates for care that are paid to providers were recently (2021) updated to better reflect the true cost of care. The reimbursement rate is higher for providers meeting the highest standard of care (Level 3) as their costs, driven by staffing expenses, will be higher. The cost of infant care is driven up by staffing ratio requirements, and providers typically end up subsidizing infant care with fees paid by the families of older children. This reality squeezes margins, contributes to the shortage of infant care slots, and discourages more entrepreneurs from going into the industry.

## Child Care Workforce

Lack of access is related to a labor shortage in Arkansas for child care workers, a workforce that is overwhelmingly female. Improving the compensation and career pathways for early learning educators will both benefit families needing access to high-quality care and will benefit the women working in the industry.

According to the 2022 study from UAMS: “Although 77% of Arkansas [early childhood care and education] teachers work full-time, many still do not earn enough to pay for basic necessities. Annual salaries range from \$24,000-\$45,000 depending on education, years of experience, race, and the age of children in their classrooms. Despite the complex needs of children younger than age 3, teachers of infants and toddlers make about \$3,500 less per year than colleagues in older classrooms.”

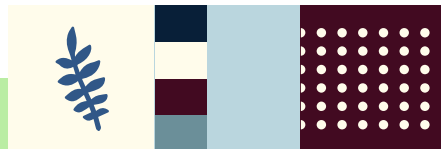
In two recent surveys of early childhood educators and program administrators, UAMS found that the early childhood workforce is under-trained, poorly compensated, economic and food insecure, and at high risk for depression.

Specifically,

- 40% have no early childhood-related education;
- On average, they make between \$16,500 and \$23,100 less than kindergarten teachers;
- 58% had trouble meeting basic needs in the previous year;
- 47% are not offered health insurance; and
- 35% are at-risk for depression.

Several of our Commission members joined a monthly call hosted by the Department of Human Services for early learning providers, who highlighted several workforce challenges they face:

- Early Childhood Education (ECE) is seen as a job and not as a career;
- ECE is not seen or valued as “real education”; and
- Providers struggling to cover basic costs cannot afford attractive benefits for employees.



## Recommendations

- 1. Meaningfully engage the business community to address child care challenges**
- 2. Provide technical assistance and capacity building for expanding existing child care businesses**
- 3. Incentivize Arkansans to enter or remain in the early childhood education profession**
- 4. Explore the related issue of elder care responsibilities, which fall disproportionately on women**

## LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee reviewed existing research related to labor force participation of Arkansas women and the real or perceived barriers to their entry into the labor force, including in the areas of education, recruitment, workforce development, and education. This subcommittee gave specific attention to the real or perceived barriers to Arkansas women entering high-demand career paths such as science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields and/or business creation (entrepreneurship)

### Educational Preparation

Girls are likely to graduate with career aspirations with lower earning potential than a male classmate<sup>15</sup>. Research shows that gender differences in self-confidence in STEM subjects surface by middle school and increase through college, with girls reporting less confidence than boys<sup>16</sup>. According to Ginny Adams, associate dean and professor in the College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics at the University of Central Arkansas, “All data in Arkansas specifically shows that eighth grade is the pivot point – so you have girls who love science, they love the hands-on stuff – something happens around the eighth grade.”<sup>17</sup>

This phenomenon is not specific to Arkansas or even the United States, and it is not inevitable. A study in 2019 by UK Education found that half of the women surveyed would be interested in STEM but 78% felt discouraged because of their gender<sup>18</sup>. Conversely, a study by Monash University in Australia showed that girls attending an all-girl school were 85% more likely to study math and science than girls attending co-ed schools<sup>19</sup>.

Universities have been intentional in recruiting and admitting women and minorities; retaining them to graduation is another challenge. Many struggle with not having family or friends and/or financial and academic support. Attrition is high for Black and non-White Latino STEM majors – 26% of Black and 20% of non-White Latino students drop out. In the words of Dr. Asmeret Berhe, director of the Office of Science at the U.S. Department of Energy: “Higher education must ensure that the folks from minoritized communities who are recruited to colleges are going to be part of a supportive work environment” (2021).

Cultural barriers continue to result in girls and women being stereotyped and even counseled into non-STEM careers. Men remain “the norm” in those jobs, in education settings, and in media portrayals<sup>20</sup>. Research suggests that elementary teachers, primarily female, experience anxiety about math and may pass this anxiety onto their girl students<sup>21</sup>. In higher grades, STEM area teachers are often predominantly male<sup>21</sup>. When women do decide to pursue a career in STEM, they report sexism at both the college level and in the workplace. Admissions tests can play to boys’ strengths (multiple choice) rather than the open-ended questions where girls perform better<sup>21</sup>.



Even after completing a degree in STEM, women continue to face barriers to success: exclusion, harassment, lack of mentorship, role models, and parental leave. Women of color encounter racism as well as sexism in the predominantly male and White STEM fields. They come to view themselves as outsiders<sup>22</sup>.

The outcomes are simple: women will continue to be in lower paying jobs, the gender gap widens, creativity and innovation decreases. “Women’s departure from stem means a loss of knowledge and expertise from stem that is disadvantageous for innovation and scientific inquiry.” – Erin Cech, sociologist at the University of Michigan.

## Food Insecurity

A disturbingly common barrier to academic success and the professional success that follows is food insecurity. The 2016 report “Hunger on Campus” surveyed almost 3,800 students in 34 two- and four-year colleges across 12 states. The findings might be shocking, but they were actually expected:

- Consistent with prior studies, 48% of respondents reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days, including 22% with very low levels of food security that qualify them as hungry.
- Food insecurity occurs at both two-year and four-year institutions. In community colleges, 25% of students qualified as having very low food security, compared to 20% at four-year schools.
- Food insecurity was more prevalent among students of color: 57% of Black or African American students reported food insecurity, compared to 40% of non-Hispanic White students.
- More than half of all first-generation students (565) were food insecure, compared to 45% of students who had at least one parent who attended college.

While the survey did not include any colleges or universities in Arkansas, 57% of the survey respondents were women. Christopher Dickie, director of Employer Relations & Community Outreach at the University of Arkansas eVersity, contributed to the report. The campus community garden hosted by GroGreen, a student organization at the University of Arkansas that donates half of its yield to the Jane B. Gearhart Food Pantry on campus, was provided as an example of a successful program that directly addresses food insecurity and should be replicated.<sup>23</sup>

Programs to address food insecurity must be available to women enrolled in colleges or universities in Arkansas, particularly at our community colleges. The Commission defers its recommendations to address the pernicious problem of hunger to the Governor’s Food Desert Working Group, whose report is delivered contemporaneously to this one.

## Entrepreneurship

According to research from Boston Consulting Group, the global economy could experience up to a \$5 trillion boost if female entrepreneurs received as much funding as male entrepreneurs (Asare, 2019). Additionally, a Kauffman Fellows Research Center study found that having women founders increases opportunities for success for other women as well (Scheidegger, 2019). Women entrepreneurs are also a good bet: “For every dollar of investment raised, female-run startups generated 151% more in revenue than male-run startups” (Fellay, 2021).

However, in 2017, only 2.2% of venture capital funding went to women-led companies – \$1.9 billion vs. \$83.1 billion for companies led by men (Asare, 2019). It is not surprising, then, that men are twice as likely to become entrepreneurs (Foxypreneur, 2020).

Female entrepreneurs’ headwinds are universal, but Arkansas had the dishonor of being one of five states deemed unsuitable for female entrepreneurs by ClarifyCapital “due to higher female unemployment rates and women-to-men pay ratios that fall below the national average” (Editorial Team, 2022). Arkansas performed only a bit better in rankings by AdvisorSmith<sup>24</sup>, ranking seventh worst for female entrepreneurs.

Bentonville-based think tank Heartland Forward ranked Arkansas 46th overall in its Entrepreneurial Capacity Index, and specifically encouraged states “lagging in support of entrepreneurs” to “prepare people, particularly women and those with diverse backgrounds, to pursue and participate in creating a more equitable economy.”

Common barriers faced by female entrepreneurs include:

- Gender bias: Overcoming the notion that women are not suitable for professional/executive/founder roles (Bhagchandka, 2019).
- Market misperceptions: Female entrepreneurs’ competency and knowledge of the market is often disregarded, as are the market opportunities they uncover (Stych, 2019).
- An unlevel playing field in accessing startup and growth capital: Investors are more likely to invest in male-owned startups than female-owned startups. (Asare, 2019)
- A lack of female investors: The tendency to show favoritism to people who are “similar to me” becomes a barrier when women attempt to gain venture capital funding (Asare, 2019).
- Socio-cultural barriers: Women perform, and are expected to perform, in caregiving and domestic roles in addition to seeking professional advancement (Bhagchandka, 2019).
- Lack of female mentors and women who have “been there” and can offer practical advice (Asare, 2019).
- Lack of access to business/social networks, which means female entrepreneurs lack access to mentors, social capital, and startup capital. (Stych, 2019)
- Access to quality child care (Stengel, 2020).

- Lack of capital for expansion, whether of the workforce or into new markets.
- Fear of failure: Women are more likely than men to fear failure when starting a new business, particularly when those around them already doubted their capabilities. As a result, some women operate from a place of fear instead of confidence. (Cheng, 2022)

Women-owned businesses account for only about 16% of the nation's employer firms and, among high-growth firms, they typically account for fewer than 10% of founders. "Female entrepreneurs have untapped economic potential, and policymakers and relevant organizations need to empower them to pursue high-growth opportunities." (Female, 2014)

Female-founded companies generate a higher return on investment than male-founded companies (Fellay, 2021) and could significantly boost the U.S. economy (Asare, 2019). But being unable to access knowledge, resources, and capital perpetuates an unlevel playing field. Only 2% of female-led companies generate \$1 million or more in revenue (Asare, 2019).

## Mentoring

There is no universally accepted definition of mentoring, but most authors emphasized teaching, professional and personal guidance, sponsorship, role modeling and socialization (Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986). People who achieve success in the workforce often cite mentors who equipped them with skills and insight and encouraged their upward progress. Mentorship shows up in articles and books like Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean in: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead" and is a common prescription for addressing gender inequality in the workplace. As the job market for women has transformed over the past several decades, informal networking and mentoring, as well as formal diversity programs that have a mentorship component, are frequently touted as routes to career success for women (Harris, 2022).

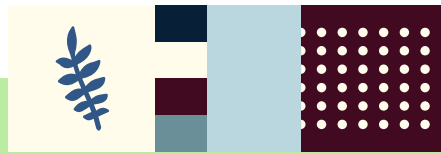
Despite their popularity, however, there remain questions about how useful mentoring programs are at improving women's career trajectories. A frequent critique of current women-focused mentoring efforts is that they reflect and uphold neoliberal feminism and have shifted from collective support to an individualized focus on competition and accruing human and social capital (Harris, 2022). The reluctance to support women's mentorship programs may stem from beliefs that any programs that specifically target women are inherently political or that they give an unfair advantage to women workers (Bird & Rhoton, 2011; Williams et al., 2014).

This subcommittee concluded that the benefits of mentorship outweigh any drawbacks. Women-focused mentoring programs are often cited as an important tool to help address gender inequality at work, and mentorship has been found to fulfill both psychosocial and career functions for women (Kram, 1985).

Mentors can always share information about the "rules of the game" regarding both the formal and

informal ways organizations and industries operate (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Having access to this information can be especially beneficial to minority women who may lack access to the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed in some fields (Zambrano et al., 2015).

In a meta-analysis of literature on mentorship, Ghosh and Reio (2013) found that mentors may also accrue benefits from mentoring, including increased career success and higher levels of commitment to their organization.



## Recommendations

1. Increase equity in the labor force and in entrepreneurship
2. Increase equity in STEM education
3. Increase mentorship for women
4. Increase awareness of programs designed to assist single parents

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEE

The Impact of COVID-19 Subcommittee was responsible for reviewing existing research related to the specific impact of COVID-19 on women in Arkansas, including the impact on their physical and mental health; their participation in the workforce; their participation in workforce development and education; and their access to government services. This subcommittee gave specific attention to additional COVID-19 impacts experienced by single mothers in Arkansas. The group identified experts in relevant fields to present information to the Commission and to help inform the findings.

Across every sector, from family life to personal security, health to personal well-being, child care to job security and success, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected women across the state of Arkansas. While more men have died because of COVID-19, the health of women has been adversely impacted because the pandemic created even a more critical shortage of women's health care providers in our rural state and underutilization of these services due to women prioritizing other duties and obligations over their own health. The pandemic created isolation and stress for everyone, but for women this exacerbated the role they play as the primary caregiver and, in some cases, the victim of domestic violence.

### Health Care

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the way people access health care, with care quickly moving to telehealth. However, with fear of contracting the coronavirus and state emergency declarations limiting non-essential and elective services in the early days of the pandemic, many people went without health care services during 2020. The pandemic has highlighted and aggravated long-standing inequities in health care availability and access.

During the pandemic, the role of caregiver exposed women to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. Representing almost 80% of health care workers, women were on the front line caring for patients and accounted for 72% of all COVID-19 cases among health care professionals nationally.

The pandemic took a disproportionate toll on some communities of color. Hispanic women, who have the lowest rates of insurance, reported higher rates of access barriers. In a national study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 4 in 10 women said they skipped preventive health services, 36% could not get a medical appointment, and 13% did not fill or skipped doses of prescription medicines because of the pandemic. KFF reported that nearly one in four women couldn't access care due to the office hours of health care providers. They couldn't take time off from work, couldn't afford child care and/or didn't have transportation.<sup>25</sup>

## Mental Health & Behavioral Health

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the mental health of women more profoundly than men in several areas, both in the workplace – especially in the health and social services sector – and at home. Unaddressed mental health issues impact our safety, productivity, economy, and our children. Mental health has been and is a growing concern not just in Arkansas but the entire country. According to the University of Michigan’s Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center, Arkansas had the 10th-lowest ratio of psychiatrists to population in 2018.

**TABLE 2: HIGHEST/LOWEST CONCENTRATIONS OF PSYCHIATRISTS BY STATE**

HIGHEST RATIOS BY STATE (PROVIDERS PER 100,000)	LOWEST RATIOS BY STATE (PROVIDERS PER 100,000)
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (50.1)	ARKANSAS (8.0)
MASSACHUSETTS (30.0)	IOWA (7.9)
NEW YORK (25.3)	NEVADA (7.8)
RHODE ISLAND (23.5)	MONTANA (7.5)
CONNECTICUT (23.4)	UTAH (7.4)
VERMONT (23.1)	WYOMING (7.2)
MARYLAND (20.4)	ALABAMA (7.0)
HAWAII (18)	INDIANA (6.6)
MAINE (17.1)	MISSISSIPPI (6.2)
NEW HAMPSHIRE (15.7)	IDAHO (5.3)

Source: University of Michigan’s Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center

While struggles with mental health resulting from COVID-19 and increased stress associated with contemporary work and life continue to impact everyone, the impact has arguably been greatest among women. Women were already 50% more likely to seek mental health treatment than men (Regis College, 2017). In some studies, women reported three times as many mental health issues than men, particularly during the pandemic.

Data close to home follow the same general pattern: In 2021, according to Ortiz, 57% of the 6,448 callers to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline identified themselves as female. In the first eight months of 2022, that proportion was up to 61%, and more women had called by the end of August than in all of 2021. In 2021, 2,786 callers identified themselves as male and 3,662 callers identified themselves as female. So far this year through August 28, there have been 2,290 callers who identified themselves as male and 3,669 callers who identified themselves as female.

Additional problems contributing to the mental health of women during and following COVID-19 include:

- Few providers, especially providers of color;
- Private providers not accepting certain types of insurance, including Medicare and Medicaid;
- Medicare and Medicaid requiring a referral and only a limited number of mental health visits;
- Not knowing where to go;
- Fear of being judged or their information being used against them;
- Lack of trust

## Care Responsibilities

The majority of pandemic-related job losses were experienced by women. Statistics show that over the course of the pandemic recession, 2.5 million women left the job market, compared with 1.8 million men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Many female-dominated industries were non-existent during the pandemic (restaurants, cosmetology, etc.), and many of those jobs paid low wages to begin with. These pandemic effects have been felt disproportionately by Black and Hispanic women compared with their White counterparts. According to Goldin (2021, p. 13), “Black women without a college degree have had larger decreases in their employment rates than Black men and non-Black women with comparable levels of schooling.”

The collapse of the child care sector and drastic reductions in school supervision hours as a result of COVID-19 drove millions of mothers out of the paid workforce. Mothers continue to shoulder the majority of family caregiving responsibilities, as they have both historically and during the pandemic. This had a significant negative effect on women’s employment and labor force participation rates, which turned into a negative effect not only on both current and future earnings but also on retirement security and gender equity in workplaces and homes.

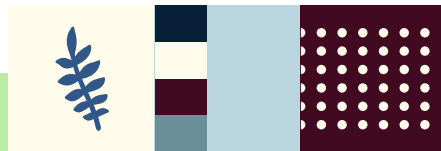
Arkansas Secretary of Commerce Mike Preston spoke about the impact COVID-19 had on the

state's labor market. He highlighted that the most common factor keeping women home and out of the workforce is likely child care.<sup>26</sup>

The pandemic-related school, camp, and child care closures exposed the vulnerabilities the United States, and especially the state of Arkansas, has created by not investing in and maintaining family-friendly workplace standards and a robust child care system. The workplace rules in our country were not built with caregivers in mind and need major restructuring to prioritize care and caregiving, which in turn will accelerate gender equity.

## Domestic Violence

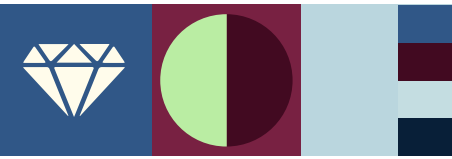
COVID-19 mandates and guidance issued during the pandemic helped stop the spread of the virus but were also associated with increased instances of child abuse and domestic violence. The pandemic's economic impacts exacerbated factors that were already associated with domestic violence: increased male unemployment, stress associated with child care and homeschooling, increased financial insecurity, and poor coping strategies, including the increased use of alcohol and other substances. In addition, COVID-19 left parents and children largely confined to their homes, cut off from friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others capable of reporting signs of abuse and violence and intervening to help potential victims escape violent situations. These and other pandemic-related dynamics increased the risk of abuse and potentially its severity.



## Recommendation

- 1. Increase access to women's and mental health resources, especially in rural communities**





## WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE TELEPHONE SURVEY

In addition to partnering with the Women's Foundation of Arkansas on updating their 2018 Economic Impact study (page 28), the Commission also partnered with the Foundation on a statewide representative telephone survey of women over the age of 18 living in Arkansas.

The survey consisted of 44 questions in the following categories: demographic questions, questions on issues that impact women in general, and questions on issues that impact subgroups of women in particular. Since not every woman faces the same set of challenges, the survey was also intended to discover barriers women face as entrepreneurs, single mothers, working moms, women in poverty, etc.

The survey was conducted during or right after the peak of the pandemic. For many respondents, their careers seemed very fragile in front of COVID due to lack of support systems. Results from the survey are referenced elsewhere in this report. Here are some findings from the survey:

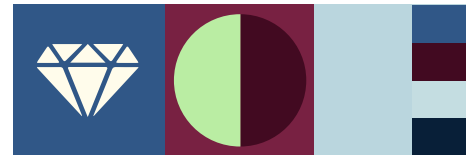
When participants were asked if they would benefit from flexible and/or remote work options, 45.6% said yes. Of those who had full-time jobs, the percentage was even higher: 66.7%.

Many of the survey participants responded that COVID had impacted their workload personally and professionally. Of those who said that their workload had changed, 8% said that they worked remotely and put in more work hours.

Approximately 50% of the participants said that they had to care for children or elderly relatives, assist student(s) with virtual learning, or spend more time caring for family members in addition to their normal workload. Self-care suffered, and many participants experienced mental and physical health issues, including depression and thoughts of suicide. Common issues with childcare and elderly care were affordability and accessibility.

Although small in number, some women respondents were in extreme poverty. They had no internet, not enough food, or were subjected to domestic violence. These women were extremely vulnerable and their basic needs were not met.

## ONLINE SURVEY & FEEDBACK



In addition to the regional events with expert testimony, focus groups, and individual experiences, the Commission asked for feedback on a continuously available on-line survey. The on-line survey asked what barriers women had faced in their work, within their family, with regard to physical and mental health, and regarding their personal safety and spiritual life. There were also questions specific to the impact COVID-19 had on their lives and ideas for policies and practices that government or non-governmental entities could adopt to address challenges they had experienced. Finally, respondents were asked to provide their ZIP code to help ensure that Arkansas respondents were submitting answers. The full responses are included in the appendices..

The responses were often poignant and personal, and they provided anecdotal support for the findings of the randomized telephone survey. Postpartum depression, a condition unique to women, was mentioned repeatedly. Here are some representative comments:

### On child care:

“ The biggest barrier I have faced financially is affording quality childcare so I can work knowing my children are being cared for. ”

“ Not being able to find an employer that understands the demands of a working mom and [is] willing to work with you regarding time off for child illnesses or accommodate a schedule that can help manage your kids’ schooling. ”

“ It is difficult to find a facility that has openings as well as takes children under the age of 3. I think it would be helpful if there were more grants available for individuals to open childcare facilities. ”

### On mental and physical health:

“ I suffered for almost a full year with undiagnosed postpartum depression. ”

“ I think we are all tired. We put everything for ourselves on the back burner and then when we actually carve out some time to take care of ourselves we feel extremely guilty. ”

“ It is difficult to access mental health care here. When I was pregnant, I saw how different maternal and prenatal care was for my friends in other states – theirs was far superior with many more options. My physical health has suffered. ”

#### On education:

“ Being overlooked and under-appreciated because I don’t have at least a 4-year degree. On-the-job experience is not taken into consideration. ”

“ I graduated from Arkansas State University in 2017 and had a hard time finding employment due to a non-violent felony offense that has now been expunged due to Act 990. ”

“ I owe 90K in student loans and make \$20 an hour. ”

#### On entrepreneurship:

“ Since I am a new business owner, I did not know that banks usually provide the business with a line of credit for expenses. I encountered approx. \$40,000 in credit card debit to make necessary improvements to the [business], [but] banks will not provide a line of credit for the business. ”

“ As a woman starting in a male dominated profession there are many obstacles I have had to face. A few are: access to working capital and networking in a male dominated industry. It is hard starting out in any industry for women entrepreneurs. ”

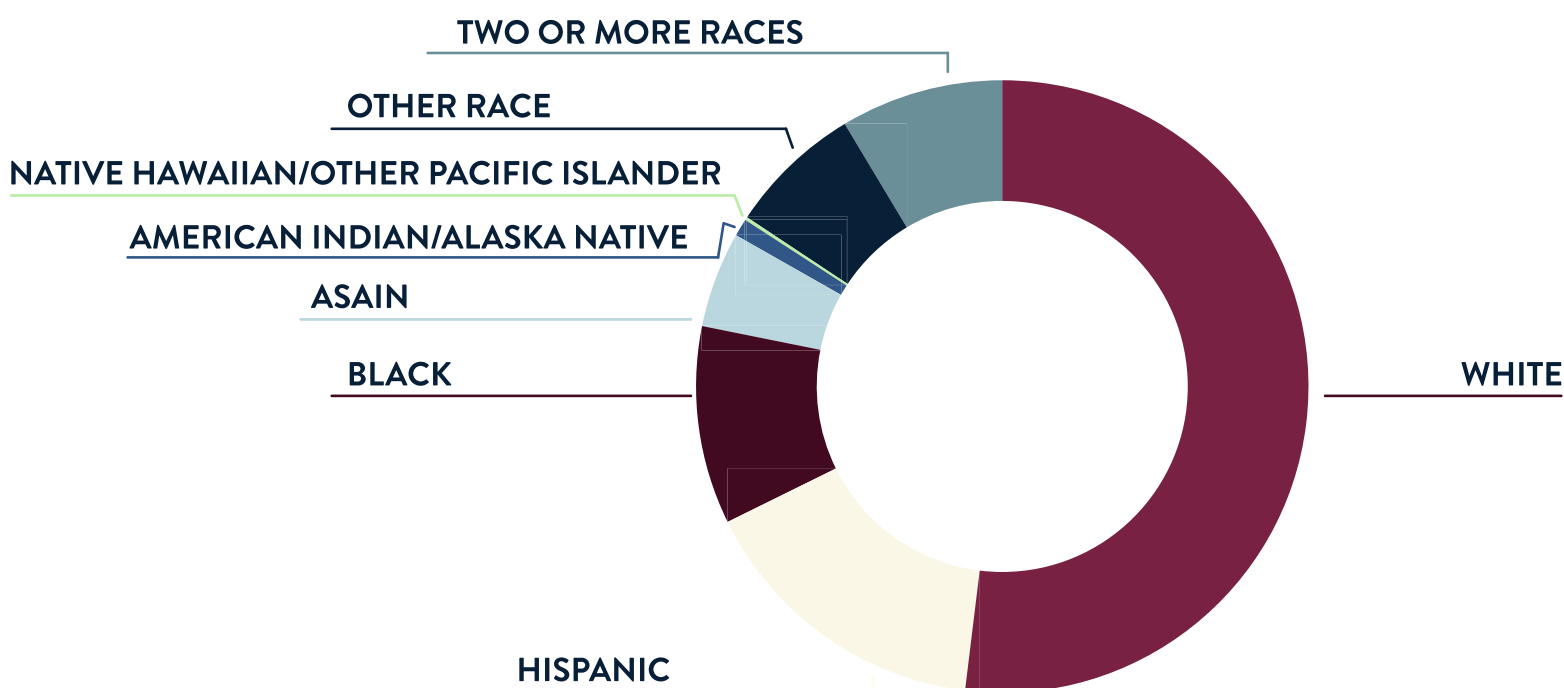
## UPDATE OF THE 2018 WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF ARKANSAS REPORT

Using U.S. Census Bureau data, the Women's Foundation of Arkansas's (WFA) 2015 Status of Women in the States Report ranked Arkansas women 50th on a composite index assessing poverty and opportunity and 47th on employment and earnings. This report enhances the collective understanding of the nuance and variation in women's economic status within Arkansas. It breaks down economic status indicators at the state level by sex, race, and ethnicity, and as with the original 2015 WFA report, the authors rely on federally generated data, including the American Community Survey five-year estimates 2012-2016 and 2016-2020, which provides relevant information to stakeholders for use in grant-making and policy-making that will strengthen women's status in Arkansas.

In both the WFA's original report and in this update,

For context, Arkansas' population as of the 2020 Census was:

White	61.6%
Hispanic	18.7%
Black	12.4%
Asian	6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.2%
Other race	8.4%
Two or more races	10.2%



**TABLE 3: PERCENTAGE AT OR BELOW POVERTY IN ARKANSAS (18 YEARS+)**

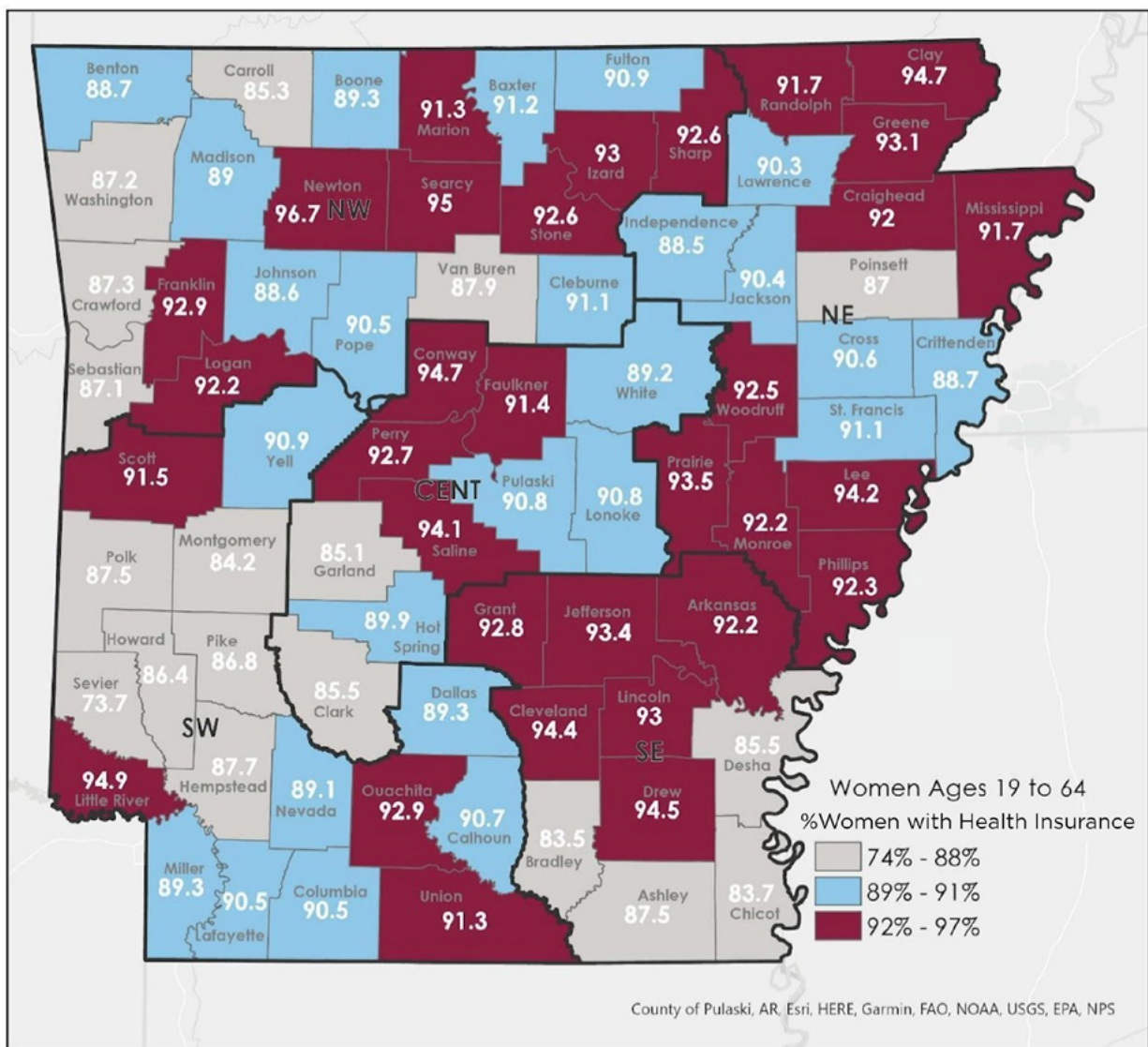
	<b>2016</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>CHANGE</b>	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>-1.8%</b>	<b>-2.3%</b>
WHITE	11.8%	15.9%	10.6%	13.7%	-1.2%	-2.2%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	24.5%	30.3%	20.1%	27.7%	-4.5%	-2.6%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	19.4%	25.2%	16.6%	21.6%	-2.8%	-3.6%
ASIAN	14.1%	14.7%	11.0%	11.7%	-3.1%	-3.0%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	21.5%	28.8%	20.9%	18.4%	-0.7%	-10.4%
SOME OTHER RACE	21.4%	31.2%	15.8%	24.0%	-5.7%	-7.2%
TWO OR MORE RACES	18.4%	21.7%	12.8%	17.9%	-5.5%	-3.8%
HISPANIC/LATINO	21.2%	30.1%	15.3%	21.0%	-5.9%	-9.1%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey*

### Poverty & Opportunity:

More men and women are living above poverty since 2016, but more women continue to live in poverty than men. There have been improvements among women living above poverty, with 88% of Asian women, 86.3% of White women, and 81.6% of women from the Pacific Islands (a small minority in Arkansas) living above poverty level. However, almost 28% of African American women were still living at or below poverty, a decrease of only 2.2 percentage points since 2016.

## Percent of Women with Health Insurance, Age 19 to 64 (2020 ACS)



Source: 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey

## Education

**TABLE 4: PERCENT OF ARKANSANS WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR HIGHER, AGED 25 AND OLDER**

	2016		2020		CHANGE	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>24.9%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
WHITE	22.2%	23.0%	23.9%	26.1%	1.8%	3.1%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	11.5%	17.0%	13.8%	19.5%	2.3%	2.5%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	14.8%	14.8%	17.4%	12.4%	2.6%	-2.3%
ASIAN	56.3%	45.8%	54.2%	45.3%	-2.1%	-0.5%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	2.7%	5.9%	9.9%	15.0%	7.2%	9.1%
OTHER/TWO OR MORE RACES	12.6%	16.3%	17.7%	17.4%	5.1%	1.1%
HISPANIC/LATINO	7.4%	10.5%	10.7%	12.7%	2.3%	2.2%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau’s Community Survey*

Similar to 2016, more Arkansas women hold bachelor’s degrees in 2020 (24.9%) compared to men (22.6%), and this is true across all groups except for Native American and Asian women. Asian women are more likely than women of any other race/ethnic group to have completed a bachelor’s degree, but the gender gap is still large among this group, with 45.3% of Asian women and 54.2% of Asian men holding a college degree. Bachelor’s degree attainment is still lowest among Latinx/Hispanic men and women, with 10.7% of men and 12.7% of women holding a bachelor’s degree.

**TABLE 5: PERCENT OF ARKANSANS WITHOUT A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA,  
AGED 25 AND OLDER**

	<b>2016</b>		<b>2020</b>		<b>CHANGE</b>	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>-1.7%</b>	<b>-2.2%</b>
WHITE	14.2%	12.6%	12.3%	10.2%	-1.9%	-2.4%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	19.2%	17.5%	15.9%	14.5%	-3.3%	-3.1%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE	20.3%	16.2%	17.6%	13.8%	-2.7%	-2.4%
ASIAN	11.4%	15.5%	14.2%	15.2%	2.9%	-0.3%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	24.2%	36.2%	40.9%	40.4%	16.7%	4.1%
OTHER	58.7%	50.1%	46.2%	44.5%	-12.6%	-5.6%
TWO OR MORE RACES	15.8%	13.4%	19.1%	14.6%	3.4%	1.2%
HISPANIC/LATINO	48.8%	43.2%	43.1%	37.6%	-5.7%	-5.6%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey*

In 2020, more men (14%) than women (12.8%) in Arkansas had not finished high school, but there has been improvement in both since 2016. Across race and ethnicity, we see that 37.6% of Latinas have not finished high school and 14.5% of Black women.



## Labor Force Participation

**TABLE 6: PERCENT OF ARKANSANS IN THE CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, AGED 16 AND OLDER**

	2016		2020		CHANGE	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63.4%</b>	<b>53.1%</b>	<b>64.0%</b>	<b>53.9%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>
WHITE	64.0%	52.0%	62.3%	52.7%	-1.7%	0.7%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	56.5%	58.6%	55.1%	58.7%	-1.3%	0.1%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	60.9%	46.2%	54.9%	47.4%	-6.0%	1.2%
ASIAN	74.1%	57.1%	75.5%	58.7%	1.4%	1.6%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	84.0%	55.1%	80.0%	60.3%	-4.0%	5.2%
OTHER	82.6%	56.4%	77.1%	56.8%	-5.5%	0.4%
TWO OR MORE RACES	60.7%	53.1%	65.9%	56.7%	5.2%	3.6%
HISPANIC/LATINO	78.8%	55.8%	78.5%	60.4%	-0.2%	4.6%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey*

As in 2016, Arkansas women's labor force participation rate is about 10% lower than men's. African American women are still in the labor force at a higher rate than Black men. Pacific Islanders, Asian women, and Latinas all have higher labor force participation than Native American and White women.

## Earnings & Pay

**TABLE 7: MEDIAN EARNINGS FOR ARKANSANS EMPLOYED FULL-TIME, FULL-YEAR, AGED 16 AND OLDER**

	2016		2020		%CHANGE	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$40,867</b>	<b>\$31,790</b>	<b>\$45,269</b>	<b>\$36,482</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>
WHITE	\$42,378	\$33,049	\$48,383	\$38,266	14.2%	15.8%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	\$31,782	\$28,018	\$35,331	\$32,463	11.2%	15.9%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	\$35,542	\$30,423	\$41,231	\$30,942	16.0%	1.7%
ASIAN	\$56,952	\$31,210	\$64,122	\$37,508	12.6%	20.2%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	\$25,435	\$22,944	\$27,500	\$25,714	8.1%	12.1%
OTHER	\$27,247	\$22,360	\$31,689	\$26,528	16.3%	18.6%
TWO OR MORE RACES	\$38,054	\$31,215	\$40,928	\$35,004	7.6%	12.1%
HISPANIC/LATINO	\$26,990	\$22,520	\$32,897	\$27,183	21.9%	20.7%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey*

Women continue to earn less than men across all race/ethnic groups, but the median earnings for all women grew significantly faster (14.8%) than for men (10.8%) between 2016 and 2020. White women continue to have the highest median income among women, but only slightly higher than Asian women. Median earnings are lowest among Pacific Islanders and Latinas.

**TABLE 8: RATIO OF WOMEN'S TO WHITE MEN'S EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME, FULL-YEAR EMPLOYED ARKANSANS**

	2016	2020	CHANGE
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
WHITE	78.0%	79.1%	1.1%
BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	66.1%	67.1%	1.0%
AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE	71.8%	64.0%	-7.8%
ASIAN	73.6%	77.5%	3.9%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	54.1%	53.1%	-1.0%
OTHER	52.8%	54.8%	2.1%
TWO OR MORE RACES	73.7%	72.3%	-1.3%
HISPANIC/LATINO	53.1%	56.2%	3.0%

*Source: 2016 and 2020 five-year averages from the Census Bureau's Community Survey*

This ratio compares earnings of women from different racial/ethnic groups to the largest group in the labor market, White men. As in 2016, the smallest gap is among White women (who earn 79.1% of what White men earn), followed by Asian women (77.5%). Black women earn 67.1% of what White men earn, and Latinas earn 56.2% of the earnings of White men.

## APPENDIX A: COMMITTEE MEMBERS BIOGRAPHIES

### ALISON WILLIAMS | CHAIR, 2022 ARKANSAS WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Alison Williams serves as Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson's Chief of Staff, managing a team of professionals who support Governor Hutchinson's transformational vision for the State of Arkansas in areas as divergent as K-12 computer science education, licensing reform, a comprehensive reorganization of state government and conservation. Prior to returning to Arkansas in this position, she was the Governor's Director of State-Federal Relations in Washington, DC. Williams is a 1999 graduate of the University of Arkansas and holds an MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business.

### GAYATRI AGNEW | CHAIR, FAMILY CAREGIVING SUBCOMMITTEE

Gayatri Agnew is a leader in corporate and social impact strategy focused on human capital trends and future of work. Agnew worked throughout her winding path to and through both her undergraduate degree and her MBA. She has dedicated herself to ensuring more people have access to meaningful work and to effective ways to learn and grow. Agnew is a member of the leadership team for Walmart's Office of Culture Diversity Equity and Inclusion where she leads Accessibility and is focused on making all experiences at Walmart accessible to everyone with a focus on people with disabilities. She was previously a member of the leadership team for Walmart's Global Responsibility division, where she leads strategy and partnerships on economic mobility in both shared values and philanthropy. Agnew lives in Bentonville, Arkansas, with her two young children Rohan and Kamala.

### MELLIE BRIDEWELL | CHAIR, IMPACTS OF COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEE

Mellie Bridewell currently serves as the Regional Director for the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Office of Strategy, Management, and Administration and as the President & Founder of the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership. Bridewell has over 22 years of experience in community and organizational networking, grant writing, and program development and implementation. She created the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership organization in 2008 which began with five critical access hospitals and has grown its membership to include 17 rural hospitals, 2 FQHCs, 92 owned and/or affiliated clinics, and three medical schools which serve the south Arkansas region. Bridewell currently works and resides in Lake Village, Arkansas.

## **DR. CHERISSE JONES-BRANCH | CO-CHAIR, RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEE**

Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch is a Professor of History and Dean of the Graduate School at Arkansas State University-Jonesboro. A native of Charleston, South Carolina, she received her B.A. and M.A. from the College of Charleston, and a doctorate in History from The Ohio State University. Jones-Branch is the author of *Crossing the Line: Women and Interracial Activism in South Carolina during and after World War II* and the co-editor of *Arkansas Women: Their Lives and Times*. A second manuscript, *Better Living By Their Own Bootstraps: Black Women's Activism in Rural Arkansas, 1913-1965*, is now available from the University of Arkansas Press. Jones-Branch also serves on the Women's Foundation of Arkansas board of directors and is a U.S. Army Persian Gulf War Veteran.

## **DR. KATHY WHITE LOYD | CHAIR, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Dr. Kathy White Loyd is a respected business leader and philanthropist. She served on the board of directors of the Women's Foundation of Arkansas and the Arkansas Academy of Computing. She retired in 2018 from the Board of Directors for Mattel, Inc. after 17 years of service. She founded the Women's Leadership Center at Arkansas State University and ASU-Mountain Home in 2016 with a mission to cultivate confident and capable young girls and women for a successful path to college and careers.

## **DR. TODD SHIELDS | CO-CHAIR, RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEE**

Dr. Todd G. Shields, of Jonesboro, Arkansas, is Chancellor of Arkansas State University. Prior to this position, he was dean of the Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. He joined the University of Arkansas in 1994, and has served as associate director of the J. William Fulbright Institute of International Relations, chair of the Department of Political Science, director of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society, Interim dean of the Clinton School of Public Service, and dean of the Graduate School and International Education. Chancellor Shields has published dozens of journal articles and is the co-author or co-editor of several books. His research focuses on public opinion, southern politics, elections, and applied statistics. He has received more than \$25 million dollars in grants and research support as a principal or co-principal investigator.

## **DR. CHARISSE CHILDERS | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Dr. Charisse Childers served as the director of the Arkansas Department of Career Education from January 2015 to July 2019 where she was appointed by Governor Asa Hutchinson. Now, as director of the Division of Workforce Services, Childers directs the state's workforce system which includes multiple employment and training programs and grants along with Adult Education, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, and Services for the Blind. Along with a team of approximately 1200 employees and board members, she continues to use her experience and knowledge to provide the resources and services needed to strengthen Arkansas's economy.

## **SENATOR BREANNE DAVIS | MEMBER, FAMILY CAREGIVING AND IMPACTS OF COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEES**

Arkansas Senator Breanne Davis lives in Russellville with her husband and four children. She served on the Russellville School Board for nine years and has been serving in the State Senate since 2018. Aside from her professional life, over the years her volunteer experience has included working with human trafficking survivors and Syrian refugees, being a respite foster family, and coaching a U8 girls soccer team. She is the owner of Deelyte Farms, a small flower farm in Russellville.

## **TAMIKA EDWARDS, J.D. | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION AND RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEES**

Tamika S. Edwards, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas, serves as Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion at Southwest Power Pool. Edwards has over 20 years of experience in social justice, public policy, government and community outreach. Edwards most recently served as the Special Advisor to the CEO on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Engagement at Central Arkansas Water. Edwards previously served as the executive director of the Social Justice Institute at Philander Smith College, director of governmental affairs at Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, director of public policy at Southern Bancorp Community Partners, and community affairs specialist for former U.S. Sen. Blanche Lincoln. Edwards earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a Master of Arts in professional and technical writing from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and a J.D. from the Bowen Law School.

## **SENATOR JOYCE ELLIOTT | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Arkansas Senator Joyce Elliott is a native Arkansan who has ceaselessly pursued a path of insisting Arkansas to live up to its former motto: “Land of Opportunity.” She has spent her life working to help bring life to that motto for every Arkansans. Elliott is a 30-year retired public school teacher and is currently in her 20th year as a state legislator, all in pursuit of its promise of opportunity for all. Along with Tony McKay (Australia), she currently serves as the co-chair of the National Center on Education & the Economy.

## **MARIE HOLDER | MEMBER, FAMILY CAREGIVING SUBCOMMITTEE**

Marie Holder, from Little Rock, is currently serving on the Arkansas Highway Commission, she also served on the Arkansas State Medical Board. She is the former finance director for Asa for Governor, AsaPAC and executive director of the Republican Party of Arkansas. Holder enjoys working with organizations that support young women, including local chapters of Delta Gamma Sorority, Daughters of the American Revolution and the Juliet Circle of Girl Scouts. She is active in Second Presbyterian Church where she has been ordained as elder and deacon. Marie, her husband Ryan and their two daughters live in Little Rock.

## **KIM LANE | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Kim Lane is the COO of Right to Start, an organization driving civic change through grassroots organizing and mobilizing, policy advocacy and engagement, and lifting the voices of entrepreneurs through media and storytelling. She is an award-winning business owner (“40 Under 40;” Arkansan of the Year; Conway, Arkansas’s Young Business Leader of the Year; Arkansas’s top Women to Watch; a top 20 “Arkansas Visionary”), and has extensive experience leading strategy efforts and scaled programming initiatives for a variety of public and private partners, including the Kauffman Foundation and Meta. She is a Senior Advisor for the Global Entrepreneurship Network, where she supports startup communities worldwide. She is a Governor-appointed Commissioner for the Arkansas Commission on the Status of Women and a board member of the Women’s Foundation of Arkansas. She previously built and scaled multiple entrepreneurial support organizations and makerspaces, including the Conductor (serving rural and underserved entrepreneurs) and the Innovation Hub, both in central Arkansas. She is passionate about changing the world through entrepreneurship and leveling the playing field to enable everyone to succeed.

## **HEATHER LARKIN | MEMBER, FAMILY CAREGIVING SUBCOMMITTEE**

Heather Larkin joined the Arkansas Community Foundation in 1998 and became its President and CEO in January 2008. She is committed to engaging people and connecting resources to build stronger communities in Arkansas. She has overseen the growth of the Foundation from \$19 million in assets and \$1.4 million in annual grants to over \$600 million in assets and \$35 million in annual grants. Larkin has been named one of Arkansas' top influencers by both *Arkansas Money & Politics* and *Arkansas Business*. She has served as a "Scholar in Residence" at the Clinton School of Public Service for exemplary contributions in the field of community philanthropy. Heather is a native of Charleston, Arkansas, a Hendrix College alumna, and lives in both Pulaski and Pope Counties.

## **AUDITOR ANDREA LEA | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Auditor Andrea Lea was raised in an Air Force family, moving several times before graduating high school in southern California. She married Phillip, a U.S. Navy sailor, and continued to move across the U.S. before settling in Arkansas, in 1982, where she spent the next 15 years devoted to raising children and to community involvement. Lea was elected to the Pope County Quorum Court and to the Russellville City Council. Starting her college education at 44 years of age, Lea graduated from Arkansas Tech University with honors with a degree in Emergency Administration and Management. She was elected and served six years in the Arkansas House of Representatives, and after eight years as Auditor of State, she will be term-limited in December 2022.

## **BEVERLY MORROW | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION AND IMPACTS OF COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEES**

Beverly Morrow was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. She attended and graduated from MIT with a BS in Chemical Engineering. She later on earned her master's degree in chemical engineering from Rutgers University. She worked in the oil industry for several years before she and her husband, Curtis, became McDonald's franchise owners. They owned and operated McDonald's for more than thirty years. During those decades, Morrow served and worked on a number of local and state boards, including Simmons Bank, Women's Foundation of Arkansas, Arkansas Community Foundation, and Arkansas Children's Hospital. She is currently the chair of Arkansas Children's Hospital board of directors. Beverly and Curtis have four adult children; Achilia, Kiisha, Chane, and Asha.



## **DR. VERÓNIKHA SALAZAR | MEMBER, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION, FAMILY CAREGIVING, IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AND RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEES**

Veronikha Salazar is the Assistant Vice Chancellor at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. She was the Director of Hispanic Outre Retention at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Georgia, from 2011 to 2013, the Associate Director for Leadership, Education, and Development at the University of Arkansas's Multicultural Center from 2008-2011, and the program Coordinator for International Student and Scholars at the University of Arkansas from 2001-2007. She is originally from Chiclayo, Peru. She obtained her master's and doctoral degrees in adult education with an emphasis in Multicultural Education and Instructional Technology from the University of Arkansas. She is the founder of RBLL, named after her mother, Rosa Barrios LLumpo, a non-profit organization that focuses on women's literacy in Peru.

## **KATHY WEBB | CHAIR, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION & BARRIERS TO ENTRY & RETENTION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Kathy Webb serves as the CEO of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the statewide anti-hunger organization, and Ward 3 City Director on the Little Rock Board of Directors. The first openly LGBTQ person elected to office in Arkansas, Webb served in the Arkansas House of Representatives until term limited, and was the first woman in state history to Chair House Budget and Co-Chair Joint Budget. In 2011-2012, Webb chaired a group which presented an Interim Study Report on Women's Social and Economic Status in Arkansas, to the Joint City, County, and Local Affairs Committees.

## **NAIJA WHITE | MEMBER, IMPACTS OF COVID-19 SUBCOMMITTEE**

Naija White graduated from Southern Arkansas University in May 2022. She received her degree in Information Systems and currently works as an IT Technician for Farmers Bank & Trust. White served as one of the Women's Foundation of Arkansas's Tjuana Byrd summer interns in the summer of 2021, working for Windstream, and a Tjuana Byrd summer intern in the summer of 2022, working for Stone Bank. White is originally from Lewisville, Arkansas.

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## **APPRILLA PORCH | MEMBER, RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEE; ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE COMMISSION**

Apprilla Porch served as Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Governor Asa Hutchinson. Porch joined the executive team of Governor Asa Hutchinson's administration in March of 2022. Prior to serving on the executive team, Porch worked in the Criminal Justice Division of Governor Hutchinson's Administration for two and a half years. In this role, Porch prepared clemency files for the Governor's review and helped to facilitate prison issues. Porch also serves as Extradition Coordinator for the State of Arkansas. Porch is a Certified Administrative Professional and Notary Public. Her life motto is "Leave things better than you found them."

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## **MADDIE SPICKARD | MEMBER, RESEARCH & WRITING SUBCOMMITTEE, LEAD WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF ARKANSAS PARTNER REPRESENTATIVE**

Maddie Spickard is the Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Women's Foundation of Arkansas. In this role, Maddie serves as the lead project coordinator for all WFA branded programs and initiatives including direct service, research, and advocacy activities. When she's not advocating for women and girls in Arkansas, Spickard loves to travel, spend time outdoors, and play tennis. Spickard was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, and is a proud graduate of Little Rock Central High School and the University of Central Arkansas. She holds a bachelors from UCA in public relations and a master's in public affairs from the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs from Indiana University.

## APPENDIX B: CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

Many individuals contributed to this report. The Commission is grateful for their participation and expertise in the activities that supported the development of this report.

### The Chair would like to thank:

- **Dr. Kristy Carter**, Director of Marketing, Outreach and Community Engagement, University of Central Arkansas
- **LaTeasha Gaither-Davis**, Owner, Therapeutic Focus
- **Craig Wilson**, Health Policy Director, Arkansas Center for Health Improvement
- **Kerri Williams**, District Administrator Watson Chapel School District
- **Breanne Bearden**, Coordinator, Career Pathways Initiative
- **Cara Coleman**, Career Academies Counselor, Mountain Home High School
- **Valerie Davis**, Student, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home
- **Emily Floyd**, Student, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home
- **Heather Hatman**, Social and Emotional Learning/School-Based Mental Health Support Specialist, Mountain Home Public Schools
- **Cassie Jankowski**, Student, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home
- **Mimi San Pedro**, Chief Strategy Officer, The Venture Center
- **The Honorable Michelle “Miki” Bowman**, Governor, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
- **Ruthanne Hill, Executive Director**, Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund
- **Shawana Reed**, Vice President for Finance, Southern Arkansas University
- **Christy Ouei**, President, Mulekick Restaurants
- **Allison Schultz**, President, Southern Aluminum

### The Research & Writing Subcommittee would like to thank:

- **Catherine Hudson**, Issues and Answers: Global Market Research and Consulting
- **Brian Culpepper**, Senior Research Assistant, Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
- **Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch**, Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of History, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro
- **Mervin Jebaraj**, Director, Center for Business and Economic Research, Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas Fayetteville
- **Dr. Samantha Robinson**, Director of Data Analytics, Department of Mathematics, Fulbright College, University of Arkansas Fayetteville
- **Lane Schmidt**, Chief of Staff, Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
- **Dr. Todd Shields**, Chancellor, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas
- **Maddie Spickard**, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Women’s Foundation of Arkansas.
- **Jack West**, Honors Student, Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas Fayetteville
- **Alison Wright**, Assistant Research Specialist, Demographic and Children’s Research, Arkansas Economic Development Institute, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.
- **Dr. Fen Yu**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Research, Arkansas State University

### **The Family Caregiving Subcommittee would like to thank:**

- **Angela Duran**, Executive Director, Excel by Eight Foundation
- **Keesa Smith**, Deputy Director for Youth and Families DHS
- **Tonya Williams**, Director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
- **Jamie Ward**, President of the Arkansas Association for Infant Mental Health
- **Michelle Barnes**, Executive Director Helen Walton Children's Enrichment Center
- **Mireya Reith**, Executive Director of Arkansas United
- **Jay Hill**, Division Director, Division of Aging, Adult, and Behavioral Health Services

### **The Impacts of COVID-19 Subcommittee would like to thank:**

- **Carrie Cochran-McLain**, Chief Policy Officer, National Rural Health Association
- **Angela McGraw**, Executive Director, Women & Children First
- **Haley Ortiz**, Office of Health Policy, Arkansas Department of Health
- **Kerri Williams**, Federal Program Coordinator, Watson Chapel School District

The Chair would also like to thank the more than 100 men and women who participated in the regional meetings of the Commission, including:

**Fayetteville:** Stephanie Blevins, Lucy Capelle, Missy Darwin Kincaid, Representative Denise Garner, Catherine Gates, Kalene Griffith, Shannon Hendrix, Dr. Evelyn Jorgenson, Laura Kellams, Melisa Laelan-Jowi, Dr. Yang Luo-Branch, Pearl McElfish, Dr. Kim Needy, Dr. Yassaman Mirdamadi, Emma Pengelly, Molly Rawn, Mireya Reith, Dr. April Seggebruch, Magna El-Shenawee, Denise Thomas, and Olivia Walton

**Lake Village:** Lozanne Calhoun, Lillie Edwards, Judge Theresa French, Dorissa Kaufmann, and Dominique Toney

**Mountain Home:** Breanne Bearden, Cara Coleman, Dr. Tamara Daniel, Mindy Fulcher Gatewood, Dr. Julia Gist, Heather Hatman, Karen Heslep, Cassie Jankowski, and Mollie Morgan

**Pine Bluff:** Lakita Brown, LaTisha Brunson, Talisa Bryant, Ethel Cogshell, Larissa Davis, Annette, Dove, Patricia Edwards, Berinda Eugene, Letrece Harris, Lakishia Hill, TyDaisha Holmes, Melrita Johnson, Chantal Jones, Pelida Norris, Nancy Oudin, Rosie Pettigrew, Tabitha Reeves, Tawanya Thompson, Allison Thompson, Jazz Washington, Shirley Washington, Ricky Williams, Myra Woolfolk, Joni Alexander, Beverly Wright

**Russellville:** Stephanie Duffield, Jim Fuchs, Christie Graham, Dr. Mary Gunter, Danielle Housenick, Crystal Malloy, Dr. Ginny McDonald, Dr. Megan Selman, Yanci Walker, Emily Young

**Jonesboro:** Emma, Agnew, Dr. Evette Allen Moore, Jessica Blackburn, Dr. Mary Jane Bradley, Perdeta Bush, Dr. Jennifer Bouldin, Nora Bouzihay, Candice Brooks, Regina Burkett, Dr. Erika Chudy, Shunquetta Cunningham, Diana Davis, Gina Gomez, Rachel Guerin, Brandi Hodges, Dr. Melissa Jackson, Dr. Patricia Quin Johnston, Dr. Brookshield Laurent, Dr. Heather McNamee, LaShea Robinson, Dr. Jill Simons, Allie J. Tabor, Dr. Alan Utter, Imani Williams, Dr. Carmen Lanos Williams, Peggy Wright, and Dr. Fen Yu.

**Magnolia:** Sonya Archer, Ellie Baker, Anne Cauthron, Jamie Collier, Sharon Colvin, Caroline De Simon, Kristen Gage, Kensel Green, Samantha Gummeson, Chandra Hooker, Valerie Keaton, Bonnie Keith, Phorsythia Marshall, Kelly Park, Alisa Proctor, Ariel Rainey, Trudy Redus, Kristen Reeves, Audrea Roach, Amy Rogers, Liliana Sanchez, Caren Sanchez, Bethanie Savoy, Ruthie Sharp, Ashley Talley, Talesha Tatom, Barbara Wafer, Karen Weido, and Jenny Marie Whitehead

# ENDNOTES

- 1 The average length of the survey was 9.95 minutes. The survey's margin of error is +/- 3.5 percentage points. The sample was provided by Marketing Systems Group.
- 2 As mentioned previously, the Subcommittee did not explore elder care, but recommends that it be studied as well.
- 3 <https://childcaredeserts.org/>
- 4 <https://medicine.uams.edu/familymedicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/08/UAMS-RED-Workforce-Study-111622.pdf>
- 5 <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/untapped-potential-economic-impact-childcare-breakdowns-us-states-0>
- 6 <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/microdata.html>
- 7 <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/national-child-care/>
- 8 <https://medicine.uams.edu/familymedicine/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2022/08/UAMS-RED-Workforce-Study-111622.pdf>
- 9 <https://arbetterbeginnings.com/>
- 10 <https://arkdhs.force.com/licensing/s/search-provider/find-providers?tab=CC>
- 11 <https://arc.arkansas.gov/arcweb/research/ROI-Analysis.pdf>
- 12 <https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/Demanding%20Change%20Appendices.pdf>
- 13 <https://www.ffyf.org/new-data-finds-child-care-prices-continue-to-rise-ahead-of-midterm-elections-outpacing-inflation-following-decades-long-trend-of-annual-increases/>
- 14 <https://www.ffyf.org/child-care-prices-rose-significantly-in-2020-continuing-decades-long-trend-of-major-annual-increases/#:~:text=The%20average%20annual%20price%20of,increases%20in%20more%20recent%20years>
- 15 O'Dea et al., 2018
- 16 Hill et al., 2010
- 17 Sharkey, 2017
- 18 Barratt, 2021

- 19 McConaghy, 2019
- 20 Portray Her: Representations of Women STEM Characters in Media, 2018
- 21 Berwick, 2019
- 22 Archer et al., 2015)
- 23 <http://www.facebook.com/groups/151775711209/>
- 24 AdvisorSmith studied the average number of employees, the average payroll, and the percentage of the female labor force that owned businesses with at least \$100K in revenue and at least one employee
- 25 <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/womens-health-care-utilization-and-costs-findings-from-the-2020-kff-womens-health-survey/>
- 26 <https://www.nwahomepage.com/knwa/fewer-women-returning-to-workforce/>

Connect with WFA  
[womensfoundationarkansas.org](http://womensfoundationarkansas.org)

