

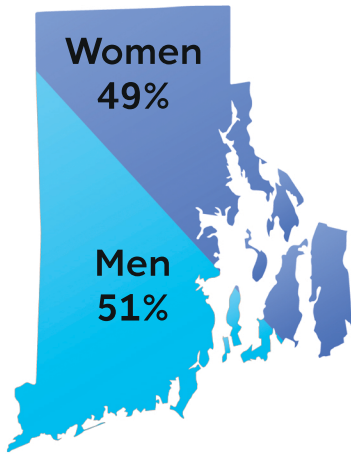
# The Status of Working Women in Rhode Island 2017

*By embracing family-supporting employment practices and public policies, we will ride a wave of continued engagement of women of all races and ethnicities in the Ocean State.*



## Labor Force

Rhode Island's labor force is made up almost equally of men (51%) and women (49%), which is the second highest proportion of women in the labor force in the country.



Nationally, by 2010 nearly **two-thirds** of mothers were breadwinners, either **sole (41.4%)** or **jointly with another parent (22.5%)**, dramatically altering the lives of RI women, their families, and the RI economy.



Supports for women in the workforce – things like affordable and accessible quality early child care and education, paid family leave, paid sick days, and family-friendly scheduling -- have lagged this transformational shift in the economy.



**36%**

Of women who work are working part-time.

*The lingering effects of a slow economic recovery is causing employers to provide less than fulltime employment.*

## Women are important contributors to the economy.

As women have entered the labor force in increasing numbers over recent decades, their contributions to the economic security of their families has grown. Women have helped spur **greater economic productivity**, generating substantial wealth for both the national and Rhode Island economies.



**1 in 5**

women are working in **office and administrative support jobs**

the median earning of which at \$29,484 is less than the median female earning across all occupations \$30,137.

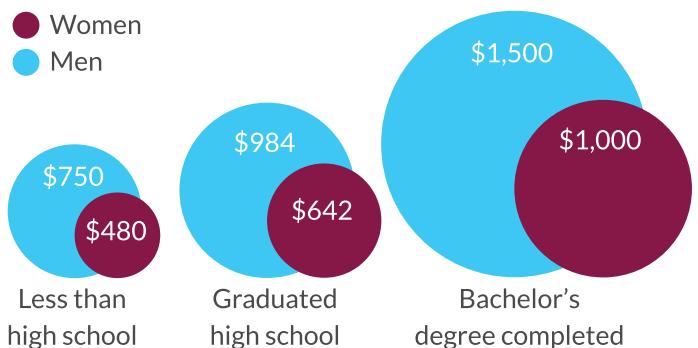
## Median wages per job sector



\*The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2017 is \$24,300

## Educational Attainment Pays

The median weekly earnings for RI women and men working full time based on educational attainment.



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## Some Policy Alternatives

*It is clear there are many features of today's economy that are not working for Rhode Island women. For women (and men) in the workforce seeking changes in their work lives to better meet the needs of families, and even the playing field between women and men, there are four general approaches that can be taken. We touch on each of the approaches below, including the positive (but not widely appreciated) impact of unions as agents of change for women in the workforce.*

### Employers Step Up

The first is for employers to proactively recognize that it's good for their workers, good for the overall economy, and in most cases, also good for their bottom line to offer employees employment conditions, family-supporting wages and benefits. While there are some notable examples where this approach has been pursued, it has become clear that this approach alone won't drive the systemic changes needed to ensure more family friendly workplaces that allow women to achieve their full potential in the economy. There is considerable potential, however, for leaders in the corporate world to raise the bar for corporate behavior, while also being supportive of outside efforts to raise the bar. Smart employers have realized that family-friendly policies, fair wages, and equitable treatment of women and men pays off in a more productive workforce, lower turn-over rates, and a better workplace environment.

### Government Regulation

The second approach is for governments—federal, state, and local—to set and enforce labor standards that ensure that employees are rewarded fairly for their work. We see this through labor standards such as the minimum wage, which currently falls far short of meeting a family's basic needs. A comprehensive suite of policies aimed at more family-friendly policies – such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, supports for child care, living wages, and fair scheduling – will go a long way towards improving equitable treatment of women in the economy.

### Unions and similar forms of collective action

A third approach is for workers to collectively demand a better deal for themselves. Historically, this has happened primarily through trade unions. Rhode Island working women who are represented by unions enjoy the advantages of union representation such as higher wages, better employment benefits, and greater workplace safety. While unionized workers benefit from union coverage, there are benefits for employers also, as a unionized workforce generally has high performance standards, and lower turnover rates. Furthermore, because women covered by unions enjoy higher wages and higher rates of employer-provided health insurance, they are much less likely to draw on costly public benefits that effectively subsidize employers who treat their workers less well.

### Educational Attainment

The final approach is to support programming that assists more young women in achieving high school graduation or GED certification, and attaining a minimum level of training that allows them to enter STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) careers, which are in high demand in RI and can provide higher entry level pay and benefits than typical entry level jobs. Doing so will also help women to succeed in a globalized, knowledge based economy.

To obtain a copy of the full report, "The Status of Working Women in Rhode Island 2017" visit [www.WFRI.org](http://www.WFRI.org)