For Women, Wage Gap Narrows but Disparities Remain on Many Measures
The Institute for Women’s Policy Research has released its 2004 report on the status of women in the United States. The report compares the economic progress of women across states and compares their status to men and to national trends. Census and Current Population Survey data were used to cull data from each state on 30 indicators of women’s status. Both positive and negative trends were found on a variety of indicators including:

• The wage gap between women’s and men’s earnings narrowed between 1989 and 2002 in every state.
• The wage ratio between all women and white men in 1999 was 67.5%. In other words, for every dollar earned by a white male in the United States, the average working woman earned 67.5 cents. The ratio between African-American women and white men was 62.5%. The wage ratio for African-American women ranged from 72.6% in West Virginia to just 48.9% in Louisiana.
• Poverty rates for women vary significantly by race. Over 20% of Native American, African-American and Hispanic women live in poverty nationally, while for white women, just 9% live in poverty and for Asian-American women the rate is 12%. Louisiana has the highest African-American poverty rate for women at 35.6%. The lowest poverty rate for African-American and Hispanic women is in Alaska at 7.1 and 13% respectively.
• Infant mortality rates are 13.5% for African-American infants, 9.7% for Native American infants, 5.4% for Hispanic infants and 4.7% for Asian American infants.
• Racial disparities in the incidence of AIDS are particularly significant. For Asian American women the AIDS rate per 100,000 was 1.4, for white women it was 2.3 and 5.0 among Native American women. For Hispanic women the rate jumped to 14.9 in 100,000 and to 49.0 in 100,000 for African-American women.


Public Funds Meant to Benefit Wisconsin’s Poor Misappropriated
The state of Wisconsin’s largest contracting agency for the provision of W-2 (TANF) services has been revealed to have misused funds to pay kickbacks, overcompensate its executives and make questionable payments to lawyers and a political radio host. The Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee (OIC) has been under scrutiny since its former executives were convicted of kickback schemes in which W-2 funds were paid to ex-State Senator Gary George (himself convicted and in prison) in exchange for state contracts. OIC has been awarded state contracts totaling $231.5 million since 1997. Among the unallowable or questionable uses of W-2 funds identified in the audit:
• $1.75 million and $1.35 million in salary, bonuses and benefits were paid to the former chief executive and chief operating officer from 1997 through 2003. W-2 provided about $2.3 million of this total, and other government grants to OIC paid the rest.
• A $3 million bonus paid by the state to OIC for meeting performance goals that prioritized reducing caseloads was used to provide almost $300,000 in one-time payments for the retirement accounts of the two chief executives.
• OIC paid $275,000 in W-2 funds to a Milwaukee radio station for its general programming.
• Two of former Senator Gary George’s brothers were paid more than $163,000 for consulting services.

The Legislative Audit Bureau report is available at www.legis.state.wi.us/lab/.

Maximus, another private contractor for W-2 was cited earlier for misuse of public funds (See September 2000 Policy Briefing at www.cffpp.org).


In yet another development related to the depletion of state funds intended to serve the poor, the Capital Times reports that Wal-Mart is regularly referring its employees to Medicaid and Badgercare, the state heath insurance program, rather than providing health benefits through a private insurer. According to the Capital Times, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services estimates the annual cost of providing health care coverage for Wal-Mart employees is $4.75 million. See Wal-Mart’s free ride: an editorial, November 16, 2004. www.madison.com.

**Study Confirms Long Term Impact of Pre-school Programs**

A well-known study of the impact of high-quality pre-school education on children living in poverty has recently completed a remarkable follow-up study of outcomes for participants at age 40. The report, *Lifetime Effects: High/Scope Perry Pre-School Study Through Age 40*, provides long-term information based on the original research design, initiated in 1962, in which ‘high-risk’ children were randomly assigned to either a control group or to receive the pre-school program at the ages of 3 and 4. The study’s results have been instrumental in securing federal support for Head Start programs over the years, showing significant improvements on a number of measures for those who received the program. Among the findings from this study:

• Significantly more of the program group were employed at age 40 than the control group (76% vs. 62%). The program also had a significant long term impact on earnings, with 60% of the program group vs. 40% of the control group earning $20,000 or more per year at age 40.
• Thirty-seven percent of the program group owned their own home at age 40, compared to 28% of the control group.
• Sixty-five percent of the program group graduated from regular high school, compared to 45% of the control group. For females, the difference in regular high school graduation between the program and control group was 84% vs. 32%.
• The program group had significantly fewer lifetime arrests than the control group (36% vs. 55% arrested 5 or more times) up to age 40. The program group also experienced significantly fewer arrests for violent crimes and property and drug crimes, and was sentenced to significantly fewer months in prison or jail by age 40.
• Fifty-seven percent of program males, compared to 30% of control group males, raised their own children, and 75% of the program group, compared to 64% of the control group reported
getting along very well with their family. Fewer program than control group males reported using sedatives, sleeping pills, or tranquilizers (17% vs. 43%), marijuana or hashish (48% vs. 71%), or heroin (0% vs. 9%).

The study also analyzed the costs and benefits of the pre-school program to society, finding that:

• In constant 2000 dollars, the return to society of the pre-school program was $258,888 per participant on an investment of $15,166 per participant - $17.07 per dollar invested.
• Of the public return, 88% came from crime savings, 4% from education savings, 7% from increased taxes due to higher earnings, and 1% from welfare savings.

The authors’ primary conclusion is that “high-quality preschool programs for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood. This study confirms that these findings extend not only to young adults, but also to adults in midlife.”

The report is available at www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject.

Drop Seen in Civil Rights Enforcement
The Transitional Records Action Clearinghouse (TRAC) has analyzed data from the Department of Justice and federal courts that show a sharp decline in government enforcement of civil rights cases under the Bush administration. According to the report:

• Nationally, federal prosecutors have filed far fewer criminal charges for the violation of civil rights laws since 1999. In that year, 159 defendants were prosecuted, compared to 84 in 2003.
• “Referrals for prosecutions,” or cases in which investigating agencies recommended that charges be filed were down from 3,733 in fiscal year 1994 to 1,903 in fiscal year 2003.
• The drop in enforcement is not explained by a decline in the number of civil rights complaints received by the government. This number has held steady at approximately 12,000 per year over the last five years.
• From FY 1999 to FY 2003, the total number of federal prosecutions of any kind increased by about ten percent, driven mostly by sharp jumps in immigration and weapons cases. Both civil rights and environmental cases experienced a decline during this period.
• Prosecutors chose to file formal charges in only 5% of the civil rights cases presented to them by investigative agencies in 2003. That same year, prosecutors filed charges in 90% of the immigration cases presented to them.

The report, Civil Rights Enforcement by Bush Administration Lags, is available at www.trac.syr.edu.

Divorce Rate Highest in Red States
According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics, the divorce rates in states that were won in the November presidential election by Senator John Kerry are almost systematically lower than in states won by President George W. Bush. The pattern is similar to findings from a research study in which “born again” Christians were found to have higher rates of divorce than those who did not describe themselves as “born again.”

• Massachusetts had the lowest divorce rate in 2003, 2.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, and has a state law allowing for same-sex civil unions. Texas has a divorce rate of 4.1 per 1,000.
• The states with the highest divorce rates are Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas. The states with the lowest divorce rates are: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. Every one of the high divorce rate states went for Bush. Every one of the low divorce rate states went for Kerry. The “Bible Belt” divorce rate is roughly 50% higher than the national average.

• Voters in Kentucky, Mississippi and Arkansas overwhelmingly supported amendments to their state constitutions to ban gay marriage. These three states had some of the highest divorce rates in 2003. The divorce rate was 10.8 per 100,000 married people in Kentucky, 11.1 per 100,000 in Mississippi and 12.7 per 100,000 in Arkansas.

Barbara Dafoe-Whitehead, co-director of the National Marriage Project, suggests that conservative states may have higher divorce rates because of regional religious differences. Whitehead states, “If your family or religious culture urges you not to have sex before you get married, then one answer is to get married, and then you’re more likely to divorce.”


Training Opportunity for Advocates
The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) has launched a new initiative, the Progressive Leadership and Advocacy Network (PLAN) for Women, which will allow up-and-coming advocates for low-income women and their families to develop the skills and networks necessary to become more effective in their advocacy. NWLC is seeking applications for its first class. To apply, applicants must demonstrate the following: 1) a commitment to low-income women’s advocacy in areas such as health care and Medicaid access, child care and early education, and non-traditional education and training for women, among others; 2) demonstrable advocacy and leadership experience; and, 3) a willingness to commit to attending the Spring Retreat and to ongoing participation in PLAN for Women.

NWLC will provide ongoing support and access to professional network to participants. An introductory retreat will take place over a three-and-a-half day period in May 2005. NWLC will provide support for room and board for the retreat with scholarships available for airfare and/or other transportation expenses. Scholarships will also be available for a Fall Summit in Washington, D.C. For more information about estimated costs to participants, contact Jamie Ekatomatis at 202-588-5180 or jekatomatis@nwlc.org.

For details on how to apply, see http://www.nwlc.org/details.cfm?id=2037&section=infocenter. Applications with references must be postmarked by December 10, 2004. The class of 20-25 PLAN for Women participants will be announced in mid-January, 2005.