

**Testimony of Fatima Goss Graves  
National Women's Law Center  
Before the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee  
March 8, 2013**

Thank you to Leader Pelosi, to Congresswoman DeLauro, Congressman Andrews, and to the members here today for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Women's Law Center. For the last forty years, the Center has been involved in virtually every major effort to defend and secure women's legal rights and advance women's economic security, including during what many now call the "Great Recession" and the long path to economic recovery, a period which has truly left many women and their families struggling.

The most recent data show nearly 18 million women live in poverty, nearly 8 million in extreme poverty and that women's poverty is at the highest rate in 18 years. These figures are particularly distressing for some groups – nearly one in four African-American and Hispanic women are poor, as are over 40 percent of single mother families and more than 18 percent of elderly women living alone.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, women's unemployment rate has dropped only slightly since the recovery officially began and the barriers they face when employed are steep.<sup>2</sup> Even when women are working, they make up a disproportionate share of workers in minimum wage jobs<sup>3</sup> and they face a persistent wage gap that hasn't budged in a decade.<sup>4</sup>

It is from this already-precarious situation that women are facing sequestration. Despite the increase in poverty for women and families, many of the automatic cuts will further reduce services and supports for low income families. The deep cuts in the sequester could mean that 600,000 women and children will be dropped from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).<sup>5</sup> Particularly at risk of WIC benefit cuts are postpartum women and children older than six months who are at nutritional risk.<sup>6</sup> The cuts could mean 70,000 young children lose access to Head Start and Early Head Start and an estimated 30,000 low-income children and their parents lose the child care assistance that helps them pay for care.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the long-term unemployed, who make up nearly 4 in 10 unemployed workers, will see unemployment insurance benefits cut by an average \$400 this budget year – dollars they simply cannot afford to lose as they struggle mightily to regain employment.<sup>8</sup>

The sequester also will mean more public sector job losses, which will slow the already fragile recovery for women. In state and local education, where women make up 69 percent of the field, the White House estimates that the sequester puts 10,000 teachers' and 7,200 special education teachers' jobs at risk. Keep in mind that women have already shouldered the burden of public sector job loss: since June 2009, the public sector has shed 721,000 jobs, 63 percent of which were women's jobs. In 2012 alone, women made up 85 percent of the 74,000 public sector job cuts. And the sequester also will cut jobs for private sector workers. When you add

up projected private and public job losses, CBO estimates that the sequester will cost 750,000 jobs in 2013 alone.

This is an outcome that is entirely preventable.<sup>9</sup> The spending cuts already enacted in the name of deficit reduction are 2.5 times larger than the revenue that has been raised to achieve this goal.<sup>10</sup> Rather than make additional cuts that hurt women and families, there are a range of options for raising revenue in a manner that is fair and does not put the burden of deficit reduction on poor families.

There is no question that many people will be inconvenienced by the sequester – I expect that we will see reports of lengthy airport lines in many places around the country as it begins to unfold. But the sequester means that workers will lose their jobs and be furloughed. And it means feeding fewer families living in poverty, assisting fewer homeless men and women, and providing fewer children with high quality early learning opportunities. All measures that will only serve to further undermine women’s economic security. If we are ever going to sustain the sound programs that are truly vital to women at every stage of their lives, a balanced approach to deficit reduction that includes additional revenues is required.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today on an issue of such critical importance to women. I look forward to any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/womens-poverty-rate-stabilizes-remains-historically-high>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/stronger-recovery-reaching-women>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/10-largest-jobs-paying-under-1010hour-are-majority-women>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/womens-poverty-rate-stabilizes-remains-historically-high>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/our-blog/kick-70000-kids-head-start-starters-or-make-millionaires-pay-fair-share-senators-will-decid>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3909>

<sup>7</sup> House Appropriations Committee Democrats, Report on Sequestration, February 13, 2013, <http://democrats.appropriations.house.gov/images/Sequestration%20full%20report.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2013/Briefing-Paper-Sequester-Unemployment-Insurance.pdf?nocdn=1>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/our-blog/sequester-will-exacerbate-already-steep-public-sector-job-losses>. Education data from CES BLS database

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nwlc.org/our-blog/kick-70000-kids-head-start-starters-or-make-millionaires-pay-fair-share-senators-will-decid>