



# The Impact of COVID on Michigan's Women of Color Voters

## Methodology

Mothering Justice and the National Women's Law Center commissioned an online survey of women of color in the state of Michigan. Vision Strategy and Insights conducted the survey from May 20 to June 4, 2020. A total of 600 eligible and likely women of color voters aged 18 to 65 years and older in Michigan participated in the survey. Of the 600 respondents, 67 percent were African American/Black women and 33 percent were Latina/Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern and North African women.<sup>1</sup>

## Overview

**Women are the face of COVID-19 in the United States.** The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing broken social and economic systems while also deepening racial and gender inequities. In the U.S., the economic fallout is disproportionately hurting women's economic security. According to [analysis](#) by the National Women's Law Center, the pandemic continues to devastate women-dominated sectors like service industries, child care, hospitality, home care, and health care.<sup>2</sup> June's "[recovery](#)" is particularly fragile for women. Though women accounted for six in 10 of the jobs gained last month, the majority of jobs were in sectors likely to once again shutter due to spikes in COVID-19 cases. Moreover, women have lost over 8 million net jobs since February 2020, accounting for 55 percent of overall net job loss since the start of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Even after June's gains, Black women and Latinas continue to be hard hit by the economic crisis – while the overall unemployment rate dropped to 11.1% in June, approximately 1 in 7 Black women (14 percent) and Latinas (15.3 percent) remained unemployed.<sup>4</sup>

Women and girls are experiencing harsher impacts across several dimensions, from diminished access to critical care services like [maternal](#) and [reproductive](#) health care to [shouldering larger amounts of unpaid care work](#), [poor](#) or [nonexistent](#) financial assistance, and the [curtailment of workplace protections](#). At the same time, women are the face of front-line and essential workers. Disproportionately over-represented in critical fields, women are 75 percent of hospital workers, 93 percent of child care workers, 90 percent of people employed in private homes, and two-thirds of cashiers and retail people in grocery stores. But the federal government and some states are failing to meet the needs of women during this time. Women, especially women of color, are struggling to make ends meet while forced to work on the front lines without meaningful workplace protections because most lawmakers have shown that women are not top of mind.<sup>5</sup>

## Women are leading Michigan's response to the pandemic and need more from the federal government's relief and recovery efforts.

Michigan is one of the states most heavily impacted by COVID-19 this spring.<sup>6</sup> In response, Governor Whitmer's administration took a proactive, public health-centered approach to COVID mitigation and garnered national attention by doing so. One of the [latest studies](#) by the [Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team](#) found that Michigan's strong containment and public health measures [reduced the average spread from a factor of 3.0 to 0.8](#).<sup>7</sup> Despite strong backlash from conservatives, Michigan's women of color voters overwhelmingly gave Gov. Whitmer high marks on her leadership.

In addition to asking respondents about the effects COVID-19 has had in their lives and for their opinions on Gov. Whitmer's public health-centered approach, respondents were asked about deeper issues related to their well-being and economic security. Michigan's women of color said they want better access to health care, stronger workplace safety protections, real financial assistance, and more robust relief and recovery packages that squarely center their needs. They made it clear: the federal government and states are responsible for providing relief and recovery to those bearing the brunt of this pandemic.

Though this battleground state has experienced some strong success with its COVID mitigation, leaders and candidates must pay closer attention to and invest in Michigan's Black and brown women ahead of November as well as in the implementation of next steps in COVID relief.

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## Key Findings: Personal Impact and Michigan's Response

### COVID-19 has significantly impacted the health and well-being of women and families of color in Michigan.

- Three in ten women of color reported that they were directly impacted by COVID-19, either having experienced symptoms of COVID themselves or losing a loved one to the virus.
- Fourteen percent of women of color said that they experienced symptoms of COVID. Of the respondents who reported experiencing symptoms, the plurality (32 percent) said they did not receive treatment compared to 23 percent who reported receiving treatment. Another 18 percent said that they were unable to get tested for COVID-19.
- Sixty-two percent of respondents reported at least one family member or friend was physically affected by COVID-19 and/or that a family member or friend lost a loved one due to the virus.

### Eight in ten women of color reported being affected by COVID-19 in other ways as well.

- Thirty percent reported experiencing a negative impact on their mental health.
- Nearly one in six women of color reported experiencing food insecurity.
- Four in ten reported being separated from family members, either because of high risk health conditions of family members or their own front-line exposure.

### Most of Michigan’s women of color are experiencing financial insecurity due to COVID-19 and are in dire need of assistance.

- Two-thirds of all respondents reported being affected financially by COVID-19 including a reduction of work hours, getting furloughed, losing one’s job, and being forced to quit one’s job to care for someone else.
- Seventy-one percent of women of color business owners surveyed reported that they were negatively impacted by COVID-19 including losing clients and/or revenue, needing to furlough workers or reduce their hours, and being forced to close one’s business.
- When broken down by ethnicity, 64% of Black women surveyed have either had their working hours reduced, were furloughed, or lost their jobs.

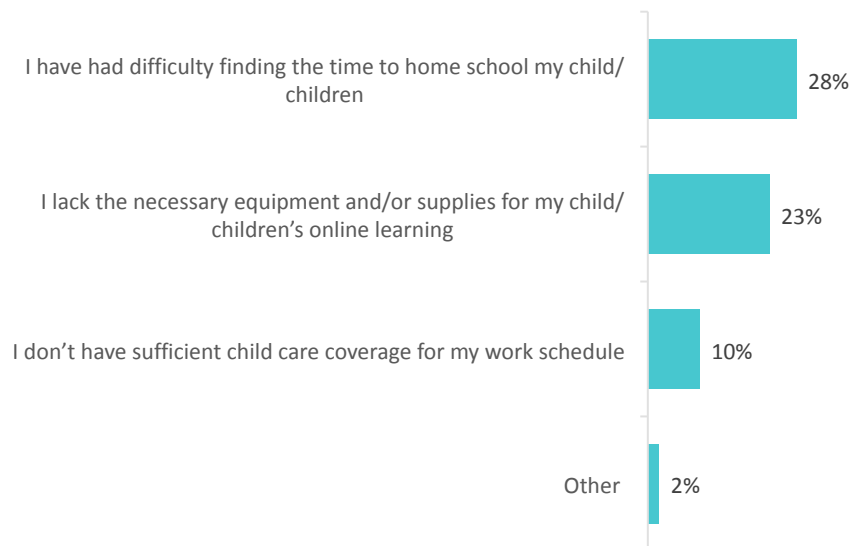
### Three in ten women of color surveyed were classified as essential workers. For women of color in households with children, four in ten were essential workers. And most essential workers don’t feel safe at work.

- Seventy-one percent of these essential workers reported they were required to report to work. Over half of the respondents who said they were required to work reported that they do not feel safe at work.

### Six in ten mothers of color are experiencing difficulties with homeschooling.

- Nearly 30 percent of respondents with children reported having difficulty finding time to participate in their children’s education since schools closed, while 23 percent lacked equipment or supplies needed to properly homeschool their children.
- Another 10 percent reported insufficient child care coverage and conflicts with work schedules.

#### SUPPORT FOR IMPROVING CHILD CARE AND ONLINE LEARNING



**In contrast, parents of color outside of Detroit are more likely to be satisfied with the educational resources provided to them compared to parents of color in the Detroit metropolitan area.**

- Fifty-nine percent of parents of color outside of Detroit reported satisfaction with the educational resources provided to them compared to 49 percent of parents in Detroit.

**Gov. Whitmer received high marks for her handling of COVID-19 in Michigan.**

- Overall, 76 percent of women of color surveyed said they believe Gov. Whitmer did a good job in handling COVID-19 mitigation in Michigan. For women of color voters ages 50 and over who were surveyed, 92 percent said they believe Gov. Whitmer did a good job handling COVID-19 in Michigan. Moreover, 82 percent of women of color voters ages 50-64 years old who were surveyed said they believe Gov. Whitmer has done a great job in handling COVID-19 mitigation.

**The overwhelming majority of Michigan’s women of color voters agreed with Gov. Whitmer’s more proactive stay-at-home orders.**

- Overall, 78 percent of respondents said they thought the stay-at-home order was the “right thing to do.” Across age groups, the support increases with each age group with 95 percent of women of color voters aged 65 and older saying they believe the stay-at-home orders to be the “right thing to do.”
- The majority of registered voters and African American voters support the stay-at-home orders more now than when the order first went into effect.<sup>8</sup>

**“I THINK IT IS NECESSARY FOR EVERYONE TO DO THEIR PART TO LESSEN THE DANGERS OF COVID-19 TO THOSE THAT ARE VERY SUSCEPTIBLE TO IT. PEOPLE, AND AMERICANS IN GENERAL, HAVE DEMONSTRATED THAT THEY CANNOT BE TRUSTED WITH JUST FOLLOWING GUIDANCES.”**

**There is significant support for continued stay-at-home orders.**

- Nine in ten women of color expressed continued support of the stay-at-home order then in effect.

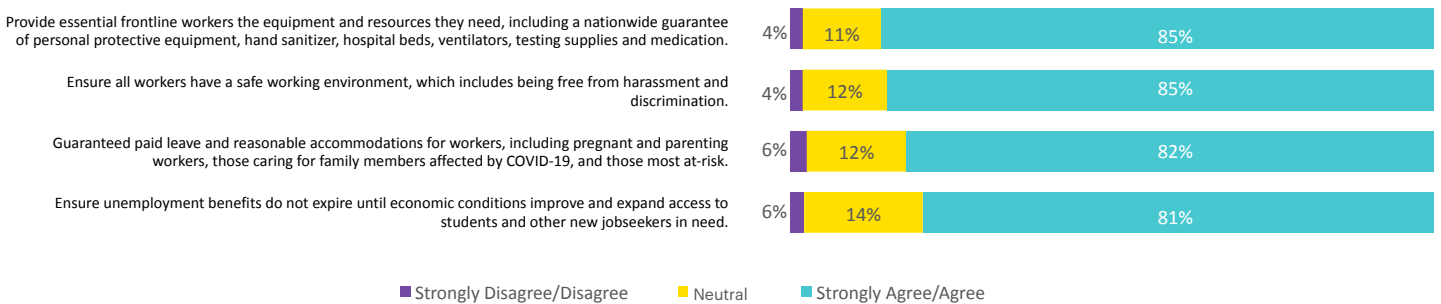
**The strong majority of women of color voters want testing widely available and a flattened curve before fully reopening the state.**

- Sixty-two percent of respondents said they want testing and a flattened curve before reopening. That number increases with age; 76 percent of respondents aged 50-64 and 73 percent of respondents aged 65 and older above said they were in favor of testing and a flattened curve before fully reopening.<sup>9</sup>

## Key Findings: COVID Relief & Recovery - Leaders Need to Act

**As businesses and workplaces reopen, Michigan’s women of color strongly support changes to increase safety measures and workers’ well-being.**

### SUPPORT FOR COVID RELIEF AND RECOVERY POLICIES



## SUPPORT FOR WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS AND WORKERS' WELL-BEING BY AGE GROUP

	Total	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
	<b>T2B</b>	<b>T2B</b>	<b>T2B</b>	<b>T2B</b>	<b>T2B</b>
Provide essential frontline workers the equipment and resources they need, including a nationwide guarantee of personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, hospital beds, ventilators, testing supplies and medication.	86%	76%	90%	94%	98%
Ensure all workers have a safe working environment, which includes being free from harassment and discrimination.	85%	75%	92%	92%	100%
Guaranteed paid leave and reasonable accommodations for workers, including pregnant and parenting workers, those caring for family members affected by COVID-19, and those most at-risk.	82%	77%	84%	87%	93%
Ensure unemployment benefits do not expire until economic conditions improve and expand access to students and other new jobseekers in need.	80%	74%	79%	89%	91%
Emergency hazard and/or premium pay for agricultural and manufacturing workers, grocery and delivery workers, health care and child care workers, and domestic and care workers.	78%	67%	84%	85%	96%
Workers at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19 should be given the right to refuse to return to work and still be allowed to collect unemployment insurance [UI] or pandemic unemployment assistance [PUA].	75%	71%	76%	81%	80%
Enact whistleblower protections for those who report workplace violations and abuses-including unsafe work conditions.	75%	64%	79%	85%	95%

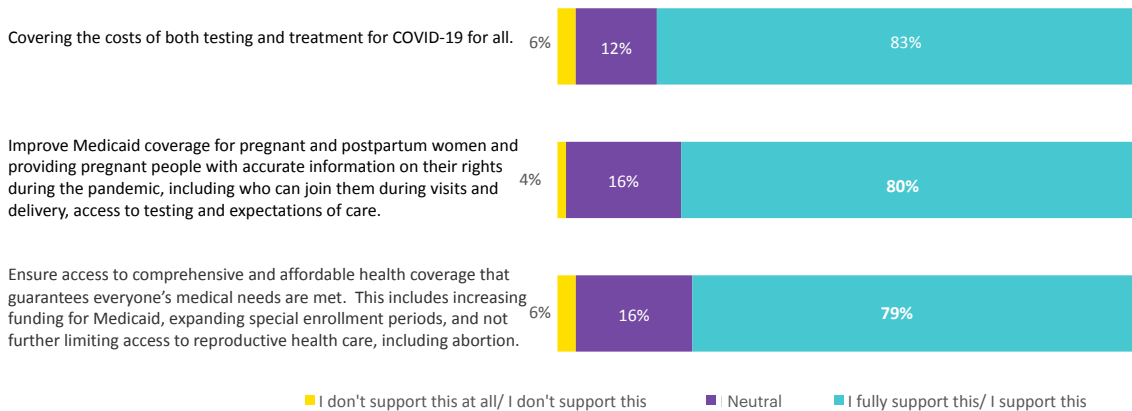
- Eighty-six percent of respondents support providing front-line workers the equipment and resources they need, including a nationwide guarantee of personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, hospital beds, ventilators, testing supplies and medication.
- Eighty-five percent of respondents support lawmakers and employers to ensure that all workers have a safe working environment, which includes being free from harassment and discrimination. One hundred percent of women of color voters aged 65 and older support ensuring that all workers have a safe working environment, which includes being free from harassment and discrimination.
- Eighty-two percent of respondents support guaranteed paid leave and reasonable accommodations for workers, including pregnant and parenting workers, those caring for family members affected by COVID-19, and those most at-risk.
- Eighty percent support lawmakers ensuring that unemployment benefits do not expire until economic conditions improve and expanding access to students and other new jobseekers in need.
- Nearly eight in ten respondents support emergency hazard and/or premium pay for agricultural and manufacturing workers, grocery and delivery workers, health care and child care workers, and domestic and care workers. Ninety-six percent of women of color voters aged 65+ surveyed support this measure.

### Michigan's women of color voters strongly support post-COVID financial assistance across the board.

- Nearly eight in ten women of color surveyed support strengthening unemployment protections so that benefits reach more people, are more adequate, and are responsive to economic indicators.
- Three-fourths of women of color voters in Michigan strongly support stronger financial assistance, including stronger unemployment protections, additional direct cash payments, increased funding for child care programs, increases to SNAP, and the elimination of barriers that limit access to key assistance programs like SNAP, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Seventy-seven percent of respondents support expanded resources for housing assistance, including additional funding to meet rapid rehousing and shelter needs and equipping landlords with the tools to respond accordingly.

**In the next relief and recovery package, women of color overwhelmingly support policies to improve health care coverage.**

**SUPPORT FOR POLICIES IMPROVING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE**



- Eighty-three percent of women of color voters surveyed support no-cost testing and treatment for COVID-19 for everyone. In fact, over 70 percent strongly support no-cost testing and treatment.
- Eighty percent said they support improving Medicaid coverage for pregnant and postpartum women and providing people with accurate information on their rights during this pandemic, including who can join them during visits and delivery, access to testing, and expectations of care. Overall, 63 percent said they strongly support this proposal.
- Seventy-nine percent support ensuring access to comprehensive and affordable health coverage that guarantees everyone's medical needs are met. This includes increasing funding for Medicaid, expanding special enrollment periods, and not further limiting access to reproductive health care, including abortion. Over six in ten said they strongly support this policy proposal.

**The majority of Michigan's women of color voters strongly agree with and support comprehensive efforts to reduce disparities; ensure access to critical services like health care, including abortion; combat bigotry; and improve opportunity and fairness for all – especially lower-wage workers and women of color.**

- Overall, nearly two-thirds of women of color surveyed agree that reducing racial disparities in wages, medical coverage and treatment, and access to healthy food, clean water, and other services would help mitigate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African Americans. The majority of each age group surveyed support disparity reduction measures, with support increasing in older age groups – 91 percent of women of color aged 65 and older said support measures to reduce racial disparities faced by African Americans.
- Sixty-three percent of respondents agree that relief and recovery must ensure that the economic security of every day women and families – especially low-wage workers and women of color – is centered in relief and recovery efforts. This includes ensuring workers' ability to keep their jobs and paychecks without sacrificing their own health and well-being or that of their loved ones and enacting better pay equity protections.
- Michigan's women of color want everyday people prioritized over corporations – and many feel that both the relief and recovery packages and the Trump administration are failing to do that. Six in ten respondents agree that Congress and Trump, specifically, need to hold the ultra-wealthy

**“THERE IS A SYSTEMIC DISPARITY IN HOW PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE TREATED, AND HAS BEEN FOR A LONG TIME. MEASURES SUCH AS THESE WOULD GO TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES, WHICH IS LONG OVERDUE.”**

- and corporations accountable for predatory behavior instead of giving them more resources than everyday Americans.
- When asked about the increase of anti-Asian hate and violence in the wake of COVID-19, 61 percent of Michigan’s women of color agree that our communities must band together against the bigotry and violence incited by Trump and other high-profile figures’ repeated use of racially charged language and scapegoating.
- The majority of Michigan’s women of color agree that federal and state governments should be increasing access to health care instead of taking it away. Even in a group of respondents with people who expressed anti-abortion views, over half (51%) agree that our leaders must reject efforts to use the pandemic as an excuse to block access to abortion.

## Conclusion: Michigan’s Black and brown women voters demand more fairness and opportunity.

Overall, Michigan’s women of color strongly support solutions that solve for racial, gender, and economic inequalities. Now, more than ever, women of color voters need policymakers to prioritize fixing the institutional and informal undervaluing of caregiving; eliminating discrimination in the workplace; raising wages; safeguarding workers’ safety, dignity, and equality instead of prioritizing corporate breaks and bailouts; guaranteeing that everyone can access and afford the health care they need; and reforming our tax system so that it centers our communities and everyday people and households.

- 1 It is important to note that the majority of this survey’s fielding time took place after the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd and the subsequent protests across the country. There is a possibility this affected respondents’ responses.
- 2 NWLC calculations based on BLS, May 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table B-1 and Table B-5: Employment of women on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, seasonally adjusted, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t21.htm> (last visited June 5, 2020). Figures are seasonally adjusted and capture total non-farm employment. See more at <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/May-Jobs-FS.pdf>.
- 3 NWLC calculations based on BLS, historical data for Table B-1 and historical data for Table B-5, available at <https://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cesbtb5.htm> (last visited July 2, 2020). See more at <https://nwlc.org/resources/june-jobs-report/>.
- 4 BLS, June 2020 Employment Situation Summary, Table A-3: Employment status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age, available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm> (last visited July 2, 2020). Figures is seasonally adjusted and is for Latinas ages 20 and over. Figure is seasonally adjusted and is for Latinas ages 20 and over. See more at <https://nwlc.org/resources/june-jobs-report/>.
- 5 In addition to insufficient relief and recovery assistance, women on the front line are also suffering from a persistent wage gap that leaves them with no savings. The majority of front-line essential jobs are low-paid jobs with limited to nonexistent supports like paid leave, employer-sponsored health insurance, and child care. Lost earnings due to the gender wage gap are exacerbating the effects of COVID-19 for many women and women of color in these low-paid jobs — and for the families who depend on their income. See more here: <https://nwlc.org/blog/the-wage-gap-has-made-things-worse-for-women-on-the-front-lines-of-covid-19/>
- 6 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/06/04/why-covid-19-hit-michigan-so-hard/>
- 7 The report referenced from the Imperial College’s COVID-19 Response Team was released on May 28, 2020 and used data from early March through May 20, 2020. Per Gov. Whitmer’s Phase 4 of the Michigan Safe Start Plan, the state lifted its stay-at-home orders in early June. As of early July, there has been an uptick in Michigan’s confirmed cases and deaths. See here for the Imperial College’s May report: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/medicine/mrc-gida/2020-05-28-COVID19-Report-23-version2.pdf>.
- 8 This survey was fielded from May 20 – June 4, 2020. At the time, respondents were asked if they “support the stay-at-home orders more now than when the order first when into effect.” Gov. Whitmer issued a statewide stay-at-home order effective March 24 which she extended several times, then lifted on June 1, 2020. Since reopening, there has been a spike in new COVID-19 confirmed cases and new deaths as of July 7, 2020 including a six-week high for new confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state. See here for more: <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/07/07/whitmer-state-dial-back-reopening-if-covid-19-numbers-increase/5389105002/>
- 9 On June 1, 2020, Gov. Whitmer announced that the state was going to begin phased reopening on June 8. Since then, select businesses and public gathering spaces reopened at limited capacity and the state has seen an uptick in cases. Gov. Whitmer recently extended the state of emergency. For more on the June announcement of reopening, see <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/06/01/michigan-reopening-bars-restaurants-coronavirus-governor-whitmer/5260059002/>. For more on the recent uptick of COVID-19 cases following reopening, see <https://www.fox2detroit.com/news/amid-uptick-in-michigan-covid-19-cases-gov-whitmer-will-give-updates-at-3-p-m>. And for more on Gov. Whitmer’s extension of the state of emergency, see [https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2020/07/14/michigan-coronavirus-state-emergency-gretchen-whitmer/5427163002/?\\_ga=2.33265915.479300600.1595481253-403364783.1594837784](https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2020/07/14/michigan-coronavirus-state-emergency-gretchen-whitmer/5427163002/?_ga=2.33265915.479300600.1595481253-403364783.1594837784).