



**NATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
LAW CENTER**

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# The Wage Gap Robs Mothers of What They're Owed

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Over seven in 10 mothers in the workforce<sup>1</sup> work full time and year-round, and in 2023 those hardworking mothers were paid only 74 cents for every dollar paid to full-time, year-round working fathers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the wage gap widens when part-time and part-year workers are included: Mothers were typically paid just 62 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.<sup>3</sup>

We need public investments and policies that support economic opportunity and address the problematic inequities failing mothers every single day, robbing them of tens of thousands of dollars every year, making it more difficult to make ends meet, and preventing them and their families from building wealth.

## The wage gap will typically cost a mother working full time \$19,000 dollars for every year of work

Mothers working full time, year-round typically lose 26 cents on the dollar to the sexist wage gap, an amount that adds up over time. Mothers working full time, year-round lose \$1,583 each month—or \$19,000 each year.<sup>4</sup> This annual loss could have paid for over six months of a family's groceries,<sup>5</sup> six months of child care,<sup>6</sup> and five months of rent.<sup>7</sup> This money could be life-changing for mothers and their families, making it easier to make ends meet, and offering them opportunities to invest in their education or their children's, purchase a home, or save for retirement.

## Racial inequities compound the maternal wage gap for many mothers of color

The wage gap for mothers is substantial but worsens for many mothers of color. For example, Latina mothers and Indigenous American mothers working full time, year-round were paid just 51 cents and 50 cents respectively for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Black mothers working full time, year-round were paid only 56 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic fathers. Many mothers of

color working full time, year-round lose tens of thousands of dollars each year to the wage gap, with Latina mothers losing \$38,900, Indigenous American mothers typically losing \$40,000, and Black mothers typically losing \$35,000 annually compared to white, non-Hispanic fathers.<sup>8</sup>

### HOW MUCH MOTHERS WORKING FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND LOSE TO THE WAGE GAP (BY RACE AND ETHNICITY)

	What Mothers Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to White, Non-Hispanic Fathers	Typical Monthly Loss	Typical Annual Loss
Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) mothers	\$0.99	\$83	\$1000
Black Mothers	\$0.56	\$2,917	\$35,000
Latina Mothers	\$0.51	\$3,242	\$38,900
Indigenous American Mothers	\$0.50	\$3,333	\$40,000
White, Non-Hispanic Mothers	\$0.75	\$1,667	\$20,000

Source: National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female and self-identify their race, whether they are of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, and whether they have their own children under age 18 in their home.

Larger annual losses are especially devastating for Black mothers working to support their families, as they are often primary breadwinners for their families. Research shows 68.1% of Black mothers are sole or primary breadwinners for their families as opposed to only 37.2% of white mothers.<sup>9</sup>

### Mothers experience a wage gap at every education level, including those who have earned a graduate degree

Women account for more than half of college-educated adults in the U.S. labor force.<sup>10</sup> However, in 2023 mothers were still typically paid less than fathers with the same or even lower educational attainment:

- Mothers working full time, year-round who have a high school diploma were typically paid just 68 cents for every dollar paid to fathers with the same diploma.
- Mothers working full time, year-round must earn a master’s degree (\$82,000) to make more than fathers with an associate’s degree (\$70,000).
- Also striking is the typical difference in wages between the most educated mother and fathers. Among professional degree holders, such as those with juris doctorate degrees or medical doctor degrees, a mother working full time, year-round typically made 71 cents for every dollar made by a father with the same education working full time—an annual loss of \$49,000.<sup>11</sup>

## MOM'S WAGE GAP BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG FULL TIME, YEAR-ROUND WORKERS

Educational attainment	Mothers Median Wage	Fathers Median Wage	Typical Annual Loss	What Mothers Were Paid for Every Dollar Paid to Fathers
Less than 9th Grade	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$10,000	\$0.75
No high school diploma (at Least 9th Grade)	\$30,200	\$45,000	\$14,800	\$0.67
High school diploma	\$36,000	\$53,000	\$17,000	\$0.68
Some college, no degree	\$42,000	\$65,000	\$23,000	\$0.65
Associate's degree	\$48,000	\$70,000	\$22,000	\$0.69
Bachelor's degree or more	\$78,000	\$110,000	\$32,000	\$0.71
Bachelor's degree	\$70,000	\$100,000	\$30,000	\$0.70
Master's degree	\$82,000	\$120,000	\$38,000	\$0.68
Professional degree	\$121,000	\$170,000	\$49,000	\$0.71
Doctorate degree	\$109,000	\$130,000	\$21,000	\$0.84

*Source: National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Respondents self-identify their sex as either male or female. Mothers and Fathers are defined as having a child under age 19 living at home.*

### We can't wait to close the wage gap for mothers

Racism, sexism, and structural inequalities rob mothers and their families of tens of thousands of dollars every single year. We need public investments in child care and other supports, and public policies that allow mothers to succeed and thrive.

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## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Data in this analysis comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS). Respondents to this survey self-identify their sex as either male or female and their race and ethnicity. Mothers and fathers are defined as having a child under age 19 living at home.
- 2 National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) calculations using 2023 ACS, using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Figure is the ratio between median earnings for full time, year-round working mothers, (\$55,000) and fathers, (\$74,000) in 2023.
- 3 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>. Figure is the ratio between median earnings including part-time working mothers (\$42,000) and fathers (\$68,000) in 2023.
- 4 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>.
- 5 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels, U.S. Average, October, 2024 (accessed December, 2024) Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Three Levels: Low, Moderate, Liberal; October 2024. Calculation is based on the USDA low-cost food plan for a family of four (two adults ages 19 to 50 and children ages 6 to 8 and 9 to 11) estimated at \$1,072.8 per month.
- 6 “Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis,” Child Care Aware, <https://www.childcareaware.org/thechildcarestandstill/>. Average costs for child care for a child in the United States (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) is \$11,582 annually in 2023, or \$965.17 per month.
- 7 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, Table DP04 . DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics - Census Bureau Table. Median housing costs for renters was \$1,348 per month in 2023.
- 8 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS, using IPUMS-USA, available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/sda/>.
- 9 Breadwinning Mothers Are Critical to Families’ Economic Security (Center for American Progress, March 2021), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/breadwinning-mothers-critical-familys-economic-security/>. This analysis uses a five-year data sample collected from 2015 to 2019.
- 10 “Women Now Outnumber Men in the U.S. College-Educated Labor Force” (Pew Research Center, September 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/26/women-now-outnumber-men-in-the-u-s-college-educated-labor-force/#:~:text=Women%20now%20outnumber%20men%20in%20the%20U.S.%20college%20Dedicated%20labor%20force&text=Women%20have%20overtaken%20men%20and,Center%20analysis%20of%20government%20data>