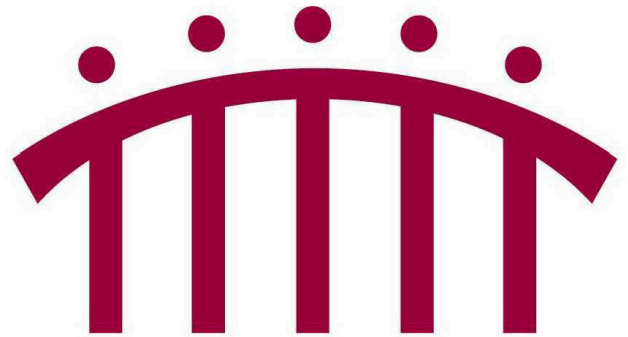


THE WISCONSIN WOMEN'S COUNCIL

2023-2025 BIENNIAL REPORT



Women's Council
• Wisconsin •



A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Governor Evers and Members of the
State Legislature,

It is with deep pride and gratitude that I
reflect on the work of the Wisconsin
Women's Council in the 2023-2025
biennium, work marked by bold
conversations and continued advocacy to
advance the status of women and girls
across our state.

In alignment with Governor Tony Evers'
declaration of 2024 as the "Year of the
Worker," the Council hosted a series of
statewide convenings that centered
women's voices in critical sectors of
Wisconsin's workforce. From trades and
apprenticeships to agriculture, healthcare,
education, and entrepreneurship, our
panels highlighted both the barriers women
face and the leadership they bring to high-
demand, high-need industries.

We are especially proud to have partnered
with public and private sector leaders, Tribal
communities, and higher education
institutions to surface innovative strategies
that support women's recruitment,
retention, and advancement in the
workplace.

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR, CONTINUED

We also recognized the importance of economic resilience and long-term financial security. Through our participation in Money Smart Wisconsin, the Council offered two financial education webinars. These virtual workshops addressed building investment confidence and preparing for retirement.

Our commitment to the empowerment of all women was further reflected in our Native Women's Leadership Roundtable, which lifted up Indigenous women leaders and their priorities—ranging from access to healthcare and safe housing, to cultural competency and intergenerational healing. Their voices reminded us that inclusion is not symbolic; it is essential to systemic change.

In closing, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Jenifer Cole, who served as Executive Director of the Wisconsin Women's Council from September 2022 through December 2024. Jen's leadership was instrumental in advancing our mission—organizing impactful roundtables, elevating the voices of women and girls, and educating state leaders and the public on the critical challenges they face. Her dedication and vision laid a strong foundation for the Council's continued work.

As Chair of the Council, I am continually inspired by the dedication of our members and the many individuals and organizations that work alongside us. Together, we are building a future where every woman in Wisconsin has the opportunity to thrive—at home, at work, and in her community. Thank you for your partnership, your advocacy, and your belief in the power of women's voices.

With gratitude,



DENISE GAUMER HUTCHISON
Chair, Wisconsin Women's Council





From L to R: Rep. Jodi Emerson; Inga Orth (dairy farmer, cheesemaker, and former host of PBS Wisconsin's Around the Farm Table); Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez; WWC Chair Denise Gaumer Hutchison; Kara Kasten-Olson - Agriculture Program Supervisor in the Division of Agricultural Development at DATCP; Sally Ladsten, WI State FFA Advisor with the Department of Public Instruction; Julie Keown-Bomar - Executive Director of the Wisconsin Farmer's Union; Patti Epstein (Council Member); True Vue - Lor Family Garden; and Jenifer Cole, former WWC Director at St. Isidore's Dairy, June 28, 2025

About the Council

The Women's Council is Wisconsin's statutory commission on the status of women and girls. Established in 1983, the Council promotes initiatives that empower women, serves as a clearinghouse for information on the status of women in the state, conducts independent research, and promotes unique partnerships to further women's economic and social equality and improve this state's tax base and economy.

Mission

The Women's Council's mission is to enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully and equally in all aspects of life.



Women's Council
· Wisconsin ·



National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Council Member Rachel Fernandez speaking at the May 5, 2024, MMIWG event

May 5th marks the National Day of Awareness for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), a movement dedicated to addressing the ongoing violence against Indigenous communities.

Council member Rachel Fernandez coordinates the annual event at the Wisconsin State Capitol. This initiative fosters support and healing by raising awareness and sharing testimonies that highlight the realities faced by Indigenous people, particularly the violence experienced by Native women and girls.

Addressing Violence Against Native Women and Girls

Violence against Native women and girls is a significant yet under-reported issue in Wisconsin and across the United States. Often, cases are misclassified or face jurisdictional confusion. To enhance data collection and tracking, accurate data protocols are essential. The MMIWG Day of Awareness highlights these critical issues and backs the ongoing initiatives aimed at:

- Improving the responses of social service organizations
- Examining the roles played by federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions
- Developing and implementing effective data collection and reporting methods

MAEHKĪW ENĀHPES -RED DRESS- 4TH ANNUAL WRAP THE CAPITOL RED

JOIN US AS WE HONOR OUR RELATIVES



Wisconsin
State
Capitol
State Street
Side

12:00pm~ Gather, Prayer, Song
12:15pm~ Speakers, Families, Survivors
3:15pm~ Wrap Red Around the Capitol
3:45pm~ Waewaenen, Sendoff, Song

May 5th
12pm-
4pm

May 5th is the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls .

On May 5th we will honor our missing & murdered relatives and listen to their families stories and truths in support.

For more information contact:
Rachel Fernandez
rfernandez@woodlandwomen.org
735.444.0370

SPONSORS:









SUPPORTING THE YEAR OF THE WORKER: WOMEN IN WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

Governor Tony Evers declared 2024 the Year of the Worker, building on his administration's work to strengthen Wisconsin's workforce in high-demand and high-need industries. In support of this initiative, the Wisconsin Women's Council (WWC) hosted a year-long series of panels and discussions focused on women in the workforce. These events highlighted the opportunities, challenges, and successes women experience across industries critical to Wisconsin's economic future.

Women in the Trades, Labor, and Apprenticeships, April 1, 2024

The Council launched its workforce series with a panel on women in the trades, labor, and apprenticeships, moderated by Chair Denise Gaumer Hutchison. Panelists included leaders from the Department of Workforce Development, the Wisconsin Building Trades Council, technical colleges, and women working in the trades as electricians and first responders. The discussion emphasized the importance of attracting, engaging, and retaining women in non-traditional fields, highlighted modest gains in participation rates, and identified persistent barriers. Panelists also shared how their programs are creating awareness among youth, noting the need to promote career pathways to girls earlier than age 16. The session concluded with calls to strengthen anti-harassment training and address harmful workplace cultures to ensure safe, welcoming environments for women.

SUPPORTING THE YEAR OF THE WORKER: WOMEN IN WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

Women in Agriculture, June 28, 2024

A panel moderated by Representative Jodi Emerson spotlighted women in Wisconsin agriculture. Panelists included farmers, agricultural educators, state agency leaders, and nonprofit executives who shared their career journeys and perspectives.

The discussion focused on the roles women play across agriculture, the programs that support them, and the unique challenges they face—including gender-based pushback and the need for mental health care for farmers. Panelists highlighted innovative approaches women are using to improve sustainability and efficiency on farms and called for increased funding for underrepresented populations in agriculture.

Gender Parity in Education, August 23, 2024

The Council heard from Dr. Joleen Bowman and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Jill Underly on the status of women in the teaching profession. Presentations highlighted women's significant representation in education, disparities that remain in leadership roles, and the broader implications of gender imbalance within the teaching profession.



Back Row from L to R: Kimberly Davister - Firefighter/Paramedic, IAFF Local 141; Nerissa Nelson - Council Member; Patti Epstein - Council Member; Christina Jungwirth - Apprenticeship Coordinator, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; Liz Pusch - Deputy Director, Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, DWD; Emily Pritzkow - Executive Director, Wisconsin Building Trades Council; Dr. Jolene Bowman - Council Member; Jenifer Cole - former WWC Director; and Michele Carter - Division of Employment and Training Administrator, DWD. Front Row L to R: Denise Gaumer Hutchison - WWC Chair; Marsha Nebel - Electrician, IBEW Local 158; Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez at the Women in Trades, Labor, and Apprenticeship Panel

SUPPORTING THE YEAR OF THE WORKER: WOMEN IN WISCONSIN'S WORKFORCE

Work-Life Balance and Supporting Women in the Workforce, September 27, 2024

At Carroll University, Council Secretary Amanda Medina-Roddy moderated a panel on work-life balance with leaders from higher education, healthcare, real estate, state government, and business.

Panelists discussed the meaning of work-life balance for individuals, employers, and communities, as well as the systemic challenges that frame it as a women's issue. They explored employer practices—such as paid leave and flexible scheduling—that support workers, shared lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, and emphasized the critical link between work-life imbalance, mental health, and workforce participation. The panel concluded with a focus on caregiving, calling for solutions to address not only childcare, but also elder care and care for individuals with disabilities.

Women in Healthcare, October 25, 2024

The Council's workforce series concluded with a focus on healthcare, featuring Lt. Governor Sara Rodriguez and leaders from the University of Wisconsin Health and the School of Medicine and Public Health. Presenters emphasized that while women make up 8 in 10 healthcare workers, disparities persist in leadership, specialty practices, and pay equity.

They also highlighted childcare and leave policies as barriers to retention, and shared efforts to support women of color in healthcare careers. Panelists noted the progress achieved through initiatives to bring more women into STEM and medicine, while outlining ongoing work to expand representation in specialty fields. Lt. Governor Rodriguez also presented recommendations from the Governor's Healthcare Workforce Taskforce, including strategies to build career pathways and reduce licensing barriers for behavioral health professionals.

Conclusion

Through this robust series of panels and presentations, the Wisconsin Women's Council elevated women's voices in key industries—from trades and agriculture to education, business, and healthcare. By connecting policymakers, practitioners, and women leaders across sectors, the Council advanced Governor Evers' vision for the Year of the Worker and reaffirmed its commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive workforce for Wisconsin.

ECONOMIC SECURITY: ADVANCING WOMEN'S FINANCIAL LITERACY

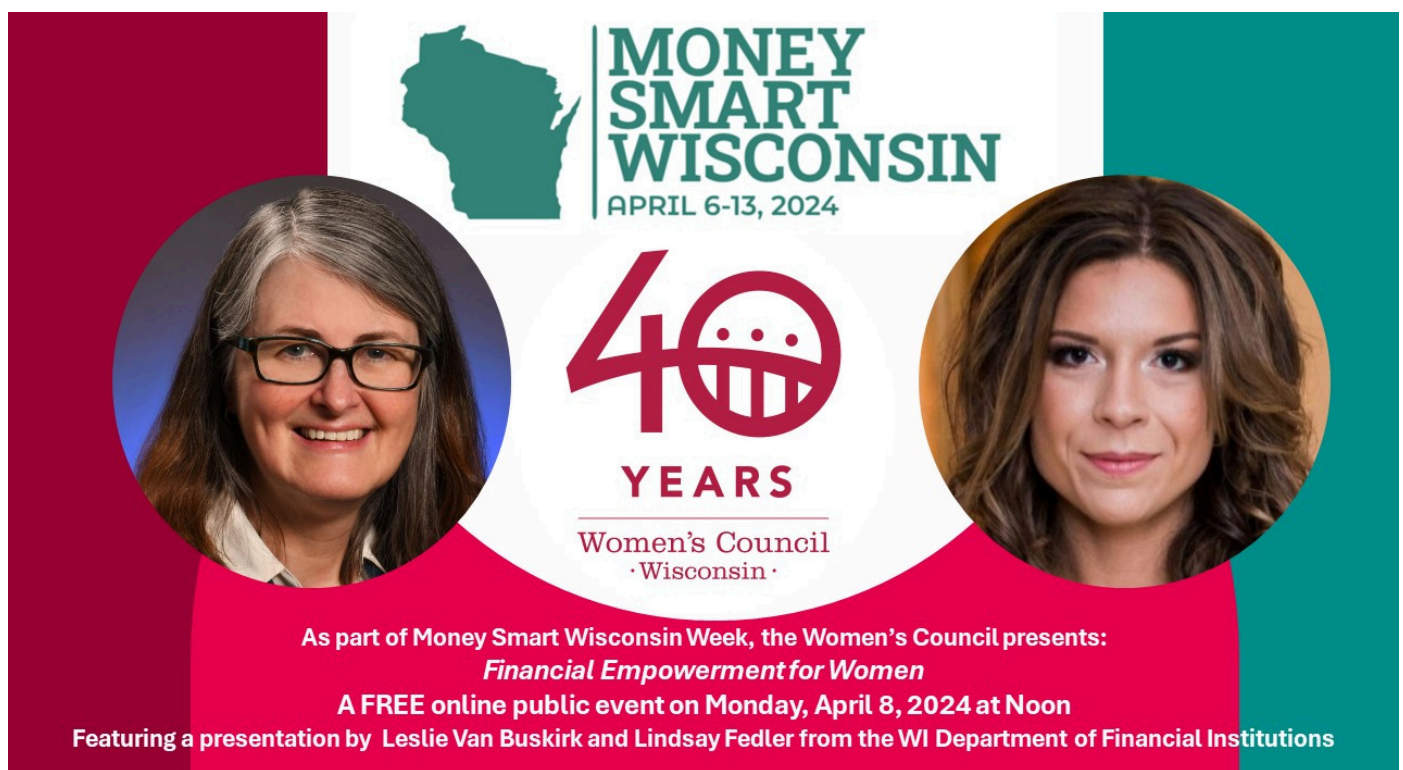
The Wisconsin Women's Council is a proud supporter of and partner of Money Smart Wisconsin—a statewide initiative that promotes financial literacy and empowers individuals to make informed financial decisions. As part of this effort, the Council hosted two educational webinars in 2024 aimed at helping women strengthen their financial knowledge and long-term economic security, with a special focus on preparing for retirement.

Webinar 1: Financial Empowerment for Women

This webinar encouraged women to reflect on their personal relationship with money and take proactive steps toward managing their finances and investments. Participants learned how to spot red flags for investment fraud, how to vet opportunities before investing, and how to build financial confidence—particularly during life transitions such as job changes, caregiving roles, or approaching retirement.

Presenters:

- Leslie Van Buskirk, Administrator, Division of Securities, Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions
- Lindsey Fedler, Staff Attorney, Division of Securities, Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions



**MONEY
SMART
WISCONSIN**
APRIL 6-13, 2024

**40
YEARS**
Women's Council
• Wisconsin •

As part of Money Smart Wisconsin Week, the Women's Council presents:
Financial Empowerment for Women
A FREE online public event on Monday, April 8, 2024 at Noon
Featuring a presentation by Leslie Van Buskirk and Lindsay Fedler from the WI Department of Financial Institutions



Webinar 2: Women's Economic Security in Retirement & Aging

This session explored the ways in which structural inequities—such as pay disparities, wage gaps, time out of the workforce, and the feminization of low-wage sectors—contribute to a retirement savings gap for women.

Presenters discussed strategies for preparing financially for later life, including budgeting, wealth-building, and how to advocate for policy solutions that address long-standing economic barriers. The discussion underscored the reality that many women face economic insecurity in retirement and highlighted tools to help mitigate these risks.

Presenters:

- Dr. Katie Fitzpatrick, Associate Professor of Consumer Science, UW–Madison School of Human Ecology and the Retirement and Disability Research Center
- Grace Trewartha, Financial Coach and Founder & CEO, Live Beneath Your Means, LLC

Through these webinars and continued partnerships, the Wisconsin Women's Council reaffirmed its commitment to building financial capability and closing gender-based economic gaps, helping ensure that women of all ages can plan for a secure financial future.



Back row L to R: Pamela Boivin, Executive Director - Woodland Financial Partners; Dr. Jolene Bowman – Council member; Crystal Chevalier, CEO - Wolf River Development Company; Patti Epstein – Council member; Rachel Fernandez – Council member; President Shannon Holsey – Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Nation; Jennifer Gauthier, Director - Sustainable Development Institute at College of Menominee Nation; and Marni King, Assistant Vice President - HUB International, Tribal Benefits Specialist Front row L to R: Jenifer Cole – former WWC director; Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez – Council member; and Denise Gaumer Hutchison – Council chair at the Native Women’s Leadership Panel & Roundtable

Native Women’s Leadership Panel & Roundtable, Friday, September 22, 2023

The Wisconsin Women’s Council hosted a dynamic panel and roundtable discussion led by Council member Rachel Fernandez, featuring Native women leaders who shared powerful insights on their roles, aspirations for women, and the challenges Native women face.

Key themes included:

- **Empowerment & Leadership:** Strength, determination, and learning from elders; encouraging Native women to seek and hold elected office.
- **Systemic Challenges:** Addressing trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, and limited access to healthcare and mental health services.
- **Cultural Competency:** The need for culturally aware providers and more inclusive collaboration with Tribal communities.
- **Community Resilience:** Tackling poverty, food insecurity, housing, clean water, education, and healthcare disparities.
- **Youth Engagement:** Creating space for younger women and girls to become future leaders.
- **Supportive Shifts:** Increasing support from Tribal men for women in leadership roles.

Panelists also offered thoughtful recommendations for how the Women’s Council can better support Native women and the organizations that serve them—emphasizing inclusion, visibility, and culturally responsive engagement.

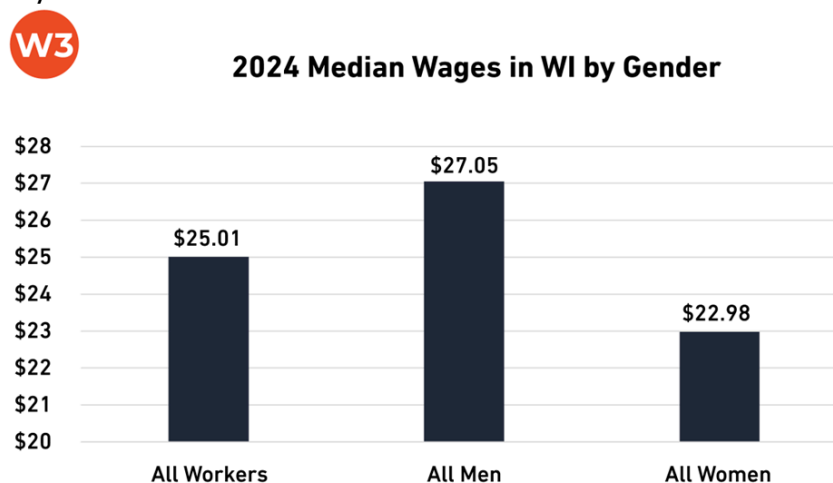


PAY EQUITY

Despite progress over the past four decades, women in Wisconsin continue to earn less than men, with women of color facing the most profound disparities.

The Wisconsin Women's Council remains committed to addressing wage inequality through policy research, public awareness, and partnerships that support equal pay and economic opportunity for all women.

Charts and data from Working Wisconsin, A Project of the High Road Strategy Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



COUNCIL MEMBERS, AS OF JUNE 30, 2025

Governor's Appointees



Denise Gaumer Hutchison
Chair



Lt. Governor, Sara Rodriguez
Governor's Designee



Nerissa Nelson
Vice Chair



Gabby Aranda-Pino
Public Health
Madison & Dane
County



Dr. Jolene Bowman
Stockbridge-Munsee
Band of Mohican
Indians



Patti Epstein
Chief Benefits Officer,
State of Wisconsin
Employee Trust Funds



Rachel Fernandez
Menominee Indian
Tribe of Wisconsin

Senate Appointees



Sen. Rachael
Cabral-Guevara
19th Senate District



Senator Kristin
Dassler-Alfheim
18th Senate District



Amanda Medina-Roddy
Secretary

COUNCIL MEMBERS AS OF JUNE 30, 2025

Assembly Appointees



Rep. Jodi Emerson
91st Assembly District



Carrie Richard
Mazomanie, WI



Sen. Dianne
Hesselbein
27th Senate District



Former Sen. Mellissa
Agard
16th Senate District

Council Staff



Jenifer Cole
Executive Director
2022-2024



Jeanne Duffy
Executive Director
2025



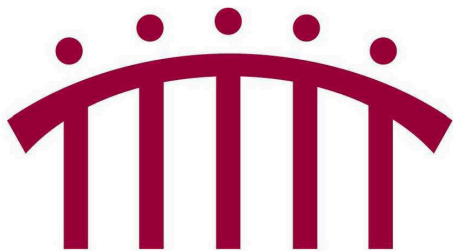
Genevieve Lambert
Communications
Intern, 2024



Brigid Zei
Communications
Intern, 2025



Back row L to R: Dr. Cindy Gnadinger - President, Carroll University; Jen Flogel - Administrator-Division of Personnel Management, WI Department of Administration; Stacy Rolston - Senior Associate Vice President, UW-Shared Services; Jenifer Cole - former WWC Director; and Dr. Kelly Piacsek - Vice President of Research, Rogers Behavioral Health. Front row L to R: Amanda Medina-Roddy - Council Member; Denise Gaumer Hutchison - Council Chair; and Shelley Gallamore - Broker/Owner, Realty Executives at the Work Life Balance panel, September 27, 2004t



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