



# ALL IN

2023 IMPACT REPORT

*Celebrating 50 Years*

 **Women<sup>TM</sup>  
Employed**  
WE pursue equity for all.

Dear Friends,

**WE** are **ALL IN**. When Women Employed (WE) was founded in 1973, we knew the stakes were high. That the challenges might be daunting. That winning equity for working women would not be easy.

But for 50 years, **WE** have been **ALL IN**. **WE** have never backed down. **WE** have been tenacious. **WE** have done the research, forged the connections, built the coalitions, fostered the partnerships, and rallied the advocates to make change happen.

The victories we seek are systemic. Helping one woman find success is gratifying. Empowering thousands—millions—to improve their futures feels purpose-driven.

Systemic change comes with twists and turns. The systems run deep. The

barriers and biases are entrenched and the battles long fought. But **WE** know what is at stake and **WE** persevere. Because **WE** work together. **WE** center the voices of those most impacted—Black and Latina/x women, women in low-paid roles. **WE** are steadfast. And **WE** are **ALL IN**.

The world looks different for women than it did in 1973. And, there is still much to be done. This year, **WE** made incredible leaps forward, which you'll read about in this report. And **WE** are **ALL IN** for what's to come—today, tomorrow, and for however long it takes until we achieve equity for **ALL**.

Thank you for your support this past year. This work can't happen without you. **WE** are stronger because you're **ALL IN**, too.

## Our Strategic Plan

**Women Employed's** mission is to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic advancement. Equity is at the core of what we do. It's reflected in our tagline: **WE pursue equity for ALL.**

Our current strategic plan calls us to focus on growing the economic power of women in Illinois who face the greatest barriers to economic advancement: those who are in low or unpaid work, and women who are Black and/or Latina/x. Our bold social goal is to close the wealth gap at the intersection of gender and race.

This work is vitally important, and our focus on women in low-paid roles, and women who are Black and/or Latina/x, is intentional, because it is precisely those women who face the largest gaps and disparities in Illinois, in every area from job quality to pay equity to debt to access to quality and affordable education. We believe that when you raise the floor for those most marginalized, for those facing the largest disparities, we all rise.

### Our plan includes four key pillars:

**ENSURE** the appropriate recognition and compensation of the essential paid and unpaid work done by women.

Radically **SHIFT** the distribution of resources.

**FORGE** pathways to economic security, leadership, and wealth.

**DRIVE** organizational sustainability, capacity, and excellence.

By advancing these pillars, and focusing on women who face the greatest barriers, we are **ALL IN** on building a more equitable world for working women.



*Lynn Watkins-Asiyambi*

LYNN WATKINS-ASIYANBI,  
Board Chair



*Cherita Ellens*

CHERITA ELLENS,  
President and CEO



# Shaping The Future: We're **ALL IN**

Systems change is a long game. With 50 years under our belt, we know how to be patient, to keep pushing, to pivot, and to remain ALL IN until we get the win. This year, with your support, we've been able to:

## ENSURE ILLINOIS WOMEN KNOW THEIR EQUAL PAY RIGHTS (ENSURE)

Community outreach and education to over **17,000** people across Illinois

digital media campaign that was seen over

**12.2 million times**

WE partnered with the Illinois Department of Labor to build a campaign, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau's FARE grant, to inform Illinois women of their equal pay rights. We partnered with Arise Chicago, Man-Tra-Con Corporation, The Shriver Center on Poverty Law, and YWCA Quad Cities to ensure a statewide approach. The multi-faceted, multilingual campaign focused on low-paid, Black, and Latina/x women and featured print and online resources, **community outreach and education to over 17,000 people across Illinois**, and an innovative **digital media campaign that was seen over 12.2 million times!**

## COMBAT FORCED ARBITRATION FOR SURVIVORS (ENSURE)

WE participated in federal advocacy leading to the successful passage of the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act. **This law ensures survivors who file a claim of sexual assault or harassment can seek justice in court** and not be forced into an arbitration process that overwhelmingly advantages corporations.



## EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP (SHIFT)

In WE Hub's first year

**Sign Up**

**367 people**

signed up to achieve their own vision of success

In the fall of 2022, WE launched our Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (WE Hub), a first-of-its-kind free tool to empower women across Illinois—especially Black and Latina/x women—with information and resources to launch and grow businesses. **In WE Hub's first year, 367 people—more than one per day—signed up to achieve their own vision of success!** Learn more at [WEHub.org](https://WEHub.org).

## IMPROVE AND EXPAND CAREER PATHWAYS (FORGE)

Career pathways are proven to help adult and non-traditional students succeed in school and access better careers. This year, **we updated our Career Foundations curriculum to make it ADA accessible and trauma informed**, we began a national project **to improve how domestic violence survivors connect with services that attach them to meaningful employment**, and we convened multiple organizations for a **Health Care Careers pilot program** to ensure learners can earn quality credentials.



## WORK WITH EMPLOYERS TO BUILD EQUITABLE WORKPLACES (ENSURE)

We **launched WE Consulting**, offering workshops, trainings, consulting, and thought leadership for employers looking to foster equitable and inclusive workplace cultures. We released a white paper on how employers can help women thrive, developed curricula for a variety of workshops, and provided sexual harassment prevention trainings that go beyond compliance to employers in a variety of industries.

## SHARE OUR EXPERTISE TO SHAPE CHANGE (ALL PILLARS)

WE experts provided thought leadership in many arenas. We were interviewed for over **50 news stories** with local, state, and national reach. We spoke at **dozens of events** hosted by partners like the U.S. Department of Labor, Illinois Diversity Council, Family Values @ Work, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), and many more. We engaged in **commissions, task forces, and working groups** where change happens, including the Illinois Labor Advisory Board, the City of Chicago Mayor's Women's Advisory Council, the Governor's Commission on Workforce Equity and Access, and the Illinois Board of Higher Education Commission on Equitable Public University Funding, to name a few.



## AND THAT'S NOT ALL!

Keep reading to learn about three major victories we secured this year that will impact millions and the decades of work that went into them.

- **Illinois Paid Leave for All Workers Act**
- **Illinois Salary Transparency Act**
- **\$100 Million in Additional Financial Aid Funding**





# PAID LEAVE FOR ALL WORKERS

Pillar: Ensure

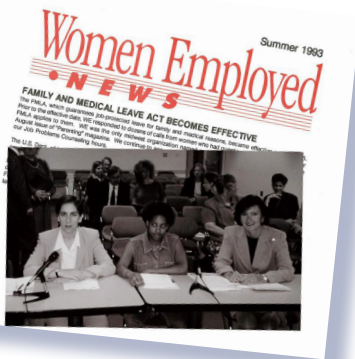
We all deserve the ability to take care of ourselves and our families without losing a paycheck—or a job. But millions across the country don't have that simple right. Women—and especially Black and Latina/x women—are more likely to suffer. Not only do we shoulder the majority of caregiving in this country, but we're also most likely to work in low-paid jobs that lack benefits like paid leave.

For decades, Women Employed has been ALL IN on making paid leave a reality for working people in Illinois and beyond. And this year, we celebrated a huge victory when Illinois passed the **Paid Leave for All Workers Act!**

## Timeline to Victory:

1993

WE helped pass the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which established the right of employees to take job-protected, but unpaid, leave for their own or a family member's serious illness or injury or to care for a new child.



2000

WE formed the Illinois Paid Leave Coalition, and began pressing lawmakers for paid family and medical leave, to ensure more people could afford to take the time off they need.

Mid-2000s

We began advocating for paid sick time in addition to paid leave, to help manage shorter-term needs, drafting an Illinois bill and advocating for its passage.

Mid-2010s

We pivoted our focus to the City of Chicago, drafting a sick time ordinance, championing an advisory referendum on the 2015 ballot that showed 82 percent voter support, and co-chairing the Mayor's Working Families Task Force, which issued a recommendation for paid sick time.

2023

**VICTORY** for Illinois! As head of the Illinois Paid Sick Days Coalition, this year we fought for—and won—a **law that will provide 1.5 million working Illinoisans with the right to earn up to five days of paid time off per year that they can use for any reason!** The law goes into effect in January of 2024, and we'll work hard to ensure everyone in Illinois knows about their new rights. And we'll keep pushing for paid family and medical leave, so people can manage longer-term care needs.



Sarah Labadie, WE's Director of Advocacy and Policy, stands with Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth, Illinois House Leader and Chief Sponsor of the Paid Leave for All Workers Act, at the bill signing on March 13, 2023.

2020

COVID-19 shined a light on the ongoing need for paid leave for ALL working people, opening a new opportunity to advocate for paid leave in the state of Illinois.

2016

**VICTORY** for Chicagoland! We led the fight to win earned sick time ordinances in Chicago and Cook County that, starting in 2017, provided half a million working people with the right to earn and use up to five paid sick days a year.



# MAKING STRIDES ON PAY EQUITY

Pillar: Ensure

It seems so basic. We should ALL be paid fairly for the work that we do. We shouldn't have to worry that our work isn't being valued properly, or that we're being paid less than the person working next to us who's doing the same job. But persistent pay gaps for women—which are significantly wider for Black, Latina/x, and other women of color—prove we're not there yet.

Since our founding 50 years ago, Women Employed has been ALL IN on advancing pay equity for working women, winning steady progress along the way. This year, we took a monumental leap forward when we helped pass a **salary transparency law in Illinois!**

## Timeline to Victory:

1973

Women Employed was founded to end discrimination and improve working conditions in Chicago's Loop. WE were armed with a study showing that the average working woman in the Loop earned \$5,268 per year, compared to \$13,153 for the average man.



1980

WE launched a national campaign to close the wage gap, releasing a groundbreaking publication and holding national meetings and conferences with government agencies to discuss policy solutions.



1992

WE convened Chicago Area Partnerships, an innovative partnership between major employers, women's and civil rights groups, and U.S. Department of Labor officials, to promote solutions for fair compensation, diversity and inclusion, and more.

2000

WE released *Raising Women's Pay: An Agenda for Equity*, which proposed a multi-faceted approach to achieving pay equity, including improving equal pay laws, addressing occupational segregation, raising the minimum wage, urging employers to do voluntary pay audits, promoting unionization, and more.

2023

**VICTORY!** We were instrumental in **winning a salary transparency law in Illinois**, which will go into effect in 2025, and **will require employers with 15 or more employees to include a pay range and a general description of benefits and other compensation in job postings.** It's a huge step forward for pay equity! Studies show that when job applicants are clearly informed about pay and compensation, the wage gap narrows.



Sharmili Majmudar, WE's Executive Vice President of Policy, Programs, and Research, talks about the importance of salary transparency and pay equity in an interview with WBEZ.

2019

After years of determined advocacy, we won a No Salary History bill in Illinois, which prohibits employers from asking job applicants for their salary history. This common practice contributes to gender and racial wage gaps.

2009

We helped win the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, a federal law making it easier for those who suffer pay discrimination to file claims and win justice.



2003

WE led the successful fight to pass the Illinois Equal Pay Act, which guarantees equal pay for equal work to hundreds of thousands of workers not covered under federal equal pay laws.





# ENSURING EDUCATION IS FOR EVERYONE

## Pillars: Forge + Shift

With a degree or credential, a woman can improve her career, her financial prospects, and her future as well as that of her family. But for many—especially first-generation, adult, and/or Black and Brown students—the barriers are daunting.

Since the 1980s, WE has been ALL IN as a leading advocate for women in higher education and training, along every stage of their journey—ensuring more women can afford education and training, that they can succeed in their programs and attain meaningful credentials, and that they aren't left with crippling debt. And this year, **we helped win \$100 million in additional funding for need-based financial aid in Illinois through the Monetary Award Program (MAP)!**

## Timeline to Victory:

1985

Women Employed launched research to identify gaps in publicly-funded employment training systems' ability to meet the needs of low-income women, and initiated our first-ever campaign to increase access for lower-income women to education and training leading to good jobs.

1998

Building on our 1997 publication, *Women's Guide to Technical Careers*, WE launched the Tech-Start Program, which worked with community colleges to enable more women to explore technical occupations and improve math, mechanical, and spatial skills in preparation for careers in higher-wage technical fields.



2004

WE launched Career Coach, a free, comprehensive, online career tool to help low-paid women explore career options. Over the years, the program helped tens of thousands of users, and was named one of the top ten career exploration tools by the U.S. Department of Labor.

2005

WE released *Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults*, a how-to guide for colleges and community organizations to develop industry-specific bridge programs that provide adults with basic academic skills while they are learning job skills, to prepare them for college-level programs.

2023

**VICTORY!** Alongside our partners, WE advocated for—and won—an additional \$100 million in funding for MAP this year. Including this investment, **WE have helped win \$300 million in additional funding for MAP over the last 4 years.** Now, every single student in Illinois who is eligible will receive a MAP grant! That's progress!



Christina Warden (right), WE's Director of Policy and Programs, with Leila Ellis-Nelson from Chicago State University at a symposium on advancing equity in Illinois higher education.

2021

WE launched the Accelerating Student Progress and Increasing Racial Equity (ASPIRE) Project, which works directly with ten community colleges to improve remedial education programs—a significant contributor to racial achievement gaps in higher ed.

2020-2023

We deepened our focus on racial equity in higher education, producing a pair of policy briefs, sitting on task forces like the Chicago State University Equity Working Group and the Latino Policy Forum's Latino Student Landscape Scan, helping pass the 2021 Education Omnibus Bill, and contributing to the Illinois Board of Higher Education's Strategic Plan: *A Thriving Illinois*—parts of which have become state policy, including a law requiring campuses to create equity plans.

2012

In partnership with City Colleges of Chicago, we launched the first of six bridge curricula, as well as for Career Foundations in 2015, which helps non-traditional students explore career options and make an academic plan. All our curricula are available free of charge to education providers.

2009

WE launched Student Advocates for Success (SAS), organizing Illinois college students to advocate with legislators for increasing funding for need-based grants through the Monetary Award Program (MAP).



SAS members advocate for MAP funding with a state legislator.

# Thank You

We are grateful for all our corporate partners, foundations, funders, and individual donors who made a gift between July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. Due to space constraints, we are not able to list all of our generous supporters. Heartfelt thanks to all of you for being ALL IN for economic equity for working women.

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THE WORKING LUNCH

Thank you to everyone who helped us celebrate our 50th anniversary at **The Working Lunch** on May 25th! As we celebrated five decades of Smashing the Status Quo, we were thrilled to honor five people and organizations who have dedicated themselves to driving systemic change: Legacy Honorees Day Piercy and Anne Ladky, Changemaker Honoree Nancy B. Kreiter, Emerging Power Builder Honoree Natrina N. Kennedy, MPH, and Key Partner Honoree Family Values @ Work.

We are grateful to our Leading Sponsor, ComEd, who has steadfastly supported WE through the years; and to Wind Creek Chicago Southland, whose unanticipated and generous day of gift allowed us to smash not just the status quo, but our fundraising goals, too! And thanks to all of YOU for being ALL IN as well. Your support and partnership drives our success, underscores our impact, and will allow us to be ALL IN for years to come.



BUILDING A LEGACY OF IMPACT

From an early age, Lynn Watkins-Asiyanbi has held a deep commitment to ensuring women and girls can embody their power. It's why she became a Girl Scout, rising through the ranks to become the youngest member of their Board of Directors. When Lynn was looking for the next opportunity to continue her service, she spoke to a former colleague, Gloria Ysasi-Diaz, who was retiring from the Women Employed Board of Directors. Gloria suggested she look into WE.

After meeting with then-Executive Director Anne Ladky, and doing her own research, Lynn was inspired. "My mind was spinning on how I could help forge Women Employed ahead with my time and talents. As a working professional and part of the "sandwich" generation who has cared for my aging parents and two sons, I have benefitted from the work WE tackles on a daily basis."

Lynn was elected to WE's Board in 2014 and became our Board Chair in 2020. She's passionate about stewarding our impact well into the future. **"It is so important for me to not only give while I'm alive, but to continue my legacy of service after I'm no longer on this side of Earth. I am deeply committed to the work Women Employed does, and I want to ensure a lasting impact for at least another 50 years, if not longer."**

What will your legacy be?

Ensure a more just and equitable future where ALL women and their families can build their economic power. Go ALL IN with a legacy gift to Women Employed through your will or living trust, retirement account, or life insurance policy. When you do, we'll welcome you as a member of WE's legacy society, *Generations Circle*.

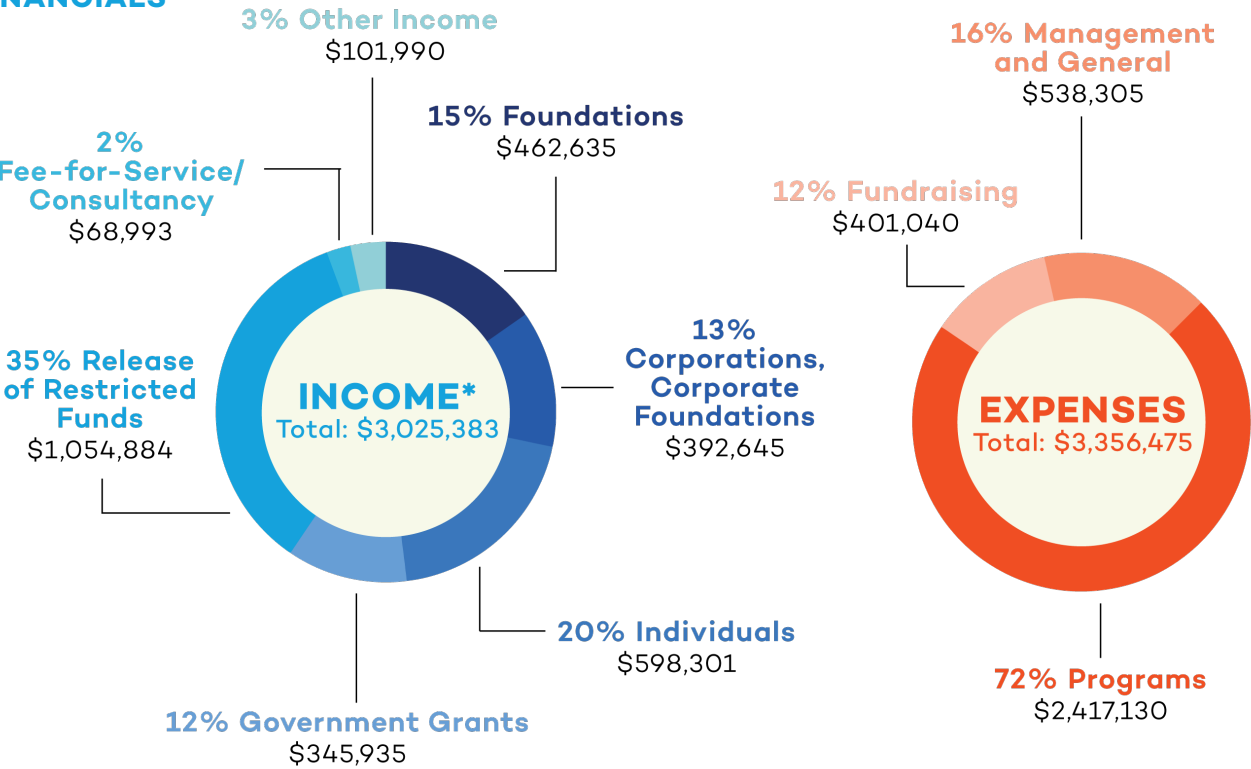
For more information, contact Christina Perez at [cperez@womenemployed.org](mailto:cperez@womenemployed.org) or (773) 739-6165.

THANKS TO ALL OUR GENEROUS GENERATIONS CIRCLE MEMBERS

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\*Unrestricted Dollars

INVESTORS FOR CHANGE

With the generosity of our *Investors for Change*, who make unrestricted gifts of \$1,000 or more annually, Women Employed is able to pursue the best opportunities to improve workplace conditions and build pathways to higher education so more women can succeed economically.

ANNE LADKY LEADERSHIP FUND ♦

Thank you to these donors who founded the fund in Anne's honor and to those who have designated the total or a portion of their gift to the fund. All donations support initiatives aimed at increasing WE's impact on the conditions facing women in low-paid occupations and building our movement by engaging next-generation leaders as activists for women's economic justice.

NANCY B. KREITER ADVOCACY FUND\*

Special thanks to the donors of this fund that support Women Employed's work to strengthen federal equal opportunity policies.

GENERATIONS CIRCLE

Thanks to our supporters who have included Women Employed in their estate plans, future generations of women will have meaningful opportunities to achieve their aspirations for themselves and their families.

ELEVATE, MONTHLY GIVING ☆

Elevate, our monthly giving community, is a passionate and determined group of monthly supporters on a mission to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to equity. Make a monthly gift and join people just like you, giving anything they can to prove how unstoppable we are when we work together!

DEDICATIONS

Honor a loved one with a gift in their name to Women Employed for a birthday, anniversary, or other special occasion. Donations in memory of a special person honor their life and continue their legacy. The tribute gifts noted are donations of \$150 and above.

For more information on these special giving opportunities, call Christina Perez at (773) 739-6165 or visit [womenemployed.org](http://womenemployed.org).





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