

# SOUNDING THE ALARM:



# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DELAWARE WOMEN

March 2021



### DEDICATION

The Office of Women's Advancement and Advocacy would like to dedicate this report to the thousands of Delaware women that continue to work on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. We especially want to thank the women who volunteered to be profiled in this report. Because of your dedication, sacrifice, commitment, and perseverance, we will get through this together.

Thank you

**Gwendoline B. Angalet**  
**Vincenza Carrieri-Russo**  
**Margherita Carrieri-Russo**  
**Sue Darnell**  
**Bernice Edwards**  
**Kim Eppehimer**  
**Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long**  
**Diedra Harper**  
**Paula Janssen**

**Susan Roupp Kent**  
**Maria Matos**  
**Rep. Melissa Minor-Brown**  
**Rev. Rita Mishoe Paige**  
**Dr. Karyl T. Rattay**  
**Jamie Schneider**  
**Jakeysia Snead**  
**Stephanie L. Staats**  
**Michelle A. Taylor**



Photos: Dr. Karyl T. Rattay and Lt. Governor Bethany Hall-Long during COVID-19 vaccination events.



# HEALTH DISPARITIES & COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020, continues to have huge impacts on Delaware, particularly for Delaware women, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic in the number of COVID-19 cases, as essential workers, or as caregivers. Given those factors, as well as how women are more likely to live in poverty, face ongoing wage gaps, and work in industries most affected by the pandemic, any recovery efforts should ensure that the voices and needs of Delaware women are included and addressed.

Over the course of the pandemic, the rate of COVID-19 cases has been consistently higher for Delaware women. For Black and Hispanic populations, the rate of COVID-19 cases has been up to three times the rate for White populations. [1] Beyond the rippling economic effects of COVID-19, these health disparities illustrate how social determinants of health such as safe and stable housing and access to healthcare can have huge effects on communities especially during a public health crisis such as COVID-19.

## **DE Women on the Frontline**

**-Rep. Melissa Minor-Brown**

**Delaware State Representative,**

**17th District**



*"As a Covid-19 triage nurse, I understand the critical role of nurses and how important it is for everyone to work together in healthcare. We are working through a crisis that many of us never imagined. We've realized that when everything goes haywire in the medical field people look to nurses to take the lead and we did just that. This pandemic has even brought nurses out of retirement. When you're watching from the sidelines you feel like you're not doing your part. If you're not deep in the trenches with your fellow nurses, there's a feeling of emptiness. But, to be completely transparent, Covid-19 hit us like a ton of bricks. It threw everyone into a panic and everything into disarray. Underneath the masks, gloves and shields, there are tears and a heart, and a person who cares. Work can be a bit overwhelming during a pandemic. We all are carrying this heaviness: in our hearts, in our minds, in our spirits, and it's more than we ever thought nursing would be. We feel it when we're alone in our cars, or at the dinner table with our families. Today, I can honestly say that nurses are the strength and the glue working on the frontlines every day, healing and saving lives. We are all looking forward to the day when we can be on the other side of this pandemic. The world has seen that nurses are the professionals that will lead the change that is needed today and for our future. We touch every single aspect of people's lives and we impact health systems, public health, and our entire community of people just by what we do in our professions. Our work can heal the world."*

## **DE Women on the Frontline**

*"Since the pandemic began, as the Public Health Director, I've had to focus my time almost exclusively on COVID-19. That means I've had to shift responsibility for ensuring the continuation of the important work of our other Public Health sections (including health promotion and disease prevention, maternal and child health, animal welfare, medical marijuana, and some work in substance use prevention) to other members of my leadership team. Additionally, in addition to myself, all of the DPH core team members for the past year have worked incredibly long hours each day, often seven days a week, without a day off – even for holidays - for months at a time. Navigating the intensity and duration of this pandemic has been the greatest challenge of my public health career."*

**-Dr. Karyl T. Rattay**

**Director, Delaware  
Division of Public  
Health**



## **Rate of COVID-19 Cases As of 02/01/2021**

**By Gender**

**Women 851.8**

**Men 808.3**

**By Race/Ethnicity**

**Hispanic 1,530.1**

**Black 854.7**

**White 572.3**

Data Source: My Healthy Community Delaware  
Environmental Public Health Tracking Network

## ECONOMIC SECURITY & COVID-19

For people living at or below the poverty level, the impacts of COVID-19 have been detrimental while the number of people facing financial hardship has increased dramatically. The pandemic has affected thousands of people across the state; however, those living in poverty typically have fewer resources to lessen the burden of a public health crisis. Low wages can hurt one's ability to save for the types of emergencies presented by a pandemic and women are often overrepresented in low-wage work, especially women of color.[2] Factors such as the immediate loss of income or a decrease in hours with few resources to fill the resulting gap can lead to amassing expenses such as rent and utility payments and even potential eviction or shutoffs as moratoriums expire.

### Living in Poverty by the Numbers

**13% of All Women**      **22% of Hispanic Women**  
**39% of Single Moms**   **20% of Black women**  
                                 **9% of White Women**

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau

Recent research shows that as of December 2020, 49,000 renters (26%) in Delaware had not caught up on rent.[3] Additionally, 87,000 Delawareans reported that their household didn't have enough to eat, even as the economy began to recover in the summer months.[4] Furthermore, expanded unemployment benefits have not reached all those that need them. In May 2020, Delaware saw a high of over 50,000 unemployment claims (53% of which were women) and the industries with the highest number of claims included Accommodation and Food Service (19%), Retail (16%), Administration and Support (15%), and Healthcare and Social Assistance (11%).[5] While the number of claims fell to 12,992 in November 2020, women and the beforementioned industries (those with large numbers of women) continued to be a higher percentage of all claims.[6] While the number of unemployment claims has decreased since hitting a high point in May 2020, data collected in December 2020 show that 1 in 3 adults in Delaware (241,000) had difficulty covering regular household expenses.[7]

### DE Women on the Frontline

"COVID has affected how I manage all of our Friendship House programs. The one affected most is our winter Code Purple program. The program exists to offer additional shelter options when overnight temps are so cold sleeping outside becomes dangerous. Our Code Purple program relies on donated space and volunteers from our faith partners, and due to COVID these locations were closed. In addition, our volunteers tend to fall into groups who are considered high risk for COVID complications. Not having anywhere to run our program, the county offered us to run code purple from their newly purchased Sheraton Hotel, now called "NCC Hope Center." They also offered financial support for us to hire staff in lieu of volunteers. We thought we would run our Code Purple winter shelter out of the ballroom, however with COVID ramping up around the holidays we made a last minute decision to put our registered folks in separate hotel rooms. This is when Friendship House began planning a revised and new program ensuring guests' needs were being met such as food (three meals a day plus snacks), transportation to and from a local bus stop, and most importantly case management. The goal was to get people into permanent housing instead of them going back to living on the street after winter. Two weeks in, we started accepting hotel/motel state vouchers. This added a new layer to our program! We are actively collaborating with many agencies to ensure our guests' goals become reality. We have doubled our staff, created a new program, and started utilizing government money all due to COVID."

**-Kim Eppehimer**  
CEO, Friendship House, Inc.





# ECONOMIC SECURITY & COVID-19

As of December 2020

**49,000**

Delaware Renters Haven't  
Caught Up on Rent

**87,000**

Delawareans Are Food  
Insecure

**241,000**

Have Difficulty Covering  
Regular Expenses

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## Industries with the Highest Number of Unemployment Claims November 2020

**Accommodation and Food Service (19%)**

**Administration and Support (15%)**

**Retail (16%)**

**Healthcare and Social Assistance (11%)**

Data Source: U.S. Department of Labor

The COVID-19 pandemic has had historic impacts on the state including disproportionate effects on women and people of color. While disparities existed long before the pandemic, they have been magnified during the COVID-19 crisis. Relief efforts have been helpful; however, many gaps remain.

## THE WAGE GAP

Delaware women make just...



**Hispanic women \$.59**



**Black women \$.68**



**White women \$.84**

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**For every one dollar a white man makes.**

### DE Women on the Frontline



**-Stephanie L. Staats**

Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Delaware

*"More than ever women are both the primary bread winners and care givers. Our skills and talents contribute enormously to Delaware's economy. We are the community backbone and COVID-19 has shown gaps in the support we need to fulfill our critical roles and to preserve our own right to self-actualization. Family friendly policies, quality childcare access, equitable outcomes in health and personal safety are pressing needs for Delaware women. Women have always been expert jugglers but COVID-19 has demanded even more of us professionally and personally. Making necessary business decisions that impact people's lives when they are experiencing heightened personal fear and stress levels, while also having to parent through remote learning, children's mental health, partner relationships and caregiving responsibilities can burn out the most resilient of us. Managing stress in healthy ways is critical."*



## DELAWARE WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINE OF COVID-19

Delaware workers on the frontlines, as well as those that had to rapidly switch to working remotely have had to learn to navigate new and unfamiliar work environments. Research illustrates that 41% of Delaware adults live in households where at least one adult has substituted some or all of their typical in-person work for telework because of the coronavirus pandemic.[8] On the other hand, thousands of Delaware workers, especially Delaware women, are essential workers. Whether as healthcare providers or home health care workers, child care workers, grocery store clerks, educators, and others on the frontline, women are the majority of those continuing to put themselves at risk to help Delaware through this crisis.

**77%** of Delaware hospital medical workers are women.

**93%** of Delaware home health care workers are women.

**93%** of Delaware child-care workers are women.

**71%** of Delaware tipped workers are women.

**77%** of Delaware retail clothing store employees are women.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, National Women's Law Center

Delaware women are also overrepresented in industries most affected by temporary shutdowns or reduced capacity. Even a year into the pandemic, recent data shows that 34% of adults in Delaware expect someone in their household to have a loss in employment income in the next 4 weeks.[9] Delaware restaurants have been hit hard by the pandemic and tend to have more women as servers that depend on tips to earn a wage. For example, it's been reported that the Delaware restaurant industry lost around \$700 million dollars and eliminated over 23,000 jobs from April to August 2020.[10] Furthermore, the Delaware Restaurant Association expects that up to 30% of restaurants will likely close their doors permanently.[11]

Many workers have adjusted and transitioned to a "new normal" in the workplace, or found other sources of employment if necessary. Businesses have innovated and found ways to try to continue to serve the public while maintaining safety precautions. However, the recovery period will take time and should focus on the needs of those most impacted by the pandemic. With regards to both front line workers and those in businesses that have been hardest hit, Delaware women have been leading efforts both great and small to keep the state moving forward during this difficult time.

### DE Women on the Frontline

*"Supermarkets never closed, and our amazing team has been here every day to provide our communities the essential items they need. We pulled together and adapted to keep everyone safe and fully employed. We implemented safeguards like mask-wearing and social distancing and started new services like curbside pickup and "Dinners for Two" at the holidays. Our compassion and understanding for each other and our community grew tenfold over this stressful time. Childcare and family care have been a struggle during the pandemic, and the shortfall has fallen hardest on our female team members. While the FFCRA helped for short periods and we have given extensive leave to our team, women fall behind in earnings when they must stay home to care for children. Safe, reliable childcare is an important part of helping women excel in the workplace and take advantage of new opportunities."*



**-Paula S. Janssen**  
Owner,  
Janssen's Market LLC

## DE Women on the Frontline

*"Covid-19 has impacted my work in domestic violence tremendously. During this time, my case load has doubled in numbers. Before Covid 19, my normal workday would be meeting with clients face-to-face, providing transportation to Family Court, assisting them with filing for a PFA, and attending court hearings and other appointments to offer my support. Now during Covid 19, my normal workday includes completing intakes over the phone, providing transportation through Uber and bus tickets, mailing and emailing PFA forms, and assisting with VCAP and other resources over the phone. I miss meeting with my clients face-to-face and I look forward to the day when I can sit down with them, give my undivided attention and let them know that I am there for them. During this pandemic my empathy has grown stronger for the clients I work with. The situations they are faced with are trying in itself, but to add the stress from this pandemic forces them to be stronger than they ever imagined they could be. I see my clients give their all to overcome for themselves and for their families. Each and every day I go to work, I give my best to each and every client. This pandemic hasn't changed that at all, it has only made me give more. Covid-19 has made my work in Domestic Violence look a little different, and it has made me become a stronger and better person and advocate for domestic violence victims."*

**-Jakeysia Snead**

Family Violence Community Advocate People's Place II, SAFE Program



*"Latina women are very family oriented and caring. Being separated from loved ones—being unable to kiss their families—has caused depression and mental health issues that will require treatment. Moreover, COVID-19 has shined a light on inequities that already existed and have now multiplied. Many women have lost their jobs and are struggling to meet basic needs. Stimulus benefits need to be provided to all women, not just citizens. Latina women need access to well-paying jobs and equitable health care."*

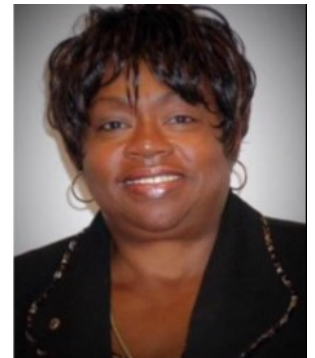
**-Maria Matos**

President and CEO, Latin American Community Center

*"The most pressing needs for Delaware women are self-care. Even in the midst of all that is happening we must continue to make our mental and physical health a priority. That cannot take a back seat in times like these. Another pressing need for women during this time is to ensure that they/we are aware of the supports and resources within the community. Because we take care of everybody we need to have viable access to supports such as emergency housing, food pantries, clothing pantry, emergency services, mental health support and etc. First State Community Action Agency is a hub that can help navigate those needs and resources for women who may need those supports."*

**-Bernice Edwards**

Executive Director, First State Community Action Agency



## CAREGIVING & COVID-19

Not only are Delaware women facing the brunt of the economic crisis in the state, they are also disproportionately carrying the weight of caregiving. Women are more likely to take on caregiving responsibilities, as indicated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which states that “two out of every three caregivers in the United States are women, meaning they provide daily or regular support to children, adults, or people with chronic illnesses or disabilities.”[12] At the height of the crisis, schools were closed for the rest of the academic year. With the closure of schools and in some cases child care centers, parents needed to quickly adapt to working remotely in addition to engaging their children in remote learning; or for essential workers, scrambling to find child care accommodations for an age group where care typically is not available. One year later, in-person learning is not widely available, and many schools remain remote or offer a mix of remote and virtual learning.

Recent research has indicated that mothers of young children have lost four to five times more work hours than fathers in the pandemic; a third of working women said a spouse was not helping with child care during the pandemic; more than two-thirds of mothers said school and day care changes in the pandemic had a “moderate or severe impact on daily life;” and a quarter of mothers were afraid of losing work because of a lack of child care.[13] Data from the U.S. Census Bureau concur with such studies stating that, “Of those not working, women ages 25-44 are almost three times as likely as men to not be working due to childcare demands. About one in three (32.1%) of these women are not working because of childcare, compared to 12.1% of men in the same age group.”[14]

### ***DE Women on the Frontline***

*“The notion that women have to “do it all” has increased tenfold during the pandemic. Women are working from home, birthing babies, taking care of babies, running their households, engaging in their children’s education, staying involved in charitable organizations, and often times taking care of parents and family members as well. I don’t know any women who haven’t picked up more responsibilities during this pandemic. And unfortunately what we have lost throughout the pandemic is the relationships that many of these situations brought to us. We are doing the hard work of our jobs, but many are doing so from the isolation of home offices or their kitchen tables.*

*We are doing volunteer work, but without the fellowship and friendship that those roles brought to our lives. We are facing the challenges of parenting without the support of our “mom networks.” We are facing fatigue. Real fatigue.*

*Women are burning out and that will be catastrophic to our workforce, our churches, our non-profits, our advocacy groups, and our families. The day-to-day impact of COVID-19 on childcare and preschools is constantly changing. Early on in the pandemic we were dealing with guidance and regulatory changes on almost a daily basis. We were faced with potentially losing a significant portion of our teachers and staff that had to be caregivers and teachers to their own children. We still face significant regulatory and best practice challenges. We have no workforce. Finding new staff is difficult. Our teachers have heroically shown up daily to be consistent, positive, influences on the children in their care.”*



**-Jamie Schneider**  
Owner, Educational  
Enrichment Center DE, LLC.



## CAREGIVING, CHILD CARE, & COVID-19

An imbalance in caregiving can have vast and long-lasting consequences. The Pew Charitable Trusts found that, “Mothers of small children have lost work at three times the rate of fathers in the pandemic, a situation that threatens not only progress toward gender equity but middle-class income gains that have become increasingly dependent on working women.”[15] Research also shows that, “The pressures of the pandemic are driving some employees—especially women—to consider downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce, in fact 1 in 4 women are contemplating such a decision.”[16] In September 2020, six months after the start of the pandemic, nationally speaking, over 800,000 women left the labor force, a figure more than four times the number of men who left the labor force.[17] The pandemic has had the unique impact on women in that they were more likely to either lose employment, leave employment because of a lack of child care options, or balance working remotely with household responsibilities. As a result, even beyond recovery efforts there are bound to be long-term impacts on labor participation and wages for women, making ever wider a gap that was trending toward closing.[18] The closing of schools and child care centers illustrate the importance of education systems and the role they play in women’s participation in the labor force. The state cannot achieve equity in the workplace unless the child care systems can adequately support the state’s workforce.

Child care is critical to Delaware’s economy and the well-being of its citizens because it helps parents, especially mothers, go to work and supports children’s healthy development. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has further strained an already overburdened child care system in Delaware, leaving many parents without enough options for care. During the pandemic, Delaware child care providers’ expenses have gone up 56% for child care centers and as much as 70% for family child care, while enrollment has gone down due to reduced capacity or families finding other arrangements.[19] National predictions indicate that Delaware could lose over 28,000 child care slots, equating to 58% of the state’s child care supply due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[20] With fewer child care choices, more women, who are more often the primary child care provider in the home, will be forced out of the workforce in order to care for their children. The data already shows that more women have left the workforce because of temporary closures of schools and child care centers. Without more support for early childhood education, many of these women may not return to the labor force once the state has recovered from the pandemic.



**-Michelle A. Taylor**  
President and CEO  
United Way of Delaware

### **DE Women on the Frontline**

*"Women have always borne the heaviest burden for child care in our country, and COVID has made that even more evident. With so many school districts now forced to provide education virtually, many parents are having to choose between caring for their children or going to work. This is especially so for women from marginalized communities. That's a false choice. One solution is to provide COVID-safe learning pods as alternatives to the traditional classroom, where women can be certain their children are getting the resources and adult supervision they need to remain engaged with online instruction. Also during this recovery, many women are looking to put their financial lives back together. Through our Stand By Me financial coaching initiative, women throughout Delaware are getting the kind of one-on-one guidance they need to not only move from financial crisis to financial stability, but to eventually achieve financial empowerment. By working with women to help them resolve debt, improve their credit scores, and develop personal savings, we are empowering women not only during the COVID recovery, but for a lifetime."*

## SMALL BUSINESSES & COVID-19

In addition to economic and caregiving impacts of the pandemic, the workforce felt a monumental shift in how business was conducted. Many small businesses faced temporary closures as well as significant decreases in the number of customers due to reduced capacity regulations. In Delaware, there are an estimated 29,833 businesses owned by women.[21] A recent research study found that "female business owners were twice as likely to say their businesses will not survive the pandemic. Only 5% of female business owners said they were unaffected by the pandemic, compared with almost 23% of male business owners." [22] Research shows that existing disparities in access to capital, educational attainment, and personal wealth can limit women and people of color in starting and growing businesses. [23] While the DE Relief Grant program has supported roughly 3,000 Delaware businesses throughout the COVID-19 crisis with more than \$180 million in grants to date [24], efforts should target women and minority owned businesses disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including expanding initiatives such as the partnership between the Delaware Division of Small Business and Delaware Black Chamber of Commerce. [25]

### **DE Women on the Frontline**

**-Rev. Rita Mishoe Paige**  
Pastor, New Beginnings  
Community AME Church



*"Trying to work from home with young children at home due to schools being closed has had major impact on women during this pandemic. It's a struggle trying to work and at the same time help children with their virtual learning. Many Day Care Centers closed. Schools closed, and many cannot afford Boys and Girls Club memberships. Trying to handle work and children has caused anxiety, depression, and abuse. Single women with children have also faced being afraid to get COVID tests. They're afraid of losing jobs if tested positive. Employers must allow appropriate sick and quarantine leave. They should also allow adequate time off without penalization when parent's must be home with their children."*

### **DE Women on the Frontline**

*"As small business owners, we had to reinvent ourselves and pivot our business quickly in order to survive. My sister and I took our upscale, dine-in Italian restaurant and turned it into a full-blown, old school pizzeria overnight. As 3rd generation restaurateurs, we actually grew up in the take-out business. So, we knew that if we wanted to stay afloat, take-out was our best chance. We applied our take-out knowledge and skills immediately. Every day was a new challenge and we had no idea what to expect from moment to moment. This pandemic has tested us as human beings in ways that are almost unimaginable. The restaurant industry was hit hard initially and continues to take punches daily. But we are resilient. And, the continued support of our loyal customers means more than we can say."*

*We feel that the most pressing needs for small businesses owners in general are more support. We need more hope. We need our political leaders to truly understand what it is like to operate a small business during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in the restaurant and hospitality industry. The Delaware Restaurant Association has been a driving force in helping our industry continue to succeed, despite the crisis that we are experiencing. They have been advocating for all business owners across the state. For more resources and updates, it is important to unite our industry and join the Delaware Restaurant Association to make things better for everyone. We really are stronger together."*

**-Vincenza & Margherita Carrieri-Russo**  
Owners of V&M Bistro & Ice Cream Delight



## RESOURCES DURING COVID-19

The Delaware 211 Helpline is a free resource that connects callers with health and human service providers, seven days a week. From help with COVID-19 questions to assistance with food, shelter, child care, personal crises and more, 211 is an invaluable resource.

### Delaware 211 Calls

June 1, 2020 to January 1, 2021

- **42,882 people contacted 211 (52% increase vs. last year)**
- **61% people were women**
- **39% people contacted 211 for the first time**
- **15,682 requests for health/medical (82% related to COVID-19)**
- **10,747 requests for financial assistance (71% utilities)**
- **4,758 requests for homeless/housing help (41% homeless shelters)**
- **2,329 requested basic needs (75% food)**

Data Source: United Way of Delaware

### DE Women on the Frontline

*"I see the challenge for women as we continue to recover is to be able to fulfill all of the expectations that society has put forth: mother, wife, daughter, essential worker, teacher, advocate, health care provider, problem-solver in chief. We often talk about "it takes a village" to raise a child. It takes that same village to support the woman who is caring for that child while meeting the other expectations placed upon her. Women need to have good paying jobs that allow them to support their families while respecting the other roles that they have to play. Women need to exercise their voice in the political process so their issues will get the attention they deserve. Lastly, women need to learn how to care for themselves too."*



**-Gwendoline B. Angalet**  
Coordinator, Wilmington COVID-19  
Community Mobilization Group

### DE Women on the Frontline

*"The most pressing needs for Delaware Women who are vulnerable is to fill their toolbox so they can prosper. Not just to survive – but to thrive! The silver lining is that Covid-19 brought to light many of the things we saw everyday as a provider but the community at large was not able to see. If you yourself are not in crisis, there is no way to really see the needs. The majority of clients reaching out to our call center are single moms. These are bright women, often attempting college to try to make a better living and life for them and their children. They are also often women who have had some sort of abuse in their past. They often need to hear encouragement with tangible opportunities we all need as humans to be successful, but their support systems are simply not there. THAT IS WHERE WE- THE COMMUNITY at large can step in and be the support and not their judge. A light has been shown on the issues that were brewing long before Covid-19 but with the opportunities that came with the responses to Covid-19; others gave a closer look to the issues. THIS IS GOOD NEWS, but we should not lose the momentum and stop at simply knowing the problem. It is important that the struggle of our neighbor is not left hidden in plain sight again. The most pressing needs for Delaware Women include empowerment to step into the opportunities of prosperity. It is my firm belief that one way we can ensure the opportunities are there is through our investment of our time. However, a coordinated system of care is key to this success."*

**-Susan Roupp Kent**  
Executive Director,  
Love INC of Mid-  
Delmarva





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Delaware women have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Delaware women, especially Black and Hispanic women, are more likely to get COVID-19, as well as live in poverty and face higher rates of unemployment. They are over-represented in both front-line occupations and among those affected by temporary business closures and reduced capacity. Add in increased caregiving needs due to child care and school closings, and Delaware women are being hit especially hard. Data collection related to COVID-19 should not only include race and gender but should also be cross tabulated. By cross tabulating data by race and gender (i.e. Black Women, Hispanic Women, etc.) we can better identify challenges and tailor solutions appropriately.

These unfortunate circumstances necessitate that the needs of Delaware women be thoroughly addressed in the continued COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts. Research indicates that any “solutions to improve the conditions of working women should address both aspects driving the disproportionate harm they have borne as a result of COVID-19’s economic impacts: an overreliance on an inadequate childcare system and their concentration in low wage jobs.”[26] The good news is that the State has created innovative programs such as the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Training Initiative to assist Delaware workers and their families who have lost jobs and income due to the COVID-19 crisis. Given that women have been disproportionately impacted by job loss over the course of the pandemic, it is essential that such programs are accessible to Delaware women. Any stimulus and recovery packages should have an eye on how they are impacting the most vulnerable – including Delaware women and especially Black and Hispanic women. The following recommendations encompass a wide range of issues that impact women related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These recommendations are not meant to be an exhaustive list of every policy that might help women in the First State, nor are they meant to be a detailed blueprint for execution. In addition, they do not consider budget and resource requirements. These recommendations do build on steps Delaware has already taken, and OWAA looks forward to working to further develop policies that improve equity and equality for women.

### **DE Women on the Frontline**

*"As the Lt. Governor and Co-Chair of the Pandemic Resurgence Advisory Committee, COVID has been a key priority of my daily work, focusing on the physical and mental well-being of all Delawareans. It has ranged from being “boots on the ground” as a public health nurse to leading policy discussions as the Chair of the National Lt Governors Association. The pandemic has reaffirmed my public policy work as a former DE State Representative and State Senator, focusing on public health services and infrastructure to protect working families across our state from Claymont to Selbyville. COVID-19 continues to shine an even brighter light on the health inequities in our state, and reinforces the need for a healthy community in order to also have a healthy economy. Now more than ever, we see the value of public and private partnerships with community organizations and leaders in order to tackle the health, education, equity, and business challenges. In turn, as we respond to COVID-19 we are starting a “roadmap to recovery.” For example, in my hat as a professor of public health nursing and research scientist, we have targeted public health responses to meet basic human needs while laying the groundwork for future long-term sustainable plans for resiliency.*

*I see firsthand especially during my work with the Pandemic Resurgence Advisory Committee, the importance of ensuring the social determinants of women are met. We must ensure women have job security, equal pay, access to affordable childcare, food on the table, workforce training, and adequate housing opportunities. When women are fully supported the entire state will benefit and more fully recover. I have been pleased to work with members of Delaware’s General Assembly, the Governor’s Office and other leaders on important policies to address these measures."*

**-Bethany Hall-Long**  
Lieutenant Governor of Delaware







## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Office of Women's Advancement and Advocacy recommends the following in order to start to meet the needs of Delaware women:

### **Recommendation: Provide Paid Family and Medical Leave Program and Guarantee Paid Sick Days to all Delaware Workers**

Without more permanent access to 1) paid family and medical leave and 2) paid sick days that cover all working people – across the government, nonprofit and private sectors – Delawareans face greater financial instability; pose an increased health risk to themselves, their families and others; and put additional strain on the public health and safety infrastructure's ability to contain COVID-19 and future public health crises.

Individuals need to stay home when they are sick or when they have no other way to care for children. However, they often go to work anyway because they cannot risk the loss of income. Although the state of Delaware took a huge step in providing paid parental leave to state workers and many state employees have access to paid sick time, there are still thousands of Delaware workers that do not have access to any paid family and medical leave or paid sick days. The State, in response to the COVID-19 emergency, exercised its discretion starting on March 12, 2020 to provide that State employees may be paid State Paid Emergency Leave at 100% of the employee's regular earnings under specific circumstances related to COVID-19 for up to two weeks.

### **Recommendation: Increase Investments in Child Care**

State funding not only helps providers keep their doors open, but it keeps costs down for families and supports providers across all settings including public schools, family child care, as well as community and center-based providers. Governor Carney has invested \$135 million in enhanced reimbursement for child care during the COVID-19 pandemic, a vital step in preserving the child care industry. However, further investments in child care are required to ensure that Delaware's workforce, especially women, remains strong.

### **Recommendation: Create a Comprehensive Plan to Increase Wages**

In Delaware, the current minimum wage is \$9.25 per hour, equating to just \$19,240 per year for someone working 40 hours per week for the full year. Yet, for a family of three, perhaps a mother with two children, the federal poverty level stands at \$21,720. While Delaware saw minimum wage increases in 2018 and 2019 and is scheduled to see increases in 2020 and 2021, such increases are dependent on legislation. Even with these increases, the current minimum wage still lags far behind the costs of living and there is no mechanism in place to ensure that wages rise with the cost of living. Furthermore, these increases do not apply to the hourly minimum wage for tipped employees, which is just \$2.23 and has not been increased in over 30 years. Delaware also permits a subminimum wage for workers with a disability per the Fair Labor Standards Act.

To help women and, indeed, all low-wage workers earn a living wage, OWAA recommends Delaware consider steps taken by other states including nearby Maryland and New Jersey, which have adopted \$15 an hour as their goal and passed laws or ballot initiatives implementing yearly increases to achieve that goal by 2025 or 2026. There are also seven states that do not permit a subminimum wage for either tipped employees or those with a disability. Instead of relying on legislation, several other states automatically increase their minimum wage based on the cost of living.

### **Recommendation: Help Delawareans Save for Retirement with Delaware Earns Program**

Many low-income workers do not have the funds to meet basic needs and therefore saving for an emergency or a future income for years down the road, simply is not feasible. However, Delaware can help eliminate such barriers to savings with the creation of a state-sponsored retirement plan, paid for by employees and overseen by the state. One proven option is a secure choice program, which is used in other states. These state-facilitated, universally available retirement savings plans provide a convenient way for middle-class workers to save for retirement, particularly workers who lack access to employer-sponsored plans and for small businesses that are unable to provide such a benefit.

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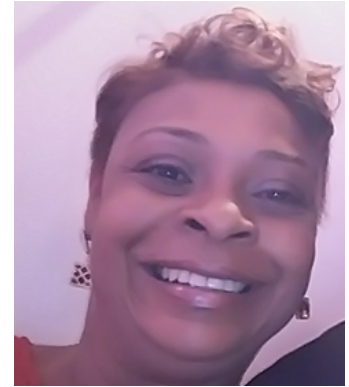
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## DE Women on the Frontline

*“Personally, I can say it was/is the most challenging experience I faced in my entire career. Hotel sheltering clients, on-going policy and procedure changes (almost in days of one another), being a support to staff, etc. I feared exposure within the shelters and how we would manage. I feared staff just not coming to work out of fear of their own health and the health of their families. I panicked due to the lack of PPE (initially). I rarely worked from home because I felt too removed. I was scared to not be able to respond to “the next thing.” Despite it all, God was still good. Not one of my residents or staff became ill. Remotely or in person, staff were always willing to help and make themselves available. Despite being afraid for themselves, they reported to work and gave the best of themselves. I am proud of my team. And grateful for those blessings I didn’t expect. Lunch provided and*

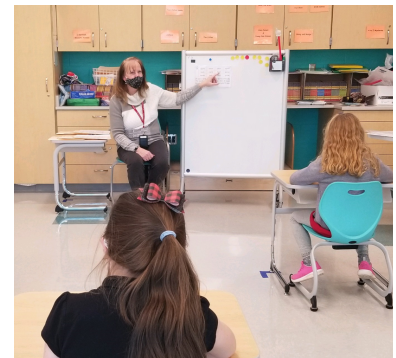


*delivered by a local restaurant for the residents weekly, facemasks provided by a Facebook sewing group (when none could be found in-store or online), and just the kind words of strangers thanking us for being there to do the work. Lastly, I am grateful for the leadership of this agency. “How are you doing? And what do you need?” always was the start of any conversation. I know we are not out of the woods yet, and it has been a hard 10 months, but I’m better because of it. And for that I am grateful.”*

**-Diedra Harper**

Associate Director of DV Shelter Services, CHILD, Inc.

*"As a teacher, I have had to learn a whole new way to motivate my students. Instructing, coaching and providing emotional support across a computer screen has been challenging for all of us. I am amazed every day as the resiliency of students and teacher to “make it work”. Everyone has stepped up to do their best. As educators one of our most pressing needs will be to find a way to prioritize time and teaching in order to close the gaps in instruction created by shortened school days and remote instruction while continuing to move our students ahead academically. Another pressing need will be to create a sense of safety and normalcy for our students. What we are experiencing now is far from “normal” but it is getting better every day!"*



**-Sue Darnell**

Reading Specialist, Laurel School District

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