



Montana Women Vote

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Who We Are:

Montana Women Vote is a statewide coalition that engages low-income women as informed voters, policy advocates, and community leaders. We work on issues including economic justice, access to health care, violence against women, reproductive rights, human rights, and election and voter protections.

Building a Healthy Montana: 2015 Legislative Priorities

The Healthy Montana Plan: Expanding Medicaid

Montana Women Vote knows that access to affordable, quality health care remains a significant concern for low-income women across the state. Many low-income women are mothers, heads-of-household, employees, and community members, and lack of health care, including preventative health services, puts these women and their families at risk for lost work, financial difficulty, and unmet health needs.

The Healthy Montana Act is what's best for Montana. Expanding health care protects our neighbors, providers, and our community hospitals. In Montana, our rural and safety-net facilities continue to be pushed toward the breaking point by the ever-growing costs of caring for the uninsured.

Early Childhood Education: Investing in Our Future

Montana is one of eight states that currently do not invest any state funding for pre-kindergarten classroom programs. The immediate and long-term benefits of early childhood education are clear and have been proven time and time again: educational and social benefits to recipients, enabling parents to work, higher long-term earnings for recipients, savings in state budgets, and lower incarceration rates are among the many outcomes.

In Montana, the steep cost of child care, coupled with lower-than-average median incomes, makes early childhood education even more imperative: Montana is the 11th least affordable state for families with a four-year-old in child care. These challenges are not equal for all families. Over half of families with children under five headed by single mothers live in poverty; the average income for a single mother is \$26,610, and the average annual cost of childcare for a four-year-old is \$7,518 – nearly 30% of household income. Single mothers do not have the option to stay home to care for children, and often face difficult choices between lower-quality, substandard care or paying an excessive amount of their income in childcare costs.

State investment in early childhood education, and particularly in public pre-kindergarten programs, would bring the proven benefits of early education to thousands of families. We support Governor Bullock's Early Edge proposal to invest in Montana's future.

Building a Healthy Montana: Investing in Our State

Our state budget reflects our values as Montanans. We need to continue to invest in the services and infrastructure that keeps Montana families healthy, safe and strong. Our state budget pays for important programs including Healthy Montana Kids, education, aging services, and more. With money in the bank, Montana doesn't need unnecessary budget cuts – we need a values-based budget that invests in building a healthy Montana.

Montana Women Vote supports full investment in essential services and infrastructures including:

- Programs that provide access to essential health care services, including the Children's health Insurance Program (CHIP / Healthy Montana Kids) and family planning services for low-income women and families.
- Early childhood education, K – 12 and higher education, and Indian Education for All.
- Programs and services that support working families such as paid sick leave and child care assistance.
- Programs and services that allow Montanans to age with dignity including Medicaid, Meals-on-Wheels, and Big Sky Rx.

Montana Women Vote also supports efforts increase revenue available to the state through strengthening compliance efforts, closing corporate loopholes, and ensuring our tax rates and credits are just and equitable.

Building a Healthy Montana: Access to Health Care

We anticipate renewed attacks on reproductive choice and rights in the 2015 session, as we've seen in past years. Montana Women Vote believes in a woman's right to privacy, autonomy, and to make medical decisions for herself in consultation with her doctor. We oppose attacks on a woman's right to appropriate and self-determined reproductive health care.

Building a Healthy Montana: Protecting our Democracy

Current Montana law provides multiple opportunities for all citizens to participate in our democratic process. These laws - including same-day voter registration and voter ID – are under attack. We all benefit from robust and accessible elections, and must continue to protect the avenues to participation that allow our most vulnerable community members to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

Building a Healthy Montana: Strengthening Families

Montana Women Vote believes that Montana is at its best when it is safe and welcoming for all families. In the past, we have seen attacks on the LGBT community during the legislative session. We stand as an ally in support of protection against discrimination and access to the rights and opportunities for LGBT folks that all Montanans enjoy.

Montana Women Vote also stands as an ally in support of immigrant rights. Montana has a long history as a welcoming state, where immigrants make up an important part of our communities, our economy, and our families. We oppose needless and harmful attacks on immigrant communities in Montana.

Montana Women Vote works alongside and in collaboration with the members of our coalition, listed below. For more information on any of our 2015 legislative priorities, please contact MWV staff.