



Good afternoon Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Dr. C. Nicole Mason and I am the President of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, an economic think tank focused on women's economic security and understanding women's labor force participation.

I thank you for the invitation to testify today about the long-term impact of the pandemic on women, and how we might chart a path toward a full and equitable recovery for those most impacted by job and income losses, specifically women of color and lower-wage workers. I ask that my written testimony be submitted for the record.

Two years ago this month, the national unemployment rate was [13.3 percent](#) and the number of unemployed persons was 21 million. For women, the unemployment was [17.8 percent](#). During the early months of the pandemic, women lost 4 times as many jobs as men—triggering a [she-cession](#), an economic downturn defined by income and job losses in sectors dominated by women—service, leisure and hospitality, education, and healthcare.

To put this in perspective, at the start of 2020, we were celebrating the gains made by women in the workforce—at the time women made up 51 percent of the labor force. This is no longer the case. In April 2022, 181,000 women left the labor force compared to 131,000 men, and there are still close to one million fewer women than men working or actively seeking a new job in February 2020.

While the national unemployment rate has dropped significantly to [3.6 percent](#), the unemployment rate for Black and Latina women is still 1.8 and 1.4 times higher than the unemployment rate of white women.¹

The pandemic has also exacerbated and deepened many of the existing inequalities and disparities in our society—health, income, racial—and exposed that many of our systems are failing women and families. Prior to pandemic, many women, especially those in the hardest hit sectors, did not have health insurance, paid family and sick leave, job security, predictable scheduling, or flexibility. Many working women had to choose between their pay or coming to work sick, or feared losing their job for taking care of themselves or their loved ones.

Now, two years into the pandemic, in terms of women's mental health and economic well-being, one in four women (26.6 percent) report that their families are worse off financially than they were a year ago and almost one-half are either "very worried" (23.7 percent) or "somewhat worried" (24.0 percent) about whether or not their total family income is enough to pay all their bills.

Now, as women begin their return to the workforce, we are seeing disparities between the policies women need to succeed and what is being offered. In a recent IWPR survey of women workers and the

¹ IWPR analysis of U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey (May 12, 2022).

future of work, we found there is a gap between the benefits women desire—such as paid leave, health insurance and fair compensation—and what they currently receive from employers. For women re-entering the workforce, a living wage and health insurance are the top two desired benefits, followed by retirement benefits and job security. Paid vacation, family and sick leave are also top considerations. But at least one in three women workers say they lack critical benefits, including paid leave, health insurance, or job security. And more than 75 percent of women surveyed rate these benefits in particular to be “very important” or “important” when considering future jobs.

Prior to the pandemic, we did see progress in terms of the enactment of workforce policies that facilitate women’s participation in our economy. But the pandemic wiped away virtually all those gains. It also brought into sharp relief the fundamental needs of women in today’s workforce: comprehensive paid leave and child care policies so women can take care of their families and pursue their education and/or professional careers.

In this moment, we have an opportunity to address these issues head-on. We can advance policies and programs at the federal and state levels and in our workplaces to support women’s re-entry into the workforce and their career advancement. We can fix the systems that weren’t working for women, families and workers before the pandemic while creating the post-pandemic policies and structures to build a more fair and equitable economy overall.