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## Message from the Director

This month’s newsletter looks at what happened—and didn’t happen—in the 2015 legislative session. Sometimes those of us who lurk around the Capitol get a little insular. (“No!” you say.) We think the world turns on what is happening here. For those of you who perhaps have a life, here’s a recap of the 2015 Minnesota legislative session:

The regular session ended at midnight on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Eighty bills had passed, but three were vetoed by Governor Dayton, so only 77 were enacted. This is the lowest number of bills enacted during a regular session since Minnesota became a state in 1858. (My thanks to the Legislative Reference Library for their [always-excellent facts about the Legislature.](#))

In order to work out agreements on the three vetoed bills (bills dealing with jobs, agriculture and the environment, and early childhood/K-12 education) and to pass a couple of other bills that didn’t get out of conference committee in time, the Legislature met in a Special Session on June 12, stretching into the wee hours of June 13.

In this month’s newsletter, you’ll find a fairly detailed summary of legislation that passed that affects women’s economic status. After looking at what passed, you can read about what policy and legislative activity will be going on during the interim before the 2016 legislative session begins on March 8, 2016. Settle down with a cold drink in the summer sunshine and then read “A Peek at the 2016 Legislative Session,” to see what might be debated by the Legislature next year.

The last article, *Our New Generation of Leader: Grandmas!*, gives a different slant to last month’s OESW newsletter about the economic peril that so many of our older women face. This article gives data on the amazing political leadership roles that older women play.

We hope you find this newsletter interesting and informative. Its purpose is to provide information to legislators, legislative staff, and the community on priority and emerging women's economic issues.

Please send us your suggestions to [barbara.battiste@oesw.leg.mn](mailto:barbara.battiste@oesw.leg.mn) and visit our [Facebook Page](#) and [Twitter](#).

*Barbara Battiste, Director, Office on the Economic Status of Women*

## Summary of the 2015 Legislative Session

Click [on this link](#) to see a detailed summary of selected legislation that passed in 2015 that affects women's economic status. There are significant changes to Minnesota's child custody/parenting time laws, and child custody is inextricably linked to child support. New laws are aimed to enhance the economic security of older Minnesotans, help alleviate the crippling economic burden of student loans (women don't necessarily have more student loan debt than men, but women make less after graduating, so debt repayment is more likely to be unmanageable), address sex trafficking and other forms of sexual abuse and violence, affect the affordability of health care, ease the cost of child care for low-income women and families, increase—in some cases—cash assistance to very low-income parents, and address a number of other issues important to the economic security of Minnesota's women and their families.

Again, here is the link to [OESW's 2015 Legislative Session Summary](#).

## Legislative Activity During the Interim

*The 2016 legislative session begins March 8, 2016 and will last only eight weeks.*

There are a number of commissions/task forces/work groups that will be meeting during the Interim. Some of these groups are formally required by statute; some are informal. All have the purpose of making recommendations to the Legislature. Attending these meetings provides an excellent opportunity to affect policy decisions at an early stage, when it is generally most flexible. OESW will do its best to post information on when and where these groups are convening on our [Facebook page](#) and on Twitter #mnoesw.

Here is a list of these groups and studies:

**Change in Method of Calculating the Parenting Expense Adjustment to Child Support Payments.** The interim work group to study this must report to the Legislature by Jan. 15, 2016.

**Paid Family Leave State Insurance System.** DEED is the lead agency for a study of mechanisms and cost of a *Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave Program* that would provide partial wage replacement for workers taking parental, family, or medical leave. Minnesota's Depts. of Labor & Industry and of Health & Human Services are to collaborate with DEED on the study. The legislation requiring this study did not have a date for report to the Legislature, but study funding is only for FY 2016.

**Reforms to MNsure and MinnesotaCare.** In 2015, bills were considered to eliminate MinnesotaCare, shifting its enrollees to the MNsure health insurance exchange, and to terminate MNsure. These bills did not pass, but instead the [2015 Omnibus Health & Human Services Act](#) established a *Task force on Health Care Financing*, whose mandate is to examine the future of MNsure and MinnesotaCare and the chance for federal waivers that could allow for a broad range of health care reforms. The Task Force is to report to the Legislature by Jan. 15, 2016. (MinnesotaCare offers low-cost health insurance for people with incomes slightly above the poverty level—sometimes called "the working poor." Medicaid covers residents with income near or below the poverty line. MinnesotaCare provides healthcare to about 90,000 Minnesotans earning \$8-\$12/hour. It has been in existence for 23 years.)

**Violence against Asian Women & Children.** A working group will study domestic violence, trafficking, international abusive marriage, stalking, sexual assault, and other violence against women and children in Minnesota's Asian communities. A report is due to the Legislature by Jan. 1, 2017.

**Somali Women's Health Pilot Program.** This program will develop strategies to address the health care needs of and health inequities experienced by first generation Somali women. Report due June 30, 2017.

**Cooperative Divorce.** Authors of bills to allow spouses to divorce by completing an on-line form, with no involvement by attorneys or the court system, have stated their intent to hold further discussions on the concept during the interim.

## A Peek at the 2016 Legislative Session

All bills introduced in the first year of the biennium (the odd-numbered year) remain active in the second year, so bills introduced in 2015 can still be heard and passed in 2016.

### **Here's a list of notable women's economic bills introduced in 2015 that will still be active in 2016:**

**ERA.** There are two ERA bills: One proposes amending the state constitution to have a new section that would read, "Equality under the law shall not be abridged or denied on account of gender." A statewide popular vote is required to amend the constitution. No hearing was held on this bill in 2015. The second ERA bill petitions Congress to eliminate the sunset on ratification of the federal ERA constitutional amendment. This bill was passed on a 55-6 bipartisan vote by the Minnesota Senate, but did not have a hearing in the House.

**Social Security.** An Omnibus Tax Bill did not make it out of conference committee before the end of the 2015 session. It may be a priority in 2016. The House version of the Omnibus Tax Bill ([HF848](#)) allows deduction of social security benefits from federal taxable income.

**Working Parents Act.** This package of bills, "the next step" following the 2014 Women's Economic Security Act, provides earned sick and safe leave, paid family leave (through insurance), wage theft protection, a ban on employers deducting credit card charges from tips, and predictable work schedules. The only component that passed in 2015 was a study of a paid family leave state insurance system.

**Minimum Wage.** A number of bills were introduced in 2015 (but did not become law) that would scale back the 2014 increase in the state minimum wage. These bills include eliminating automatic increases in minimum wage based on inflation; allowing employers to pay tipped employees less than minimum wage (but not less than \$8/hr.), if their total wage with tips is at least \$12/hr., with no index to inflation; and prohibiting local governments from requiring a higher-than-state minimum wage or requiring employers to provide any employee benefits that exceed state or federal law.

### **Change in Method of Calculating the Parenting Expense Adjustment to Child Support.**

The interim work group to study this must report to the Legislature by January 15, 2016, so expect related legislation in 2016 to enact its recommendations.

**State Retirement Savings Plan.** Part of the 2014 Women's Economic Security Act was a study, by Minnesota Management & Budget, of a possible state-administered retirement savings plan for private sector employees who are not offered a retirement savings plan by their employer. MMB was not able to meet the required report date of Jan. 15, 2015, but plans to report to the Legislature by Nov. 15, 2015. There may be 2016 legislation based on the recommendations from this study.

**Surrogacy.** Bills to establish a Legislative Commission on Surrogacy to study and recommend public policy and laws to regulate surrogacy did not pass in 2015.

**Cooperative Divorce.** Bills to allow spouses to divorce by completing an on-line form, with no involvement by attorneys or the court system, did not receive hearings, but bill authors intend to hold further discussions on the concept during the interim.

**Cohabitation and Spousal Maintenance.** The House held an informational hearing in 2015 on a bill to allow termination of spousal maintenance if the recipient is living with someone.

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**MNsure and Minnesota Care.** In 2015, bills were considered to eliminate MinnesotaCare, shifting its enrollees to the MNsure health insurance exchange, and to terminate MNsure. These bills did not pass, but instead, a *Task force on Health Care Financing* was established to examine the future of MNsure and MinnesotaCare and the chance for federal waivers that could allow for a broad range of health care reforms. A report to the Legislature is due by Jan. 15, 2016.

**Transportation as a Women's & Family Issue.** The "Getting to Work" bill, which provides funding to nonprofits to provide cars and car repairs to low income persons who need a car to get or keep a job, made it into the Senate version of the Omnibus Jobs Bill, but didn't survive conference committee. Speculation is that there will be a major transportation funding bill in 2016; if so, maybe this minor (\$500,000) provision will be included.

## Our New Generation of Leaders: Grandmas!

The theme of last month's OESW newsletter was *The Economic Security of Minnesota's Older Women*. [OESW reports](#) showed that 1 in 15 Minnesota women age 65 to 74 live in poverty, 1 in 9 age 75 and older. There's a great flip side to the portrait of today's older women, though, brought to light by a recent article in The Atlantic ([Playing the Granny Card](#)).

Opening by pointing out the upsetting factoid that humans are one of the few animal species—along with killer whales—in which females live long after they stop reproducing, the article goes on to say, "[W]hatever the reason older women were put on this Earth, their example suggests, maybe the time has come for them to run it."

The theory is that women are usually encumbered with raising children (and care and feeding of husbands) in their early and mid-life years, when men tend to soar professionally. However, once the kids are off to college, today's older women, who overall have more education and professional experience than any preceding generation of women, are ready to "move into overdrive."

### **Indeed, today's older women are world and U.S. rock stars in political and government leadership:**

- Two of our three female U.S. Supreme Court Justices are over age 60. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed a justice at age 60, and is now 82. Sonia Sotomayor was 55 when she was appointed, and will soon turn 61.
- Janet Yellin, the first female Chair of the Federal Reserve, was 67 when she was appointed. She'll serve until she is age 71.
- If Hillary Clinton is elected the first U.S. woman president, she will be 69 when she takes office, and theoretically could remain president until age 77.
- Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, is 61.
- Elizabeth Warren was 63 when she was first elected to the U.S. Senate; she'll turn 65 in a week.

### **Women in the U.S. House of Representatives:**

- 50, or 57%, of the 88 women members of the U.S. House are age 60 or older.
- 18, or 20%, are age 70 or older.
- The oldest woman in the U.S. House is age 85 (Louise Slaughter, from New York).

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*Our New Generation of Leaders: Grandmas!* continued

### **Women in the U.S. Senate:**

- 12, or 60%, of the 20 women members of the U.S. Senate are age 60 or older.
- 3, or 15%, are age 70 or older.
- The oldest woman in the U.S. Senate is age 81 (Dianne Feinstein, from California).

### **What about Minnesota?**

Of the 67 women currently serving in the Minnesota House and Senate, 23 (34%) are age 60 or older and 9 (13%) are age 70 or older. The oldest woman legislator is age 78.

Here is a fervent hope that all these amazing older women will erode the double whammy of ageism plus sexism that often faces women “of a certain age” and open the doors for women with grey hair to show the world what they can do!

## Resources, Research & News

### New Data from USDOL Women’s Bureau

- Women’s Earnings
- Asian American & Pacific Islander Women in the Labor Force
- Equal Pay: Gender Differences Across Occupations & the Wage Gap.
- Women’s Occupations

[Find the data here.](#)