

# 2016's Best & Worst States for Working Moms

by [John S Kiernan](#)



Women today comprise [nearly half](#) of the American workforce, and solo moms with young children are forced to work at a [higher rate](#) than their married counterparts. Yet women still earn only [\\$0.79](#) for every dollar that men make and have far less upward mobility, as evidenced by the fact that only [4 percent](#) of S&P 500 companies' chief executives are female. Even the new crop of high-profile female CEOs seems to be [drastically underpaid](#) compared with their male peers.

Such obvious inequality has spawned a great deal of debate about gender roles in a shifting socioeconomic environment. Workplace inequality is important not only in the spirit of a merit-based economy but also for deeply ingrained social reasons. For instance, should women have to choose between career and family?

The real question, however, is what we're doing about this fundamental problem. Progress appears to be taking shape at different rates across the nation. Not only do parental leave policies and other legal-

support systems vary by state, but the quality of infrastructure — from cost-effective day care to public schools — is also far from uniform as well.

So, in order to help ease the burden on an inherently underappreciated segment of the population, WalletHub’s analysts compared state dynamics across 13 key metrics to identify the Best & Worst States for Working Moms. A complete breakdown of our findings, as well as expert commentary and a detailed methodology, can be found below.

## Main Findings

Overall Rank	State	Total Score	‘Child Care’ Rank	‘Professional Opportunities’ Rank	‘Work-Life Balance’ Rank
1	Vermont	63.93	1	2	11
2	Minnesota	60.23	8	4	7
3	Connecticut	58.17	12	37	1
4	North Dakota	56.34	7	16	14
5	Massachusetts	56.26	2	21	30
6	Illinois	54.42	9	13	22
7	Wisconsin	54.33	15	26	10
8	Colorado	53.64	10	14	27
9	Kansas	53.15	5	27	21
10	New Jersey	53.12	3	46	17
11	Maine	52.96	24	12	8
12	Iowa	52.81	22	11	13
13	Tennessee	52.48	11	9	36
14	Virginia	52.06	6	7	48
15	Utah	51.88	14	50	6
16	Kentucky	51.09	4	45	32
16	Montana	51.09	30	36	5
18	New Hampshire	51.07	16	10	34
19	Washington	50.13	32	15	9
20	Nebraska	50.08	29	8	19
21	Rhode Island	49.92	33	43	4
22	Oregon	49.82	40	30	2
23	Delaware	49.33	19	6	46
24	Maryland	48.86	13	5	51
25	South Dakota	48.79	28	19	18
26	Wyoming	48.30	18	49	15
27	Ohio	48.08	20	41	20

Overall Rank	State	Total Score	'Child Care' Rank	'Professional Opportunities' Rank	'Work-Life Balance' Rank
28	Hawaii	47.95	44	3	16
29	Indiana	47.75	23	33	26
30	North Carolina	47.64	21	25	35
31	Arkansas	47.02	26	20	31
32	California	46.75	47	18	3
33	Texas	45.70	17	38	42
34	Missouri	44.87	27	29	38
35	Michigan	44.78	34	31	29
36	Oklahoma	44.68	25	39	37
37	District of Columbia	44.50	41	1	50
38	Pennsylvania	43.28	36	35	33
39	New York	42.52	35	22	43
40	Florida	41.41	37	24	44
41	West Virginia	40.84	42	42	28
42	New Mexico	40.69	46	40	23
43	Georgia	40.43	31	32	49
44	Idaho	39.84	51	17	12
45	Mississippi	39.59	38	44	41
46	Arizona	37.50	45	34	47
47	Alaska	37.37	50	28	25
48	Louisiana	36.97	48	47	24
49	South Carolina	36.88	43	48	39
50	Alabama	35.94	39	51	40
51	Nevada	34.63	49	23	45

### Best Day Care Systems

1. New York
2. Washington
- T-3. North Dakota
- T-3. Oklahoma
- T-3. Texas



Best State  
vs  
Worst State

### Worst Day Care Systems

47. Alabama
48. Louisiana
49. California
50. Nebraska
51. Idaho

5x Difference

### Lowest Child Care Costs (as % of Median Women's Income)

1. Mississippi
2. Tennessee
3. South Carolina
4. South Dakota
5. Missouri



Best State  
vs  
Worst State

### Highest Child Care Costs (as % of Median Women's Income)

47. New York
48. Nevada
49. Rhode Island
50. District of Columbia
51. Florida

2x Difference

### Lowest Gender Pay Gap (Women's earnings as a % of men's)

1. District of Columbia
2. Hawaii
3. Tennessee
4. California
5. Vermont

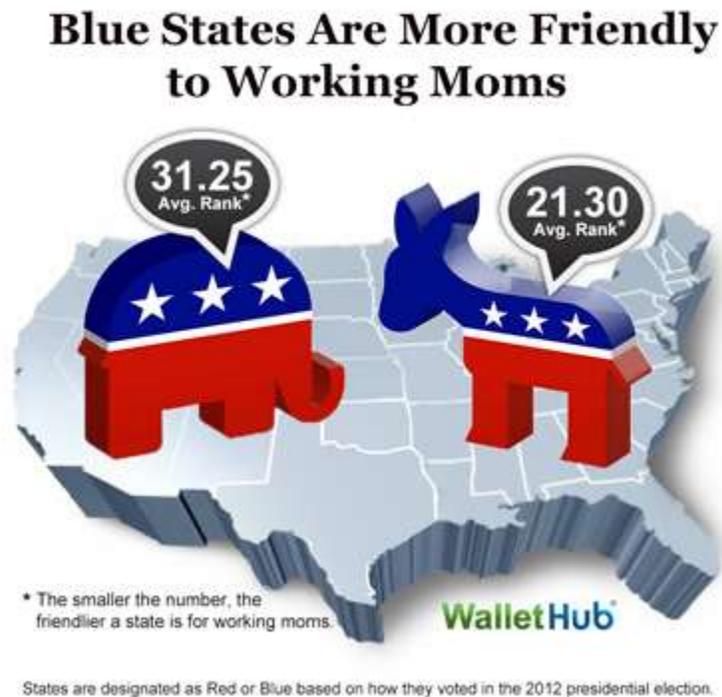


### Highest Gender Pay Gap (Women's earnings as a % of men's)

47. Kentucky
48. Alabama
49. Montana
50. Utah
51. Wyoming



## Red States vs. Blue States



## Ask the Experts: Improving the Plight of Working Moms

It's clear that something must be done in order to increase workplace gender equality and ease the burden on working parents, but there is significant debate about what that "something" should be. For some added insight into the issue, we turned to an eclectic group of experts — from university professors who research gender roles and economics to the authors of some of the most popular career and women's blogs. Click on the experts' profiles to read their bios and responses to the following key questions:

1. Is it becoming easier or harder for women to balance a career and family?
2. What can companies do to help working parents balance home and work life?
3. What careers are most difficult to balance work and family? Easiest?
4. What can state and local governments do to support working mothers?
5. What needs to be done to promote gender equality in the workplace?



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Taryn Morrissey

Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Policy in the School of Public Affairs at American University



Is it becoming easier or harder for women to balance a career & family?

Both parents – mothers and fathers – report having trouble balancing career and family. A 2015 Pew Research survey found that more than half of mothers (60%) and fathers (52%) reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. Nearly half of mothers (47%) and one-third (33%) of fathers said that parenting interfered with their career advancement. Full-time working fathers today are more likely than full-time working mothers to report that they don't spend enough time with their children (50% vs. 39%). Research finds that millennial generation parents often fall short of their egalitarian attitudes due to the pulls of long hours at work and a lack of work-family infrastructure for workers with children.

What can companies do to help working parents balance home and work life?

Public and employer policies like paid parental leave (both maternity and paternity) and increased access to affordable, high-quality child care and preschool through subsidies or on-site centers can help both parents balance work and family responsibilities. Access to family leave, particularly paid leave, increases employee retention and reduces the cost of employee turnover, which is costly to employers. Research finds the expansion of family leave laws, especially paid leave like that provided in California and New Jersey (and recently passed in New York) increases the likelihood that employees return and stay at their pre-leave employer (reducing attrition and increasing retention). Research also finds that employers' offers of dependent care flexible spending accounts can help with workers' child care expenses and increase their loyalty to their employer.

What can state and local governments do to support working mothers?

State and local governments can do several things to support both working mothers and fathers. First, a handful of states including California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have publicly supported paid parental leave systems, which help new parents recover from childbirth, adjust to life as parents, and provide for the extremely valuable time needed to form strong parent-child bonds. Without it, many workers, particularly low-wage workers, lack any paid time off (or even unpaid job-protected time off), and return to work very quickly. New York recently passed a paid leave law, to be implemented in 2018, and Washington State has a paid leave law on the books but has yet to fund or implement it. Washington, DC, and other jurisdictions are also considering paid parental leave laws. Paid family leave, which allows for time off when children (or aging parents) are older but require care (such as when they're sick), is also important to working parents. Supporting affordable, high-quality early care and education programs through investments in strong subsidy programs, tax credits, or public preschool can help when parents return to work.

What needs to be done to promote gender equality in the workplace?

Paid parental leave, available to and used by both mothers and fathers, can go a long way to promoting gender equality in the workplace. Research in other countries has also found that generous maternity-only leave policies (absent analogous policies for fathers) may inadvertently harm women's income and progression in the workforce. Affordable, high-quality, reliable early care and education opportunities can also ease parents' work-family stress.



Is it becoming easier or harder for women to balance a career & family?

While it is more commonly accepted that women will work outside the home and will still be the ones to have primary responsibility for family and home responsibilities, I don't think it's become easier for women to balance career and family. Society still hasn't addressed the need for affordable and high-quality child care, so women are forced to flex time, work part time, or make other arrangements. Child care is neither affordable nor easy to arrange.

What can companies do to help working parents balance home and work life?

Companies must recognize that women and men need affordable and safe child care. They need to either have on-site child care or find a way to subsidize such services to keep quality employees from leaving.

What careers are most difficult to balance work and family? Easiest?

Consultants and those who work from home find it somewhat easier to balance work and family. Jobs that are hourly have less flexibility and staying home with sick children is more difficult for these parents.

What can state and local governments do to support working mothers?

If we really believe that raising children is the most important job in our culture, then we need to find ways to support that through affordable, safe and readily available child care.

What needs to be done to promote gender equality in the workplace?

Popular wisdom is that time will take care of this problem. It hasn't. We need to recognize that women deserve equal pay. We need greater transparency in salaries. Women need to be trained to negotiate their salaries. Men almost always do this; women seldom do.

## Methodology

In order to identify the best and worst states for working moms, WalletHub’s analysts compared the 50 states and the District of Columbia across three key dimensions: 1) Child Care, 2) Professional Opportunities and 3) Work-Life Balance.

First, we identified 13 relevant metrics, which are listed below with their corresponding weights. Each metric was given a value between 0 and 100, wherein 100 represents the most favorable conditions for working moms and 0 the least.

Finally, we calculated the overall score for each state using the weighted average across all metrics and ranked the states accordingly.

### Child Care – Total Points: 40

- Day-Care Quality: Double Weight (~13.33 Points)
- Child-Care Costs: Full Weight (~6.67 Points)  
Note: This metric was adjusted for the median women’s salary.
- Access to Pediatric Services: Full Weight (~6.67 Points)  
Note: This metric measures the number of pediatricians per 100,000 residents.
- WalletHub’s “[Best School Systems](#)” Ranking: Double Weight (~13.33 Points)

### Professional Opportunities – Total Points: 30

- Gender Pay Gap: Double Weight (~8.57 Points)  
Note: This metric measures women’s earnings as a percentage of men’s.
- Ratio of Female Executives to Male Executives: Full Weight (~4.29 Points)
- Median Women’s Salary: Full Weight (~4.29 Points)  
Note: This metric was adjusted for the cost of living.
- Percentage of Families in Poverty: Full Weight (~4.29 Points)  
Note: “Families” include single mothers with children aged 17 and younger.
- Female Unemployment Rate: Full Weight (~4.29 Points)
- Gender-Representation Gap in Different Economic Sectors: Full Weight (~4.29 Points)  
Note: This metric measures the absolute difference between the share of female employees and male employees.

### Work-Life Balance – Total Points: 30

- Parental Leave Policy: Full Weight (~10.00 Points)
- Length of the Average Woman’s Work Week: Full Weight (~10.00 Points)
- Women’s Average Commute Time: Full Weight (~10.00 Points)

*Sources: Data used to create these rankings were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Child Care Aware® of America, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Council for Community and Economic Research, National Partnership for Women & Families and WalletHub research.*

## Author

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[John S Kiernan](#) MEMBER

*John Kiernan is Senior Writer & Editor at Evolution Finance. He graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in Journalism, a minor in Sport Commerce & Culture,...*  
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