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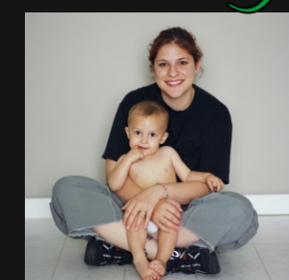


# Status of Women and Girls



# Santa Cruz County

## Executive Summary



County of  
Santa Cruz



## Women's Commission

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The United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is described as an international bill of human rights for women. Currently, 186 nations have ratified the treaty. Surprisingly however, the U.S. remains the only hold out among the industrialized nations. Despite Congressional inaction since 1980, many local jurisdictions around the country have begun to implement CEDAW's terms independently, resulting in noticeable improvements for women and girls in these communities.

Inspired by these grass roots efforts, the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission began documenting the status of women and girls in our County. We gathered local statistics collected by government agencies, nonprofit organizations, schools and volunteers in six areas of concern: Health Care, Criminal Justice, Education, Violence against Women, Economic Justice and Political Participation. This information guides our policy recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for improving the status of women and girls in Santa Cruz County.

It is important to note that, as many local agencies do not compile statistics by gender, some of this report is based on focus groups and interviews held by the Commission. For this reason, we recommend that the County departments and other institutions begin collecting and reporting key data by gender and critical subgroups. This will allow more efficient monitoring of the impact each policy, program, and budget has on women and girls, as well as on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability.

This report on the status of women and girls in Santa Cruz County is the first of its kind, presented by the Women's Commission. This Executive Summary presents the Commission's key recommendations in each area. The full report is available on line at [www.sccwc.org](http://www.sccwc.org)

### COMMISSIONERS

1ST DISTRICT  
D. Sapia  
K. Lacrosse

2ND DISTRICT  
K. Rusmore  
Ariel Serre

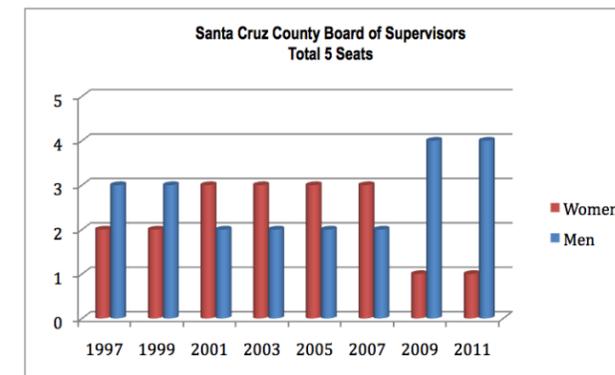
3RD DISTRICT  
J. Obrien-Rojo  
S. Milton

4TH DISTRICT  
L. Juan  
Vacancy

5TH DISTRICT  
S. De Lany  
M. Laham

Political participation by women is essential to governance that addresses the needs of women and girls. While tremendous gains have been made since women got the vote in 1920, equal representation of women in the area of elected or appointed officials has not been achieved. Moreover, the larger the budget or salary involved, the less women are represented. In 2011, only 6 governors (12%), 17 U.S. Senators and 73 Members of the House of Representatives (17% of Congress) are women.

Although Santa Cruz County has greatly increased the proportion of women in office, neither the City Councils nor the Board of Supervisors have representation proportional to the number of women in the community. Women are still a minority of the county's supervisors, council members, county and city executives, judges, and commissioners.



Santa Cruz City has three women out of seven council members. Of the four cities' 37 executives, fourteen, 37.8%, are women. In 2011, Capitola and Watsonville\_ each have only one woman on each council.

Women register and vote in larger numbers than men at all levels, yet this does not translate into more women in elected and appointed office. Qualified women do not run for office for several reasons; when they do run, they are as likely to win as men.

➡ Continue to support the County's voter education and outreach focus, and use emerging social networking media as well as traditional methods of reaching current and potential voters.

➡ Continue active efforts to reach out and include underrepresented groups on County committees and Commissions. Encourage appointed female commissioners to act as role models and mentors, to attract and support young women to public service and leadership. Publicize volunteer opportunities such as VIP/CityServ.

➡ Promote the California Women's Appointment Project to recruit women to apply for appointment by the Governor to State boards, commissions and agencies.

➡ Encourage education and training of women of all ages for political involvement and leadership. Have elected and appointed women speak to classrooms and organizations about involvement in community action.

# ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Santa Cruz County's economic situation for women is bleaker than might be expected. Women earn significantly less than men with similar education and skills and are more likely to live in poverty, especially if they are heads of households or non-Caucasian. Women tend to be more directly impacted by the costs of childcare, have a more difficult time paying for housing, and are less likely to earn a self-sufficiency level wage than men. The vast majority of families assisted by the CalWORKs program are headed by women.

➔ **Support higher-paid positions for women and wage increases in jobs typically held by women.** Ten years ago, the family income with a female head of household was 72% of that for a male head of household; five years ago it was only 56%. Currently, women in Santa Cruz County, holding the same position as men make 72% on the dollar compared to men. Santa Cruz County women tend to be employed in lower-paid occupations and receive less pay within the same occupation. Even greater disparities exist for women of color.

➔ **Provide quality, affordable childcare and after school programs.** Affordable, quality childcare is key to a woman's economic advancement. Procuring childcare in Santa Cruz County is a significant challenge. As of February, 2011, 675 families were waiting for space in subsidized programs.

➔ **Increase access to affordable housing.** Santa Cruz County is regularly rated as one of the least affordable areas to live in the nation. From 2000-2005, 20% of surveyed women spent at least three-fourths of their net income on housing. A very small proportion of women can afford to buy homes, while a many more men earn enough to do so.

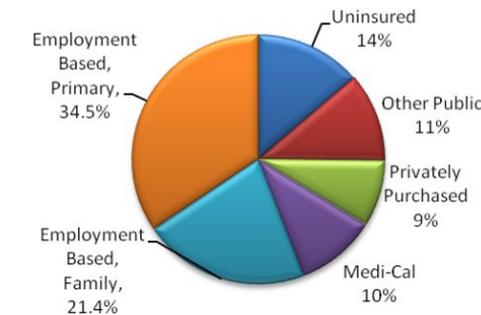
➔ **Ensure comprehensive employment services, reasonable work participation exemptions, and a large safety net for women and children utilizing CalWORKs support.** In 2009, almost 2500 households participated in CalWORKs in Santa Cruz County. Nearly 90% were homes headed by single women. The support women need to move themselves and their children from welfare to self-sufficiency is in serious jeopardy due to recent budget cuts.

Women earn significantly less than men with similar education and skills and are more likely to live in poverty

# HEALTH CARE

Health care has a significant impact on the status of women and girls, as a women's health care needs also include reproductive issues. Santa Cruz County women need access to quality health education, insurance, preventive healthcare, treatment, pregnancy prevention and care, and mental health services.

Sources of Insurance Coverage in Santa Cruz County



Women, particularly single and minority women are at greater risk of being under-insured.

➔ **Promote universal health care insurance that includes maternity coverage, and monitor Federal Health Care Reform legislation.** The lack of adequate health insurance is one of the greatest barriers to the well being of women in Santa Cruz County. Women tend to be the biggest consumers of health care due to their medical and reproductive needs and their greater longevity. Yet women, particularly single and minority women are at greater risk of being under-insured. For example, almost one third of Pajaro Valley residents have no health insurance at all. Further, almost half of the county's farm workers are women, with the majority being undocumented and ineligible for health insurance. Universal health care coverage could provide a safety net for vulnerable women and children who need the benefits of proper care, but have no access to it because of cost and/or immigration status.

➔ **Endorse programs that help prevent unwanted teen pregnancy.** Santa Cruz County's teen birth rates, while declining, are still high. There were over 300 teen births here in 2008. Teens generally have less-than-adequate prenatal care and more pre-term births. Teenage girls need access to appropriate education on safe sex and family planning to help them achieve economic self-sufficiency as adults.

➔ **Support programs that focus on mental health while promoting self sufficiency.** Many women and girls in our county are at risk for mental illness, and recent budget cuts have resulted in a backlog of unmet mental health needs. Drug use and chemical dependency are significant concerns for many women suffering from mental health issues. Almost half of those admitted into residential substance abuse treatment programs are female. Recent studies suggest that one out of five teen women are diagnosed with clinical depression. Gender-specific services can help focus on issues of particular concern for women and girls, including reproduction, childrearing, childcare, self-image, depression, eating disorders and others.

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Women and girls encountering the criminal justice system are a neglected population. Drug crimes, particularly methamphetamine-related, are the primary reason women and girls become incarcerated in Santa Cruz. White-collar crimes by women are on the increase as well. Unfortunately, 50% of women are re-incarcerated within a year of their release. This recidivism rate suggests more resources are needed to help women avoid returning to jail.

Drug crimes, particularly methamphetamine-related, are the primary reason women and girls become incarcerated in Santa Cruz.

**Increase vocational rehabilitation and educational opportunities for women, during their confinement and after release.** Currently, incarcerated men have greater access to these services. While women have the opportunity to take various classes in jail, men's educational options are more sustainable in length, affordability, and practicality. Women should have equal access to existing opportunities for improving their lives during and after incarceration through programs that address their specific needs. Comprehensive services, both pre- and post-release, are essential to prevent recidivism and promote stable employment, allowing women to rebuild a life free from crime. Effective programs, such as GEMMA, that includes classes in parenting, relapse prevention, job preparation, nutrition, empowerment, healthy relationships, and housing preparation need to be supported.

**Support effective teen programs that are designed to prevent recidivism and promote healthy decision making and lifestyles such as Girlzpace.** Studies indicate a high correlation between dating violence and other juvenile delinquent behavior. In fact nearly 92% of girls who enter the correctional system report being victims of physical, and or sexual abuse.

# EDUCATION

Apart from being a right – and the right thing to do – girls' education also affects communities at large. The activism of one educated girl or a group of girls – championing the right to freedom from abuse, exploitation and other forms of injustice – can empower all women in the community. With its intrinsic benefits of fulfilling aspirations and improving life skills and social interaction, education gives girls and women in largely patriarchal societies access to tools that have the potential to transform the quality of their lives. **Higher education is a critical first step to greater self-sufficiency, higher income and more opportunities in life.**

**Support programs that assist girls to complete high school and continue on to college, with a focus that includes math, science or technology.** Nationally, a woman's income is between 65 to 80% that of men: this gap must be eliminated to attain gender equality. Support for girls to study and work in previously male-dominated fields will help lift any glass ceilings.

**Support school programs that focus on financial literacy and build confidence and self-esteem in girls.** Confidence and performance in Santa Cruz girls drastically diminishes in middle school. Programs such as Girls Moving Forward, The Girl Game Company, Girl Talk, Girls in Engineering, YWTeens and Triangle Speakers need ongoing financial assistance to better meet the needs of school age girls.

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# VIOLENCE AGAINST

# WOMEN AND GIRLS

On average, 1000 domestic violence cases are reported each year in Santa Cruz County. Yet, only two shelters exist to provide safe housing to about 300 victims. The county's two non-profit organizations currently providing support and services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are the Walnut Avenue Women's Center and the Women's Crisis Support/Defense de Mujeres. They provide crisis intervention, peer counseling, support groups, advocacy, legal assistance, emergency shelter, and children's services. Supported by limited federal, state, and local funds, these agencies rely on volunteers to provide essential services. State funding for domestic violence services was recently slashed.

On average, 1000 domestic violence cases are reported each year in Santa Cruz County; while 60% of victims never report to authorities.

Nationwide, in 2009, one in three teens experienced some form of abuse in a dating relationship, two-thirds never report it to anyone. Young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate partner violence-nearly triple the overall average. Teen dating violence can be devastating to the long-term physical and mental health, life goals, and academic performance of our community's young women.

**Restore and increase funding to support shelters and nonprofit organizations working with victims of domestic violence.** Restoring and increasing domestic violence funding is essential to the recovery of families caught in the cycle of violence.

**Survey teens about dating violence to monitor this high-risk group.** Currently there are no statistics for Santa Cruz County. Increased funding and effective reporting will provide better protection, services and monitoring for this vulnerable sub-group.

**Support prevention and intervention programs such as I Decide, Healthy Relationships and others that target young teens through empowerment models that focus on first relationships, intimacy, warning signs of abuse, recognizing healthy relationships and understanding that some behaviors are not just wrong, they are illegal.**