

ADVANCING THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN



Tennessee Economic Council on Women

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The Tennessee Economic Council on Women (TECW) improves the lives of

Tennessee women through awareness, advocacy, and action. Created by the Tennessee legislature in 1998 (TCA §4-50-100, et seq.), the TECW is legislatively mandated to act as an economic advocate for women in Tennessee, who now earn only 75.1 percent of what similarly employed Tennessee men earn. At a time when our state was desperately searching for new sources of revenue, the sponsors of this legislation realized that supporting the economic advancement of women and providing tools for women to earn self-sufficient wages would improve the state's economy and relieve tax expenditures. Noting that women and their children account for the majority of all public assistance recipients in Tennessee, these legislators had a vision for underprivileged women to be enabled to become self-sufficient through access to better training and educational programs. Through enhanced opportunities virtually half of our population could be converted from consumers of tax-funded assistance programs to equal taxpayers, thereby benefitting the state and improving women's lives. This vision inspired the creation of the TECW and shaped our mission to advance the economic status of women in Tennessee.

The council's members, selected by the governor, the speakers of the House and the Senate, and the members of the Black Legislative Caucus and the Women's Legislative Caucus, represent each of Tennessee's nine Development Districts, the Governor's Cabinet, the Tennessee Senate and House, public and private universities, and the major women's organizations.

Through public hearings throughout the state and research conducted with the Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington, D.C., the council assesses Tennessee women's economic status to develop and advocate solutions to help women achieve economic autonomy. The TECW is regarded as the source of information about women's economic issues in Tennessee, and our goal is to raise awareness with policymakers, the business community, advocates, and citizens to bring about positive change for Tennessee women.

by Margaret Jane Powers

The council hosted the first Economic Summit for Women in December, led by the governor and first lady. A tremendous success, it drew more than 500 attendees to hear experts' presentations on topics such as the economic impact of domestic violence, the status of women in Tennessee's 95 counties, and women as legislative advocates.

By partnering with companies such as HCA, St. Thomas Hospital, and First Tennessee Bank and with grants from the Office of the Tennessee Attorney General, U.S. Department of Labor, and Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, the council provides career mentoring and training to women and girls of all ages throughout Tennessee.

The council is organizing regional advisory groups in each of the development districts to better meet the needs of Tennessee women on a local level, to get input from women across the state on issues that need to be addressed in each region, and to keep local advocates informed of the TECW's most recent research on the status of women in Tennessee. As always, we invite your participation.

I am proud of the programs and research described in this historic issue of *Tennessee's Business*—the first ever on women and economics—in cooperation with MTSU and guest editor Barbara Haskew. As the TECW and advocates across the state work together to raise awareness on the economic status of women, we will see Tennessee women advance. ■

Margaret Jane Powers, attorney, is the chair of the Tennessee Economic Council on Women. For information, e-mail info.ecw@state.tn.us or visit www.tennesseeewomen.org.

Economic Summit for Women 2005

Plans are underway for the next economic summit, which will take place on October 17 at the Nashville Airport Marriott. Information is available at www.tnwomensummit.com or from ycwood@aol.com.