

## NEW JERSEY STATE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMISSION

### COUNCIL ON GENDER PARITY IN LABOR AND EDUCATION

#### 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

Over the past year, the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission's Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education has continued to provide leadership on gender issues at both state and national levels and to promote gender equitable practices and conditions in work and education settings.

As the Gender Parity Council (GPC) enters its 10<sup>th</sup> year, it confronts significant and unprecedented challenges. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate reached 9.4 percent in May of 2009 and has continued at this level, a dramatic increase from the 5.8 percent unemployment rate of the previous July.<sup>1</sup> At 9.2 percent, New Jersey's unemployment rate is in keeping with the national average. Record-high numbers of claims for unemployment insurance (UI) have also signaled the country's economic distress. In New Jersey alone, monthly UI claims went from 188,000 in December of 2007 to 383,400 in March of 2009.<sup>2</sup> Even as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 has delivered much-needed funding to workforce and training systems, many have worried about the extent to which funds are directed to occupations and industries traditionally and historically positioned as male.<sup>3</sup>

As the only state to have a legislatively created Gender Parity Council, New Jersey is well-positioned to identify and address gender equity challenges. Established in 1999, under legislation sponsored by New Jersey Senator Diane Allen, the Council brings together representatives from business, labor, education, government, and the community to promote full and gender-equitable participation in the workforce and education systems. Since its inception in the beginning of 2000, the Council has organized research, made legislative and policy recommendations, conducted formal and informal events, and supported local, state and national initiatives, all with a focus on dismantling gender-based barriers and encouraging equal participation by students and workers in education, training, and employment.

The following report highlights key research, publications, events, and initiatives pursued by the Council over the past year. More information about the Council, as well as links to Council publications, can be found at the SETC website, [www.njsetc.net](http://www.njsetc.net), or at the website of Rutgers University's Center for Women and Work, the research and administrative arm of the Council, at [www.cww.rutgers.edu](http://www.cww.rutgers.edu).

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Governor's Office of New Jersey, "Priorities for New Jersey's Workforce Investment System: Summary of New Jersey's Unified State Plan Modification."

<sup>3</sup> See Women Work! Legislative Bulletin, available at <http://www.womenwork.org/issues/eei022509.htm>.

### **Legal Talent at the Crossroads Report**

In April of 2009, the Council released its original research report, ***Legal Talent at the Crossroads: Why New Jersey Women Lawyers Leave Their Law Firms, and Why They Choose to Stay***. This report reflects the Council's commitment to exploring the role of women in growing occupational areas in New Jersey as first identified in the 2002 GPC report, ***Women at Work: Achieving Parity on the Job***. The legal profession is the most recent of several professions and industries that the GPC has set out to examine through a "gender lens."

The GPC is indebted to a number of partnering organizations and key individuals for the completion of this report. As a part of the New Jersey Women in the Law initiative, influential New Jersey law firms, committed to women's leadership, workplace diversity, and organizational effectiveness of the legal community, joined together to become founding members of the Council's Forum on Workplace Practices in the Law. Forum members participated in member-only roundtable discussions with experts in the industry and in research to understand the current status of women in the legal profession in New Jersey, including best practices for retention, recruitment, and advancement, as well as opportunities for creating a work environment and culture that encourage women's success. Forum members also provided funding to support the research for the report.

Using survey and interview data from over 520 women lawyers and from firm managing partners, the report documents what many know anecdotally: women lawyers face high-pressure time demands as they commit themselves both to their profession and to their families. Many law firms recognize and work to address the problem of attrition among women lawyers, as well as their persistent proportional under-representation in the highest ranks of the profession. Adopting responsive workplace policies and promoting a gender equitable work environment allows firms to simultaneously address both client demands for greater diversity and the most fundamental management objective: attracting and retaining the best legal talent.

To date, the report has received both local and national media attention. It is also the foundation for a companion piece and practitioners' guide, ***Legal Talent at the Crossroads: A Blueprint for Action***, published in June of 2009 by the SETC.

### **Non-Traditional Career Resource Center**

The Council continued its efforts on behalf of equity in education, with a particular focus on career and technical education. The *Nontraditional Career Resource Center (NCRC)*, a practice arm of the Council, has worked closely with the National Women's Law Center and the New Jersey Department of Education to pilot a comprehensive assessment and technical assistance program for career and technical education schools in the state. Data gathered from pilot schools will provide much-needed information on why gender segregation persists in career and technical education programs, and will also inform specialized technical assistance plans for each institution.

The NCRC also plans to conduct two summer programs focusing on non-traditional careers for junior high and high school youth during the summer of 2009. The website for the Center is at [www.ncrc.rutgers.edu](http://www.ncrc.rutgers.edu).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Science and Technology Summit**

For each of the past three years, the GPC has convened a dynamic group of experts and key stakeholders for a Summit on Women in New Jersey's Science and Technology Workforce. Women's growing role in the science and technology workforce has been a key issue for the Council since its 2000 inception. Through numerous outreach events and published research, including *Bridging the Gap: Women in Science, Engineering and Technology* (2001) and *Engineering Their Futures* (2002), the Council has concluded that, despite increasing numbers of women in science and technology careers, substantial underrepresentation persists in many fields.

National trends point to continued cause for concern. Even as the U.S. unemployment rate nears ten percent, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a continuing need for qualified applicants for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs. Because women are historically underrepresented in STEM fields, they are poorly positioned to benefit from these broad employment trends, as well as from specific policy initiatives including expanded funding for the development of "green jobs."

In 2007, the Gender Parity Council proposed bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to share perspectives and develop comprehensive, integrated, and nuanced recommendations for addressing gender issues in STEM education and employment. In the spring of that year, and each of the subsequent two years, representatives from K-12 education, academia, industry, community-based organizations, government, and policymaking groups and institutions gathered to share knowledge and ideas and to construct both immediate and long-term recommendations for continued progress.

Early in 2009, the Council formed a subcommittee of representatives from industry, government, education, community organizations, and research institutions to provide insight on its efforts, and to formulate an agenda for the 2009 summit. Members of the subcommittee compiled recommendations from the summit held in 2008 in a report to the Council, available on the NJSETC website at [www.njsetc.net](http://www.njsetc.net). These recommendations drove the agenda for the Council's third annual Women in New Jersey's Science and Technology Workforce Summit on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009, at Mercer County Conference Center. The summit's theme was "Green Now! Women Leading the Way in Science and Technology" and focused on positioning women to take advantage of the growth of green jobs in both local and national economies. The summit was funded in part by Bio-1 WIRED, and was attended by over 190 leaders representing government, policy makers, educators, community groups, and industry leaders. Members of the subcommittee will also compile the recommendations discussed during the summit in a third report to the Council.

## Meetings and Presentations

The Council met throughout the year to review policies and proposed legislation. Council meetings were attended by GPC members, including both appointees as well as representatives from the SETC, Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Department of Human Services. Minutes from all meetings (July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009, and April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009), are available at [http://www.njsetc.net/council\\_gender/meeting\\_minutes.htm](http://www.njsetc.net/council_gender/meeting_minutes.htm).

During the course of the year, GPC meetings featured a number of speakers. In July, Eileen Appelbaum, Director of the Center for Women and Work, presented data on four occupations in the state of New Jersey that have a high demand for labor but tend to offer low wages, particularly for entry-level workers: health care, child care, hospitality, and logistics. Women remain disproportionately represented in jobs that are considered “low skill” and that are attached to low wages. Appelbaum offered suggestions for moving low-wage workers to self-sufficiency, including building on existing career ladders and lattices in key occupations and industries; improving enforcement of wage and hours laws; and pegging the state minimum wage to the average state wage.

In September, June Shelp, Vice-President of The Conference Board, presented information on the mission of the Board and collaborative opportunities for the GPC. The Conference Board collects and reports on labor market information to help businesses improve their performance and connect to a trained workforce. Its tracking of labor market data represents a valuable tool for the GPC.

In November, the GPC heard from Elizabeth S. Lindsey, Associate Assistant Treasurer for Economic Development for the New Jersey Department of the Treasury. She presented an overview of the Division of Minority and Women Business Development and the Office of Supplier Diversity, focusing on the status of women-owned businesses in New Jersey. Although New Jersey boasts the 13<sup>th</sup> highest state-level growth in the U.S. in women-owned businesses, these still account for only 26% of non-farm firms in the state. The Office of Supplier Diversity is currently engaged in assisting small, minority and women-owned businesses to compete successfully for State contracts.

The January 2009 passage of the ARRA, and the economic downturn that prompted it, engaged much of the Council’s attention at the close of this year. Efforts as it begins its 10<sup>th</sup> year will include developing an understanding of how gender factors into the emerging economy, and, in particular, how women are faring both in this economy and with the workforce development funds provided through ARRA. Even as data suggest that women have been less adversely affected by the current recession (i.e., have experienced fewer job losses), they continue to be disproportionately represented in jobs with low wages and few, if any, benefits. It remains unclear to what extent women’s relative protection from job loss in the current market may be speaking directly to the “disconnect” between their high value as employees and their relatively low access to higher earnings. These are issues that will command the Council’s attention in the coming year.