

2009 State Legislation Affecting Women
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It may not hit the headlines, but the Denver Women's Commission is monitoring all legislation affecting women. For a complete list, go to www.denvergov.org/women and click on 2009 Legislation affecting women under "most requested" in the upper right hand corner.

Four bills have been introduced that our Commission voted to support so far:

Senate Bill 9 – by Senator Boyd and Rep. Massey – This bill came out of the Health Care Task Force (Interim committee). It adds certain basic prevention and wellness **dental procedures** (to be determined by rule) to services available to pregnant and post-partum women on Medicaid and the Child Health Plan. There is a strong relationship between the poor oral health of expectant mothers and pre-term low birth weight babies, which have more health problems. After birth, mothers also may transmit the bacteria responsible for tooth decay to their infants and toddlers through the sharing of saliva. But only 42% of pregnant women receive counseling about dental care (compared to 93% counseled about smoking).
www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/oralhealth/snapshot.html

Senate Bill 68 – by Senator Morse and Rep. McCann – This bill would **fund domestic abuse services** from a modest **\$20 fee on marriage licenses and a minimal \$10 fee on both divorce petitions and responses**. While these are only small surcharges at the user level, cumulatively they will generate approximately \$1,028,960 more each year for life-saving services and programs. Furthermore, there is a clear connection between the proposed fees and the services listed below that they would support. **Thirty-six (36) other states have similar marriage license surcharges; eleven (11) others have similar divorce filing fees**. The bill will set aside half the funding for up to 5 years to address the escalating risks of domestic violence among military and veteran families. Additionally, the funding would support programs and services for married, separated and divorced victims of domestic violence. Not only does the inclusion of all three of these categories ensure a clear connection to the proposed fees, but married women also significantly under-report their abuse until they are free from the abusive relationship - that is, until they are separated or divorced. The fact that separated or divorced women (i.e., women leaving a marriage) experience a substantially higher rate of domestic violence than any other category confirms that they typically report abuse only after leaving or trying to get away.

In 2007, 6,341 individuals were turned away from shelters in Colorado due to a lack of capacity, a 7% increase from 2006, where 5,886 individuals were turned away and a 60% increase compared to 2005, during which 2,537 victims were turned away. *Source: Colorado Department of Human Services, Domestic Abuse Assistance Program, "2007 Annual Report."* Retrieved on July 15, 2008, from www.domesticabusefund.org.

House Bill 1057 – by Rep. Kerr and Senator Bacon – This bill allows employees of Colorado businesses with 50 or more employees to take up to 18 hours per academic year of **unpaid leave to attend children's parent-teacher conferences or certain other academic activities**. Businesses with existing leave policies do not need to provide additional leave. Employers rank Leave for School Functions as one of the most effective work-life programs in reducing unscheduled employee absences "2003 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey" CCH Human Resources Group, 2003.

93% of parents say that being involved in their child's education is very meaningful. But only 47% of parents say they have enough time to participate in educational activities with their children. 52% of parents indicate that their work schedules prevent them from spending more meaningful time with their children. "2003 Annual Meaningful Time Check-Up on US Children and Families" by Boys and Girls Clubs of America and KidsPeace. 2003

Of parents who had a child scoring in the bottom quartile in math and reading tests, nearly three quarters could not rely on flexibility at work. **More than 1/3 of workers with children in the bottom quartile had held jobs in which they lacked paid vacation or sick leave.** “*The Widening Gap: Why America’s Working Families are in jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*” by S. J. Heyman. Basic Books, 2000.

House Bill 1064 – by Rep. Kefalas and Senator Sandoval. Creates a Legislative Task Force to advance economic opportunity while **reducing poverty**. Five Senators and five Representatives will serve on the Task Force. The Task Force will develop a strategic, integrated and comprehensive plan to expand economic opportunities and reduce the number of Coloradans living in poverty by 50% by 2019.

This severe economic downturn is a critical time to intentionally focus on poverty and economic opportunity. The impacts of the downturn, by necessity, increase the need for government supports at the time government can least afford them.

Food, housing, health, utilities, employment, education, disabilities, domestic violence are interconnected in people’s lives, but this interconnection is often not considered in the development of public policy. Government, individuals, businesses, nonprofit organizations, foundations and churches all must play a part in reducing poverty and providing economic opportunities in Colorado. The Task Force can map out the strengths and expectations of each sector, and in concert with all key stakeholders, develop and implement a plan to reduce poverty.