

The Clarion Ledger

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Celebrating All Mississippi Moms



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Mother's Day is a wonderful celebration of the women in our lives who have nurtured and cared for us. It is a day each year when we put the woman who has nursed us when we were sick and comforted us when we were sad, who has been our biggest cheerleader and our most honest critic, and, above all else, who has loved us unconditionally first.

This Mother's Day, let us all make room in our hearts for the mothers who face extra challenges. Across Mississippi, there are mothers struggling to make ends meet for their families. These are mothers who wake up each day without a clear path to a better tomorrow for themselves and their families because they lack job training, education, or steady employment. These are mothers who are doing it alone, without a strong network of family or friends to lean on when times are tough. And these are mothers in abusive relationships who cannot find their way out.

In the busyness of our days, between work and family commitments, we sometimes do not notice these mothers. But they are all around us and they need us to take notice of them, to understand their struggles, and to help them.

Mississippi took some big steps forward for many of these mothers this year. For instance, we now have a law protecting equal pay for equal work for all Mississippi women. Until this year, Mississippi was the only state in the country that did not promote the basic fairness of equal pay. With this new law on the books, we can take a giant leap forward in closing our 27 percent pay gap. That means more money for the groceries, rent and clothing their families need.

Mississippi's Legislature also passed a new \$3.5-million tax credit for donations to pregnancy resource centers. These centers have long helped new mothers with everything from diapers and car seats to medical care and emotional support. In a single year, the more than 30 centers in Mississippi offered over 4,500 free ultrasounds and provided nearly \$1.9 million in medical services, material goods and other services. They helped almost 12,500 people as they took their first steps in parenting.

But there is more work ahead for us as a State to empower these mothers and mothers to be. We need to find ways to reduce the cost of childcare. It is expensive and hard to find, but absolutely necessary if a mother needs to support her family. It should not cost more to put a toddler and an infant in childcare for a year than it does to send your child to one of our fine public, four-year colleges. But it does. In fact, a mother working a minimum wage job works nineteen weeks of the year, January to May, just to pay for childcare for one infant. Twenty-five states, including nearby states like Arkansas, Louisiana and Kentucky, offer parents a tax credit for childcare that can help these families.

We need to improve child support enforcement. Mothers have borne the financial burdens of parenthood alone for too long. Of the 5.4 million parents due child support in 2017, 24 percent received only partial payment and 30 percent received no payments at all during the year. The poverty rate of a custodial parent family averages about 10.5 percent higher and their support payments account for 50 percent of the income for these families, so timely and complete child support can make a real difference in the lives of a struggling family.

We need to build on the network of pregnancy resource centers already thriving across Mississippi and fill in the gaps in the services they provide. Many of them already provide a safe place to bring their children when they need to head to a job interview or a quiet room with a computer where they can study for their GED. When we weave a consistent safety net for women in need, one that helps them to succeed, they can anchor healthy families.

We need to address foster care and adoption issues. There are children in need of loving mothers and families, and there are loving mothers and families ready to welcome them into their homes and help them to thrive. It must be our mission to connect them.

Working together as a State we can find ways to uplift all mothers, not only on Mother's Day but all year long. When we empower the women who are struggling, they can empower the children in their lives. We all benefit from helping and supporting all the mothers around us.

Lynn Fitch is attorney general for the state of Mississippi.