

2026

ECONOMIC

BLUEPRINT



WOMEN IMPACTING
PUBLIC POLICY



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WOMEN IMPACTING
PUBLIC POLICY

Executive Summary

The policy landscape for small businesses continues to evolve, and uncertainty can pose real challenges – especially for the more than 15.7 million women-owned small businesses across the country. Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP) remains steadfast in its mission to ensure these businesses have a strong voice and the tools they need to thrive.

Our 2026 Economic Blueprint builds upon the foundation of previous policy agendas, offering a comprehensive framework to support the economic advancement of women entrepreneurs.

While progress has been made, many of the challenges faced by women-owned businesses persist, including inflationary pressures, limited access to capital and federal contracting opportunities, workforce hiring and retention struggles, and difficulty attracting new clientele and expanding into new markets.

COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES



INFLATIONARY PRESSURES



**LIMITED ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND
FEDERAL CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES**



**WORKFORCE HIRING AND RETENTION
STRUGGLES**



**DIFFICULTY ATTRACTING NEW CLIENTELE
AND EXPANDING INTO NEW MARKETS**



Executive Summary

Despite these challenges, women-owned businesses continue to thrive. According to the 2026 Wells Fargo Impact of Women-Owned Businesses Report, women own 15.7 million businesses – 40.6% of all U.S. businesses – employing 12.6 million people, nearly 9.1% of the total workforce¹. Collectively, they generate \$2.8 trillion in annual revenue. However, their overall economic impact remains disproportionately lower than their representation, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and support.





Who We Are

WIPP members on their way to a briefing with the House Small Business Committee Staff during a Legislative Fly-In.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP) is a national nonpartisan organization advocating on behalf of women business owners—strengthening their impact on the nation’s public policy, creating economic opportunities, and forging alliances with other business organizations.

As an organization that represents women business owners, WIPP has within its ranks Republicans, Democrats, Independents, liberals, conservatives, and every variety of political affiliation. It urges and encourages members to become involved and politically active, but these members do not speak for the organization or for its positions.



WIPP members gathered in the House Transportation Committee hearing room for a briefing with House Small Business Committee leaders.

WIPP'S ACE PRINCIPLES

At WIPP, our guiding core principles are Advocacy, Community, and Education (ACE):

A

ADVOCACY

WIPP has empowered a generation of women business owners to claim their seat at the table, testifying before Congress, shaping legislation, and influencing regulations.

C

COMMUNITY

Our network connects members, stakeholders, and partners with industry leaders and vital resources, fostering a supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs.

E

EDUCATION

WIPP's programs have helped thousands of women scale their businesses, navigate federal contracting, and connect with key decision-makers.



WIPP 2026 Policy Pillars

PILLAR 1: INCREASING FEDERAL AND STATE MARKETPLACE COMPETITION

Federal and state marketplaces must be competitive in order to control costs, promote innovation, and to best serve U.S. taxpayers. Women-owned and all small businesses expand the government's ability to compete and bring down costs.

PILLAR 2: MAKING THE COSTS OF DOING BUSINESS MORE AFFORDABLE

Business owners are being squeezed by essential, unavoidable costs—such as energy expenses, rising healthcare costs, inflation and the cost of pursuing capital. Policy makers should approach legislative efforts with the lens of reducing the cost of doing business for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

PILLAR 3: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

Women-owned businesses must be equipped, not sidelined, as AI reshapes the economy. AI policy must also be designed in a manner that does not compromise innovation, economic growth and job creation.

PILLAR 4: SUPPORTING THE CARE ECONOMY

Women-owned and small businesses consistently cite hiring and retention as major barriers to growth, driven in part by limited capacity to offer essential care-related benefits such as paid leave, childcare, and retirement security. As states consider paid leave and related policies, solutions must be designed to work for small employers by providing flexibility, scalability, and administrative simplicity so businesses can support their workforce, including caregivers and people with disabilities, without compromising growth or competitiveness with larger firms.



Increasing Federal and State Marketplace Competition

Federal and state marketplaces must be competitive in order to control costs, promote innovation, and to best serve U.S. taxpayers. Women-owned and all small businesses expand the government's ability to compete and bring down costs.

A competitive federal and state marketplace is not a partisan goal; it is a foundational principle of smart government. When small businesses, including women-owned firms, can access contracting opportunities on a level playing field, the result is lower costs, greater innovation, and stronger accountability for taxpayer dollars. This pillar outlines WIPP's priorities for protecting and strengthening the policies that make that competition possible.

FEDERAL AND STATE CONTRACTING MARKET ACCESS

Federal and state contracting programs are tools to ensure sufficient supplier competition, not carve-outs or preferences. These programs help small businesses enter federal and state marketplaces, expand the pool of qualified bidders, and prevent over-reliance on a concentrated group of large contractors. When these programs are weakened or eliminated, the government loses access to a broader, more competitive supplier base and taxpayers pay the price.

ACCESS REMAINS THE TOP CHALLENGE

According to the WIPP membership survey, lack of access to contracting opportunities was the top challenge for 58% of respondents.

WOSB AND EDWOSB PROGRAMS EXPAND COMPETITION

The Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) and Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Business (EDWOSB) programs increase the number of qualified firms competing for federal contracts, supporting price competition, performance quality, and innovation across the federal supplier base.

CONCENTRATED CONTRACTING CARRIES REAL RISK

When federal or state governments rely too heavily on a concentrated pool of large contractors, they risk paying higher prices for goods and services, experiencing slower delivery on projects, and losing the performance benefits that come from a competitive marketplace.



Increasing Federal and State Marketplace Competition

WIPP supports maintaining and strengthening the WOSB and EDWOSB programs as competition tools that serve the government's interest in a healthy supplier base. We oppose any changes that would restrict women-owned, and all small business, participation in federal contracting without a corresponding mechanism to preserve market competition.

UNDERSERVED SMALL BUSINESS CONTRACTING PROGRAMS

Underserved small business contracting programs, including the SBA 8(a) Business Development Program, HUBZones, and state-level equivalents are facing heightened regulatory scrutiny. WIPP's position is clear: these programs should be held to the highest standards of accountability and implementation, but eliminating them altogether would reduce competition and innovation in the federal marketplace. Accountability strengthens these programs; dismantling them weakens the market.

★ DOT DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (DBE) PROGRAM

The Department of Transportation's DBE program has been subject to significant regulatory change following the release in October 2025 of an Interim Final Rule (IFR) that ends race- and sex-based presumptions of disadvantage in the DBE program, creating uncertainty for WIPP members who rely on it to access transportation-related contracting opportunities.

Member impact is significant: 17% of WIPP members indicated they were impacted by the Interim Final Rule (IFR), and of those impacted, 38% cited maintaining program eligibility as their top concern. WIPP will continue to monitor implementation of the IFR and advocate for clear, fair eligibility standards that do not create unnecessary barriers for women-owned firms participating in DOT-funded projects.

Changes to the Federal DBE Program flow to state programs: As a result of the Interim Final Rule, billions of dollars worth of contracts, particularly large infrastructure contracts across the country have been paused for review, with DBE credits and goal enforcement suspended.



Increasing Federal and State Marketplace Competition

★ STATE-LEVEL CONTRACTING PROGRAMS

Changes at the federal level are reverberating through state contracting programs, creating a patchwork of policy environments that WIPP members must navigate. The data show real, measurable harm to women-owned businesses in key states.

Nearly 1 in 5 WIPP members affected: Almost 20% of WIPP survey respondents indicated they have been negatively impacted by changes to state-level contracting programs.

Greatest impacts by state: FL (11.9%), MD, CA, and IL (all 8.3%), and TX (7.14%) reported the highest rates of negative impact among respondents to WIPP's survey.

★ In Texas, Attorney General Ken Paxton has aggressively pursued efforts to roll back contracting programs that were created to help women and minority-owned businesses access contracting opportunities. In a [legal opinion](#) issued in early 2026, the Attorney General declared the "unconstitutionality" of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs, including those present in state contracting programs.

WIPP supports strong program integrity and improved implementation of underserved small business contracting programs at both the federal and state level, including clearer thresholds, updated eligibility requirements, and robust program oversight. We firmly oppose eliminating these programs, which would reduce supplier competition and undermine economic opportunity in historically underutilized communities.



Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Contracting and Infrastructure, Rep. LaLota, and Ranking member Velazquez discuss their work on the committee alongside WIPP President and CEO, Angela Dingle. Their work includes the Plain Language in Contracting Act, and efforts to preserve the Rule of Two in federal contracting.



Increasing Federal and State Marketplace Competition

★ THE RULE OF TWO ★

The Rule of Two is one of the most powerful and straightforward competition tools in federal procurement. It requires contracting officers to set aside a contract for small businesses when there is a reasonable expectation that at least two qualified small businesses will submit offers at a fair market price.

It is not a preference system; it is a competition mandate that Congress already put into law.



WIPP members gathered in the House Transportation Committee hearing room for a briefing with House Small Business Committee leaders.

- ★ WIPP played a central role in preserving the Rule of Two during the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) rewrite process, successfully advocating for its retention against proposals that would have weakened or eliminated it.
- ★ This was about enforcing existing competition rules, not preference: WIPP's advocacy was grounded in the principle that the Rule of Two is a market competition tool that benefits the government by ensuring the broadest possible pool of qualified bidders. Weakening it consolidates contracting power and raises costs.
- ★ WIPP will continue to monitor any regulatory or legislative proposals that would limit the Rule of Two's applicability, and will mobilize member advocacy in response.



Increasing Federal and State Marketplace Competition

A competitive federal and state marketplace doesn't happen by accident – it is the result of deliberate policy choices that keep the doors open to the broadest possible pool of qualified suppliers. The programs and rules outlined in this pillar exist because Congress and policymakers recognized that concentrated contracting power drives up costs, slows delivery, and stifles the innovation that comes from a diverse supplier base.

For WIPP, this is not an abstract policy debate. Our members feel the consequences of these decisions directly, as uncertainty of the future of contracting programs that they have competed in, and they have helped grow their businesses looms. Nearly 60% of WIPP members cite lack of contracting access as their top challenge.

The path forward is not to eliminate the tools that make competition possible, but to strengthen them. That means protecting the Rule of Two, defending underserved small business contracting programs against elimination while holding them to rigorous standards, and ensuring that women-owned firms can fully participate in both federal and state marketplaces. That is why WIPP is proud to support the Protecting Small Business Competitions Act of 2025, introduced by Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez (D-NY) and would codify the Rule of Two into law.

Accountability and access are not in conflict, they are complementary goals, and pursuing both is how the government gets the best value for taxpayers while building a stronger, more resilient industrial base.



WIPP members attend briefing on Capitol Hill with Senate staffers from the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Sen. Cory Booker's Chief of Staff, Veronica Deron.



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

Women business owners are being squeezed by essential, unavoidable costs—such as energy expenses, rising healthcare costs, cybersecurity compliance, inflation and the cost of pursuing capital. Policy makers should approach legislative efforts with the lens of reducing the cost of doing business for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

The top concern for women-owned businesses remains capital access. In our annual membership survey, over 40% of respondents identified capital access as their top business concern. Despite this, more than 30% shared that they had not sought out capital in the last year because they used personal savings or business strategic reserves to fund a business expense. There are several reasons that a business may use personal funds over seeking business capital, including interest rates, the expectation that they'll be denied, or burdensome application requirements or lack of awareness of their options.

The cost of taking out a business loan is on the rise, serving as a barrier for women-owned businesses, and all small businesses looking to expand their business. According to a recent survey conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis of business owners across the Fed's 9th district, nearly 64 percent said current [interest] rates have had a negative impact, with some indicating that interest rates are "directly affecting their ability to grow or invest in their businesses"².



WIPP's June 2025 Coalition Partner Meeting hosted in Washington, D.C. during the annual legislative fly-in.



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

Compounding the challenge of high borrowing costs is the economic uncertainty stemming from tariffs. According to WIPP's membership survey, 32% of WIPP members are delaying hiring plans, 26% are putting business decisions on hold, and 25% are raising their prices as a result of tariffs. 31% also cited economic uncertainty related to tariffs as the top challenge to their businesses. This is why WIPP has consistently supported legislative efforts to exempt small businesses from tariffs, including Senator Ed Markey's Small Business Liberation 2.0 Act.

As women-owned businesses continue to lag behind their male counterparts in access to capital, there are options available to them outside of traditional financing, including venture capital and angel investors. Venture capital is a particularly appealing avenue for women-owned firms, and data shows that women are making greater strides in the space, as female-founded companies collectively raised a record \$73.6 billion in 2025, nearly twice as much as in 2024, even as total deal count declined.³ While this is a welcomed sign of progress, it's worth noting that roughly \$30 billion of this came from investments in artificial intelligence (AI), and companies solely founded by women still only raised 1.1% of venture capital funding. Furthermore, All-female teams raised a total of \$3.2 billion (across 794 deals) while all-male teams raised \$191.1 billion (10,048).⁴

The record-breaking \$73.6 billion raised by female-founded companies in 2025 is cause for optimism, but 1.1% of total venture capital is not cause for celebration. Women business owners have demonstrated time and again that when they have access to the resources needed to compete, they deliver for their families, their communities, and the broader economy. It's time for policy to match their ambition.

WIPP encourages Congress to expand the Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) program to help increase funding for women-focused investment networks, and explore tax incentives that encourage angel investors to direct capital toward women-owned firms. We also call on Congress to reduce barriers to SBA loan access so that more women can access the capital they need to start, sustain, and scale their businesses.



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

ENERGY COSTS AND RELIABILITY

As a result of rising energy costs stemming from increased demand on our power grid, women-business owners must weigh higher energy bills against decisions to invest in their businesses or bring on new workers. According to WIPP's annual membership survey, 36.5% of respondents said energy costs for their businesses are "somewhat higher" and 26.2% said they are "much higher" than they were 12 months before. Adding to the challenge, WIPP members don't anticipate their costs will come down in the next year, with just 7% saying they are "very confident" that costs will improve in the next year.

The growing demand on power grids across the country shows no signs of slowing, as the development of new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and electric vehicles continues to accelerate.⁵ In addition, energy demand has increased across the board after slightly dipping during the pandemic with the rise of remote and hybrid work.⁶ Data shows that some communities disproportionately shoulder the impact, including Black and Latino communities, who base energy decisions on cost more than any other factor. In addition to implementing an all of the above approach to energy to increase affordability, lawmakers must also prioritize permitting reform efforts that streamline the construction of new natural gas and renewable power.

WIPP supports a diverse, all of the above energy mix inclusive of nuclear, renewables, batteries, carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), and low-methane natural gas and its infrastructure that support climate goals and prioritize affordability and reliability for small businesses.

CYBERSECURITY COSTS

With rapid advances in technology, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity has increasingly become a necessary expense for business owners. For women-owned businesses pursuing federal contracts, the burden is especially acute.



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

The Department of Defense's Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) program requires contractors and subcontractors to meet increasingly rigorous cybersecurity standards, and the cost of achieving and maintaining compliance can run tens of thousands of dollars, serving as a significant barrier for small businesses competing for federal work.

Small and medium sized businesses are more often targeted for cyber attacks over larger corporations, making cybersecurity essential for small businesses.^{7,8} In some industries, small business owners can expect to allocate up to 12% of their total revenue on cybersecurity costs.

While WIPP strongly supports efforts to protect consumers and businesses from cyber threats, we believe that compliance frameworks must be designed with small businesses in mind. One-size-fits-all mandates that do not account for the size and resources of a business risk shutting women-owned firms out of federal contracting pipelines and broader market opportunities at a time when their participation is needed most.

WIPP supports efforts to develop cybersecurity requirements that effectively protect both businesses and the consumers they serve from cyberthreats and that take into consideration the cost barriers that face smaller firms.



WIPP members, led by WIPP President and CEO, Angela Dingle and Board Member Amy Rowland, arrive for briefing on Capitol Hill with Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez (D-NY) and Congressman Nick LaLota (R-NY).



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

PRESCRIPTION DRUG AFFORDABILITY & RISING PREMIUM COSTS

Another area in which women-owned businesses are feeling the squeeze is rising healthcare and prescription drug costs.² Part of what drives up the costs of prescription medications is the lack of transparency into Pharmacy Benefits Managers (PBM) rebate practices and spread prices. While it is true that rebates can help lower the cost of prescription drugs, in order for PBMs to maximize rebate revenue, they may favor higher priced drugs with higher rebates over lower-priced drugs with low or no rebates in their negotiations with drug companies. For this reason, WIPP has consistently advocated for legislation that would remove the incentive to favor higher priced drugs by delinking compensation from the price of a drug.

What is a PBM?

Pharmacy benefit managers are intermediaries in the pharmaceutical supply chain and perform multiple roles in the management and distribution of pharmaceuticals to patients. They exist to negotiate, and in theory, reduce drug costs.

Over the years, consolidation of the PBM market has allowed a small number of PBMs to gain significant market power, with just three PBMs controlling 80% of all prescription claims in the U.S.¹⁰ Moreover, the three top PBMs controlling most of the market are vertically integrated with major insurers. This consolidation results in fewer choices for business owners and their employees, and ultimately, less opportunity for price comparison and higher costs. In addition to market consolidation, PBMs have come under bipartisan scrutiny for opaque spread pricing arrangements in Medicaid managed care that have increased Medicaid costs for states and the federal government.

According to WIPP's annual membership survey, 42% of respondents said that policy makers' top priority when considering PBMs should be "reducing out of pocket costs for consumers", and over a quarter said "increasing transparency in pricing and rebates" should be top priorities.



Making the Cost of Doing Business More Affordable

WIPP remains encouraged by bipartisan, bicameral efforts by lawmakers to address affordability and transparency within the PBM industry, including a recent hearing on Capitol Hill with the nation's top health insurance executives. WIPP shared the perspectives of women-owned businesses in a [letter](#) sent to Committee leadership to reinforce the need for transparency and affordability.

In addition to prescription drugs, our members also express concerns over rising healthcare premiums. This especially came to light at the end of 2025, when enhanced premium tax credits tied to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) lapsed, resulting in an increase in monthly premiums for millions of Americans who obtain health insurance via the healthcare exchange. 33% of survey respondents said they are impacted by the lapse of the ACA health insurance subsidies. This is why WIPP supported the bipartisan Premium Tax Credit Extension Act (H.R. 5145) to prevent premium increases and continues to support legislative efforts to ease costs for women-owned businesses.

PBMs have an important role to play in the broader pharmaceutical and healthcare industry, however, steps must be taken to increase transparency and reduce costs for business owners.

WIPP has consistently supported measures to increase transparency in the PBM industry, including bipartisan efforts that would delink PBM compensation from the price of a given drug. WIPP also continues to support legislation that would reduce the cost of monthly premiums for small businesses and their workforce.



WIPP's coalition partners come together to discuss issues impacting women-owned businesses, including those in federal contracting.



Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work

Women-owned businesses must be equipped, not sidelined, as AI reshapes the economy. AI policy must also be designed in a manner that does not compromise innovation, economic growth and job creation.

Artificial Intelligence has rapidly evolved, and in the process become an essential tool for women business owners, fueling innovation and expanding what a business can accomplish without requiring large teams or major capital investments.

According to WIPP's most recent member survey, the majority of respondents are familiar with artificial intelligence and some of its business cases, and are 'somewhat confident (48.8%) or 'very confident (22%) in their ability to identify and use AI tools to benefit their businesses. Many women business owners are using AI for a variety of business uses, including marketing and outreach (62%), business development (46.7%), products and service development (37%), operations and logistics (36%), etc.

Additionally, a recent Reimagine Main Street survey of small businesses found that 87 percent use it for marketing and customer engagement, 74 percent report using AI to enhance worker productivity, and 65 percent rely on it to support product or service innovation. These tools allow entrepreneurs to automate routine tasks, better understand their customers, and develop new offerings - capabilities that can help small businesses compete and grow.

This tells us that women-owned, and all small business owners, are increasingly confident in their abilities to integrate AI into their businesses and use it to expand capabilities, increase productivity and reach new markets without a large influx of capital.

GUARD RAILS, NOT BARRIERS

As AI has evolved since its entry into the mainstream in 2022, it's been a source for both excitement and pause. Excitement for the potential, and pause due to legitimate concerns regarding data privacy and labor displacement. However, despite those concerns, business owners remain optimistic about the potential of AI for their businesses. At the same time, they recognize that guardrails are necessary to protect consumers personal data and to ensure that workforce disruptions are kept to a minimum.



Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work

Our membership survey found that overwhelmingly, respondents believe that “ensuring responsible and ethical use of AI” should be the top concern of policymakers when regulating AI. Furthermore, when asked how policymakers should balance the need to expand AI-related infrastructure (such as data centers, chip manufacturing, etc.) with environmental concerns, nearly half said that there should be a balanced approach between speed and oversight.

The data also make clear that women entrepreneurs risk being left behind if policy does not actively support their access to AI tools and training. According to the [2024/2025 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor \(GEM\) Women’s Report](#), women were 11 percent less likely than men to see the benefits of AI for their businesses – a gap that policymakers and support organizations must work to close. At the same time, [Gusto’s 2025 New Business Formation Report](#) found that women started nearly half (49%) of all new businesses in 2024, the highest share on record and a 69 percent increase since 2019. As women continue to drive entrepreneurship and new job creation at historic rates, ensuring they can fully leverage AI is not only a matter of equity – it is an economic imperative. A recent SBA Office of Advocacy report further confirms that small firms are rapidly closing the AI adoption gap with larger enterprises, signaling that the window to build an inclusive AI economy is now.

Women-owned businesses understand the potential that AI stands to offer for business growth, and at the same time, recognize the importance of getting the policy right in order to protect personal data and address environmental concerns. They favor approaches that won’t stifle innovation and that promotes data protection. AI will continue to evolve and the establishment of guardrails to protect data privacy and take environmental concerns into consideration without slowing innovation will be key.

WIPP supports a pro-innovation federal AI policy framework that removes unnecessary regulatory barriers while establishing clear, consistent standards to protect consumer data and ensure responsible use and calls on Congress to prioritize small businesses in AI policy by investing in accessible training and technical assistance resources.



Supporting the Care Economy

Women-owned and small businesses consistently cite hiring and retention as major barriers to growth, driven in part by limited capacity to offer essential care-related benefits such as paid leave, childcare, and retirement security. As states consider paid leave and related policies, solutions must be designed to work for small employers by providing flexibility, scalability, and administrative simplicity so businesses can support their workforce, including caregivers and people with disabilities, without compromising growth or competitiveness with larger firms.

Access to paid leave, childcare, and retirement benefits is not simply a quality of life issue, it is a business competitiveness issue. WIPP's most recent membership survey found that over 70% of members said that the ability to offer benefits such as paid leave and healthcare is "very important," while only 34% currently offer paid leave to employees. Our members understand that these benefits are essential for attracting and retaining talent; in many cases, however, they simply lack the capacity to provide them. Women business owners need solutions that are both meaningful and workable for businesses of all sizes.

PAID LEAVE

Paid leave strengthens businesses by improving employee retention and productivity – but only when program design accounts for the realities of running a small business.



WIPP President and CEO, Angela Dingle alongside Congresswoman Velazquez, Ranking Member of the House Small Business Committee, during a panel discussion on how the Committee is serving women-owned small businesses.



Supporting the Care Economy

Research consistently bears this out: a 2024 survey of 500 small business owners conducted by Small Business Majority and the National Partnership for Women & Families found that 79% of small businesses support a national paid family and medical leave program, with backing extending across party lines¹¹. In states that have already enacted paid leave laws, employers have seen measurable gains, including a 5% increase in productivity compared with peer employers in states without such programs¹². Despite this evidence, small businesses remain disadvantaged: only 56% provide any form of paid medical leave, and most offer far less than the 12-week standard that employees need¹³.

Women business owners need paid leave solutions that offer clarity, flexibility, and cross-state consistency. A patchwork of diverging state-level mandates creates compliance complexity that falls disproportionately on small employers operating across jurisdictions, undermining the very goal of expanding leave access. WIPP strongly supports the bipartisan More Paid Leave for More Americans Act, led by the Bipartisan House Paid Leave Working Group, which creates a framework for state-level coordination through the Interstate Paid Leave Action Network (I-PLAN). By encouraging more states to adopt paid leave programs through public-private partnerships, this legislation offers a flexible and sustainable model that supports working families while keeping small businesses competitive. Any paid leave framework must also be designed with inclusivity in mind, accounting for the needs of employees with disabilities and those caring for loved ones with disabilities.

The Section 45S Employer Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave allows employers to claim 12.5% to 25% of wages paid to employees on leave. Together, these credits give small businesses real tools to compete with larger firms on benefits – but both are dramatically underutilized. WIPP's membership survey found that 73% were unaware of 45S, with only 5.34% planning to use it.

WIPP urges Congress and the Administration to invest in targeted outreach so that small and women-owned businesses can access credits they are already entitled to.



Supporting the Care Economy

CHILDCARE

The Section 45F Employer-Provided Childcare Credit allows employers to claim a tax credit for costs associated with childcare facility expenditures and resource and referral services. Specifically, employers can claim 25% of qualified childcare facility expenditures and 10% of qualified childcare resource and referral expenditures, up to a maximum credit of \$150,000 per year. Despite its direct relevance to small business owners, WIPP's membership survey found that 76% of respondents were unaware of the 45F credit, and only 5.34% plan to use it in the coming tax year.

These figures make clear that expanding take-up of existing tax incentives must be a policy priority. WIPP urges Congress and the Administration to invest in targeted outreach and education so that small and women-owned businesses can access credits they are already entitled to. In parallel, as federal childcare funding remains constrained, there is a growing opportunity for the private sector – and employers in particular – to develop creative solutions to support employees and their families through enhanced use of the 45F and 45S credits.

RETIREMENT SECURITY

In addition to paid leave and childcare, access to retirement benefits is crucial for attracting and retaining talent, and for supporting the long-term financial stability of employees. Small businesses face unique barriers to offering retirement benefits, yet the barrier is often perception rather than reality: research from The Pew Charitable Trusts found that many small employers overestimate the financial costs and administrative burdens of offering retirement plans, and are simply unaware of the lower-cost, lower-burden options available to them.¹⁴



WIPP members participate in Q&A session with Ranking Member Velazquez during WIPP's 2025 legislative fly-in.



Supporting the Care Economy

A 2025 survey of small business owners found that the retirement system is disproportionately failing women entrepreneurs, who are twice as likely as men to have no retirement savings at all¹⁵. From traditional 401(k)s to state-facilitated auto-IRA programs, small businesses have more options than many realize – and the SECURE 2.0 Act has further expanded the tools available to help small employers close this gap.

The retirement security challenge is especially acute for women. Research from the U.S. Department of the Treasury finds that women hold fewer retirement assets than men and are more likely to face poverty at the end of their lives¹⁶. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women (50%) are more likely than men (47%) to have no retirement savings at all, and only 22% of women have \$100,000 or more saved compared with 30% of men¹⁷. These disparities are compounded for people with disabilities and caregivers of loved ones with disabilities, who often experience disrupted careers and reduced lifetime earnings. Retirement security policies must be designed with these realities in mind, ensuring that long-term financial stability is equitable and accessible for all workers.

WIPP supports a flexible, small business-first approach to expanding access to paid leave, childcare, and retirement benefits. WIPP supports the bipartisan More Paid Leave for More Americans Act and the I-PLAN framework as a model for nationally consistent, state-flexible paid leave solutions. As women entrepreneurs continue to drive job creation and economic growth, policies that help them offer competitive, inclusive benefits are essential to a thriving workforce and economy.



WIPP members ask questions during the briefing with Senate Small Business Committee staff during WIPP's 2025 legislative fly-in.

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END NOTES

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