

# The Status of Women & Girls in Massachusetts: A Story of Progress and Paradox

## Findings from the Inaugural 2026 Report



**WOMEN'S  
FOUNDATION**  
*of*  
**MASSACHUSETTS**

Proudly  
Celebrating  
50 Years of  
Shaping a  
Better World

**Wellesley  
Centers for  
Women**

# METHODOLOGY

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- **PROJECT DESIGN**

- Developed study framework with WFMA, informed by prior Minnesota research

- **DATA IDENTIFICATION & ACQUISITION**

- Collected publicly available MA + national datasets across health, education, and economic indicators
- The team moved quickly to preserve key resources amid shifts in federal websites and data availability

- **DATASET REVIEW & SELECTION**

- Cleaned, reviewed, and selected priority data sources; analyzed trends and comparisons (MA vs. U.S., over time where available)

- **ANALYSIS + EVIDENCE INTEGRATION**

- Interpret findings and align analyses assessing the status of Massachusetts women and girls, especially economic empowerment

# MASSACHUSETTS CONSISTENTLY RANKS AMONG THE BEST STATES IN THE NATION FOR WOMEN.

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**#1**

state for working mothers

**#1**

educational attainment

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**#1**

ranked economy  
drive by innovation, research,  
and education

**Top 2**

healthiest state for women

# YET, MASSIVE INEQUALITY PERSISTS

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**1) The Economic Paradox**



**2) The Education Paradox**



**3) The Health Paradox**





# **The Economic Paradox**

**Basic security is out of reach for many.**

# GENDER WAGE GAP

A woman in Massachusetts earns 75 cents for every dollar a man earns, a gap that widens dramatically for women of color.

Average Earnings Relative to a White Man



## The Part-Time Impact

Including part-time workers, the gap widens to **69¢**

## The Motherhood Penalty

Mothers with children ages 6-18 earn **55¢** for every \$1 a father earns.

# EVEN HIGH EARNINGS DON'T MEAN EQUAL PAY

Earnings that qualify as 'high' in other states fail to provide basic economic security in Massachusetts.

**Wage Gap: \$30,000 annually**

**\$90,389**  
Women

**\$120,237**  
Men

# STARK REALITY FOR SINGLE-MOTHERS

Federal poverty measures don't account for the 2nd highest cost of living in the US, masking the real economic struggle facing women in our community.

## Economic Reality for Households in MA (averages)

Household Type	% Below Federal Poverty Line (FPL)	% Below Cost of Living
Two-Parent Households	6%	41%
Single-Mother Households*	32%	84%

*\*Black and Hispanic Single-Mother Led Households = 96%*

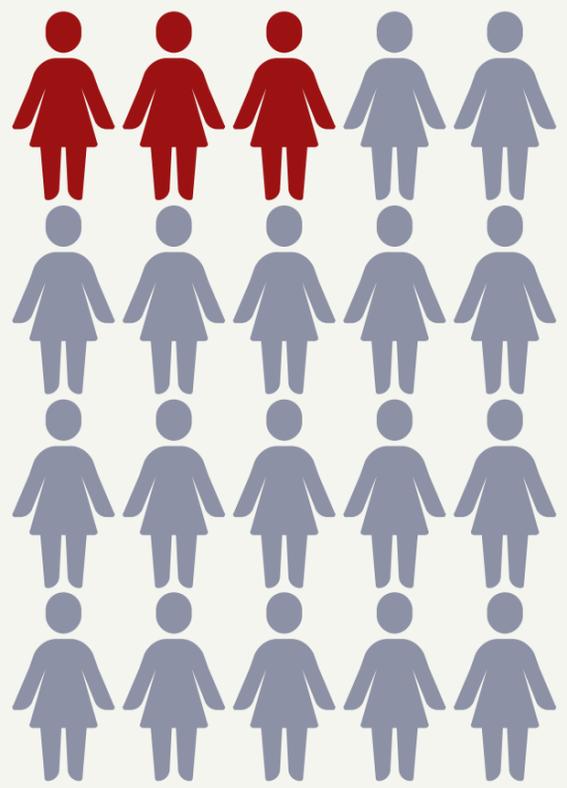
# A LIFETIME OF EARNING LESS LEADS TO ELDER POVERTY

The accumulation of disadvantage leads to a severe drop in relative earnings for women in retirement, leading to massive elderly poverty.

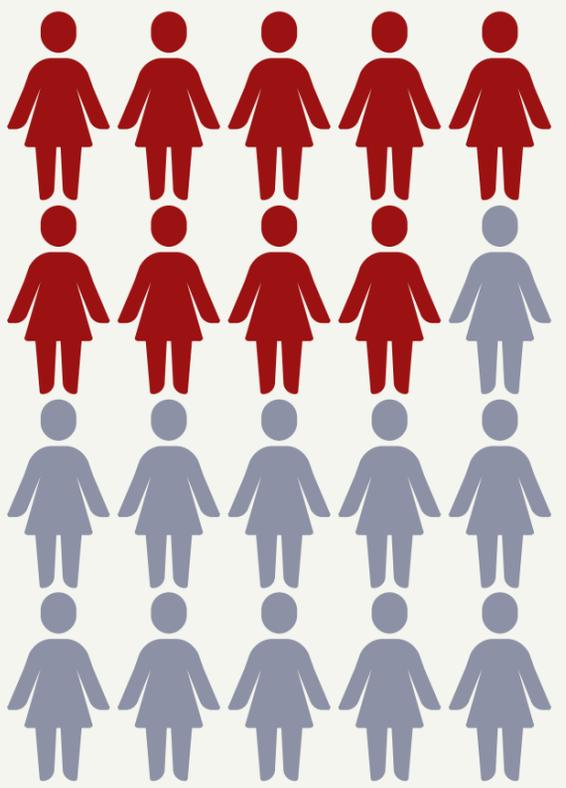
**\$25,196**

**Median income  
for women 65+**

**15% UNDER FEDERAL  
POVERTY LINE**



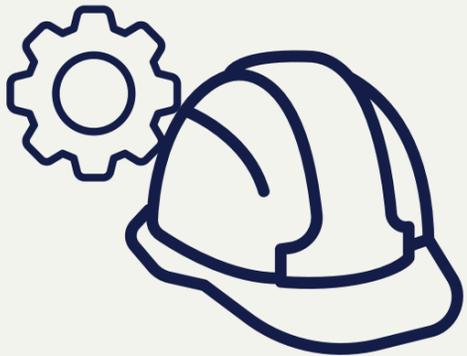
**43% UNDER MA  
COST OF LIVING**



# WOMEN ARE CONCENTRATED IN LOWER-PAYING JOBS

## Occupational Segregation

Male-dominated fields



**\$40**

average hourly wage

Female-dominated fields



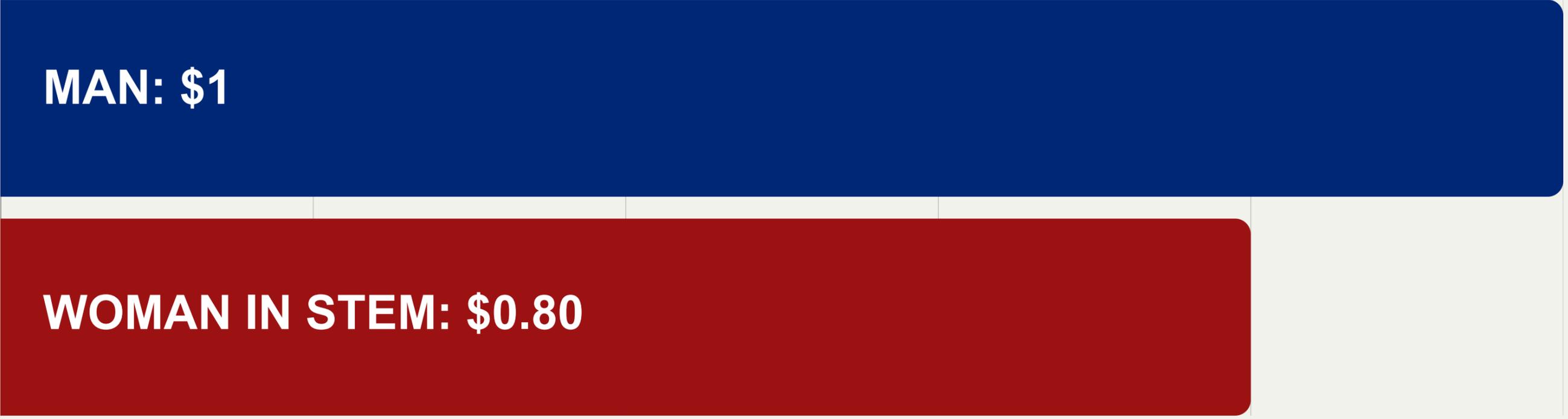
**\$33**

average hourly wage



# STEM CAREERS NARROW BUT DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE WAGE GAP

Even the “right” industry does not eliminate the wage penalty.



A horizontal bar chart with two bars. The top bar is dark blue and represents 'MAN: \$1'. The bottom bar is dark red and represents 'WOMAN IN STEM: \$0.80'. The bars are set against a light gray background with vertical grid lines.

Gender	Wage
MAN	\$1
WOMAN IN STEM	\$0.80

**MAN: \$1**

**WOMAN IN STEM: \$0.80**

Women are also more likely than men to leave STEM jobs, either to exit the labor force entirely or switch occupations.

# WOMEN'S UNPAID LABOR



Even when both parents work full-time, women with children spend more time than men taking care of kids and managing household tasks.

With the nation's 2nd-highest childcare costs, women are **shouldering an unsustainable burden.**

Time spent on child-care by full-time workers.

**Father**



**Mothers**



**+92 min**

*+ additional 23 min for single-mothers*



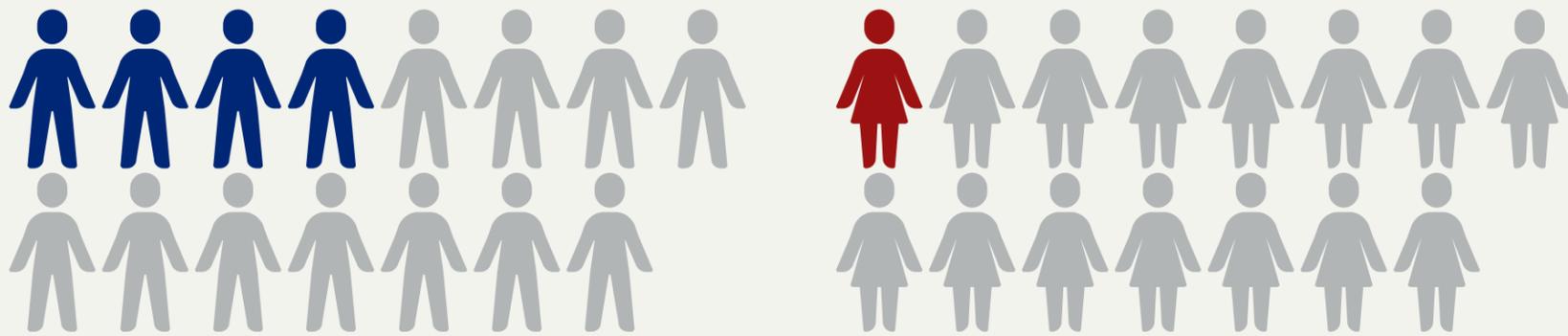
# The Education Paradox

Higher Achievement,  
Unequal Rewards

# GIRLS STEERED AWAY FROM HIGH-GROWTH FIELDS

Talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not.

## The STEM Pipeline Gap



In STEM fields, only **4%** of female graduates study engineering, compared to **16%** of male graduates.

## The Confidence Gap

**28%** of girls report avoiding certain classes because there are not enough girls in them.

# MORE DEGREES, LESS PAY, MORE DEBT

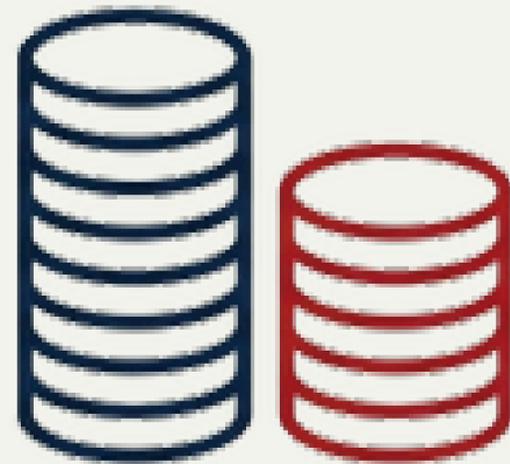
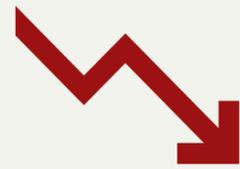
Girls graduate and enroll in college at higher rates, yet start their careers earning less and carrying more debt.

## Lead in school



Girls have higher graduation rates (91% vs 87%) and higher college enrollment rates.

## Fall behind in pay



Just 6 years after high school, men earn nearly **\$5,000** more annually than women.

## Burdened by debt



For a bachelor's degree, women borrow an average of \$5,000 more than men (\$43,300 vs. \$38,300).



# The Health Paradox

**Top-ranked care is not everyone's reality.**

# GROWING HEALTH RISKS AND BARRIERS TO CARE

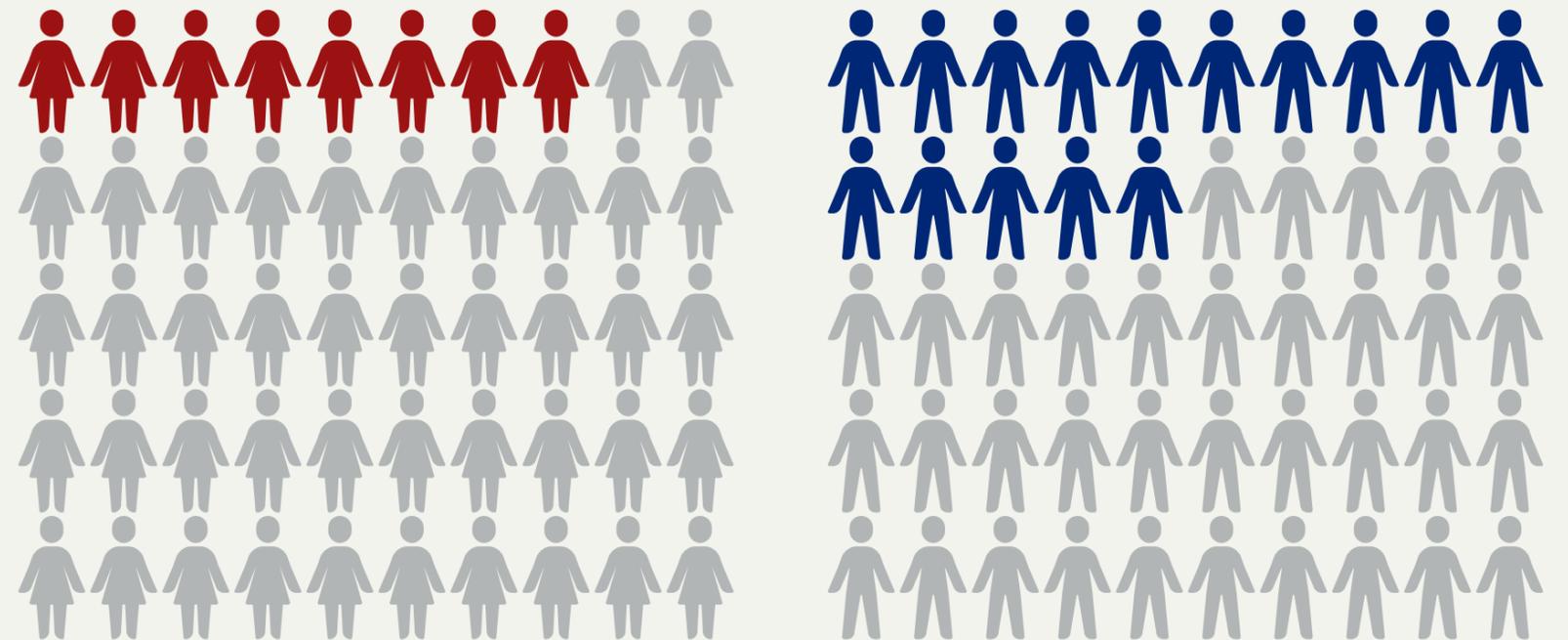
## ACCESS TO CARE

**35% more likely to skip or delay care**



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**1 hour of physical activity a day in high school**



# ALARMING RATES OF MENTAL DISTRESS

**45%**

**of high school girls felt sad or hopeless for 2 weeks in a row that they stopped doing usual activities (vs. 23% of boys)**

## Risk- seeking behavior



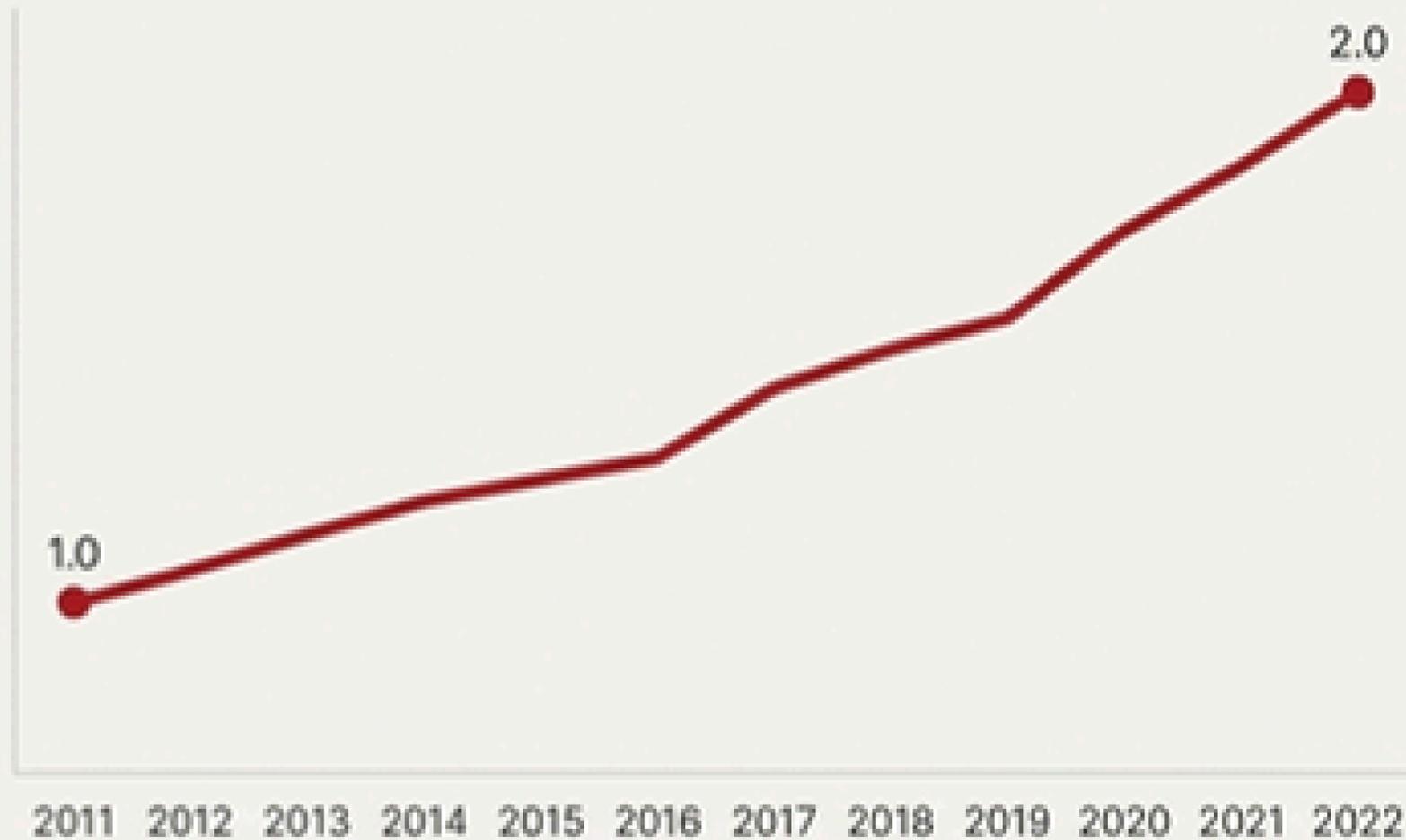
more girls report trying a vape product (35% vs. 26%)



More girls report binge drinking (15% vs. 10%)

# SEVERE MATERNAL COMPLICATIONS DOUBLED IN A DECADE

Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) Rate in MA



Disparity in Risk (vs. White Mothers)



Black Mothers



**2.3x**  
higher risk



Hispanic Mothers



**1.3x**  
higher risk

# PREGNANCY RATES COMPARABLE TO HIGHEST IN NATION

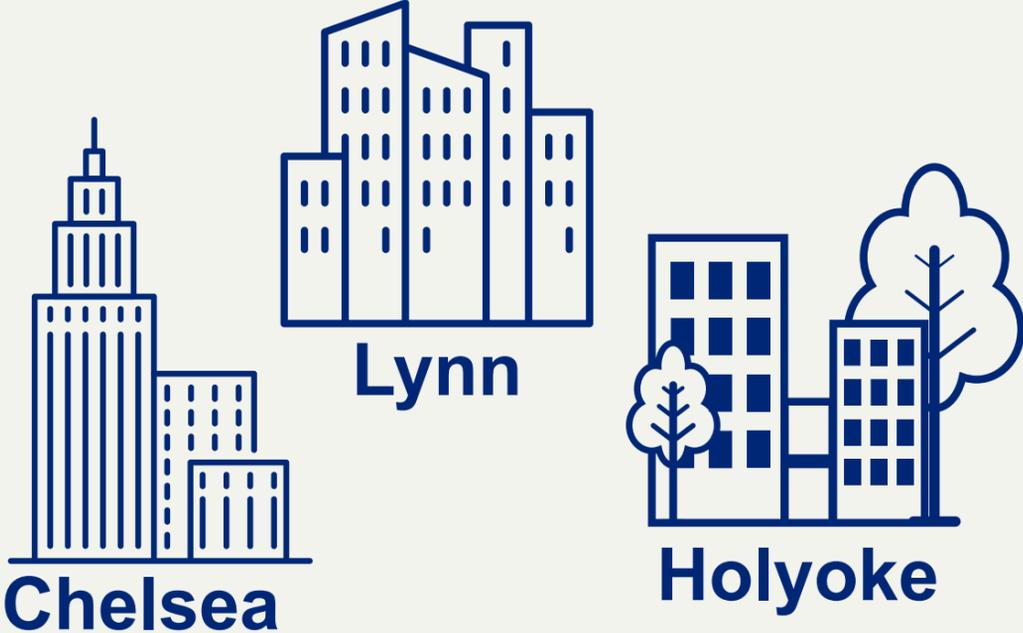
*\*per 1,000 births*

## MASSACHUSETTS



**6**

## GATEWAY CITIES



**22**

## HIGHEST NATIONAL RATE



**25**



# Our Proposed Solution

Increase  
investment in  
women & girls

# Progress is Possible. Action is Essential.

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*“We call on Massachusetts residents, philanthropists, and community leaders to invest in women and girls because it strengthens families, communities, and our Commonwealth as a whole.”*

***Christina Gordon***

Co-Founder and CEO  
Women’s Foundation of Massachusetts

