

Bridge Builders

Summit 2026

Because of Mom, a New World is Emerging

Why Single Mothers?

Share Our Strength's Family Economic Mobility work has historically centered single mothers to amplify their strengths as backbones of their communities and economic drivers, who despite their contributions and commitments, face socioeconomic hardship and systemic barriers that limit their and their children's economic mobility.

- **Participation and Dedication:** Approximately 30% of households with children were led by single parents in 2023, 80% of which are headed by women ([Urban Institute 2025](#)). Underscoring their commitment to providing for their families, 61% of single mothers are employed ([WISER 2025](#)). Furthermore, 45% of the 3.1 million student-parent undergraduates are single mothers, and 67% of these student mothers work at least 20 hours in non-workstudy jobs ([Urban Institute 2025](#)).
- **Systemic Barriers:** Despite this dedication, about one in four single-mother households live in poverty ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#)). Systemic barriers deepen these challenges, and in comparison to other wealthy nations, the U.S. offers far fewer supports for single mothers, resulting in

limited economic mobility for them and their children ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#)).

What Are Mothers Telling Us?

Recent survey research commissioned by Share Our Strength reinforces the realities families are navigating every day:

- 61% of mothers say the 2020s are the hardest period in recent history to raise children.
- An additional 29% say parenting has always been difficult.
- 51% of mothers reported making at least one sacrifice in the past year to ensure their children had enough food.

The most common sacrifices included:

- Taking on debt (24%)
- Working extra hours or additional jobs (23%)
- Skipping meals themselves so their children could eat (20%)
- Delaying bills (17%)
- Relying on family or community support (17% / 14%)

When asked what would help their families thrive, mothers most frequently identified:

- Healthy, affordable food (55%)
- Affordable housing (54%)
- Stable income (47%)
- Flexible work schedules (45%)
- Mental health support (37%)

The Systems Shaping Economic Mobility

Child Care

Research highlights child care as one of the most significant barriers facing families today. Approximately half of families in the United States live in “child care deserts,” communities with more than three children under age five for every available licensed child care slot ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#)).

Recent survey research also found that:

- 79% of single-parent families report difficulty finding child care ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#))
- Infant care costs can consume between 24.6% and 75.1% of family income for single-parent households ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#))

According to research done by the [Urban Institute](#), fully funding the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) under current eligibility guidelines could:

- Provide subsidies to an additional 800,000 families
- Enable approximately 270,000 mothers to enter the workforce
- Reduce child poverty by approximately 3%

Tax Policy

Research from [Washington Center for Equitable Growth](#) demonstrates that economic instability shapes long-term outcomes for children. Studies found that an additional \$1,000 in household

income through the Earned Income Tax Credit increased:

- High school graduation rates by 1.3%
- College completion rates by 4.2%
- Young adult employment rates by 1%
- Adult earnings by 2.2%

Income and Employment

Race and gender compound inequities. Economist Michelle Holder’s research found that Black women face a “double wage gap,” experiencing both racial and gender wage discrimination totaling approximately \$50 billion in involuntarily forfeited earnings annually ([Washington Center for Equitable Growth, 2025](#)).

The Urban Institute’s research also identifies several policy levers that could improve job quality and economic mobility, including:

- Raising federal and state minimum wages
- Eliminating tipped subminimum wages
- Expanding labor protections for domestic workers, caregivers, and home health workers
- Expanding refundable tax credits such as the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit