NEW MEXICO WOMEN.ORG

THE LANDSCAPE OF GENDER JUSTICE IN NEW MEXICO

2025 SUMMARY OF DATA

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our organization recognizes that the land on which we conduct our work is the ancestral and contemporary home of many Indigenous peoples, with 23 Native Nations including the Pueblo Nations, the Navajo Nation, the Apache Nations, and other Indigenous communities. This land and these unceded territories across New Mexico have been cared for and inhabited for millennia by these sovereign Indigenous Nations, who remain deeply connected to this land as a source of strength, cultural continuity, and resilience.

As we work to address disparities impacting women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people in New Mexico, we specifically acknowledge and center the colonial history of our state and the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous communities. In our work for gender justice and healing, we will continue to act in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples and sovereign Nations on whose lands we are located. We do this through our grantmaking investments, our training and education programs, and through research such as this report. We are committed to ongoing learning to ensure our work supports the sovereignty, self-determination, and well-being of these Nations and of all Indigenous people who call New Mexico home.

ABOUT NEWMEXICOWOMEN.ORG

NewMexicoWomen.Org (NMW.O) is the only fund of its kind in New Mexico that works to advance opportunities for women, girls, and gender nonconforming people statewide, so they can lead self-sufficient, healthy, and empowered lives. Our strategic focus is gender justice and healing. A gender justice framework is intersectional—it encompasses various social, economic, and environmental justice issues, with a specific gender lens. It is inclusive of lived experiences of race, class, immigration, sexuality, as well as a spectrum of gender identities. Healing is the process of restoring health from an unbalanced or unhealthy state. Gender justice cannot be achieved without deeper healing, and healing cannot occur without lasting justice.

NOTE ON CITATIONS

Note that footnotes providing additional context or definitions and endnotes with all relevant citations are available in the full-length report.

INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN

NewMexicoWomen.Org, in collaboration with the Center for Social Policy at the University of New Mexico, is excited to present this report on the status of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ New Mexicans. The report outlines key statistical trends in the gender justice landscape using a variety of public and non-public quantitative survey data, as well as qualitative interview data gathered through discussions with community partners and experts from across the state of New Mexico.

Additionally, it contains policy recommendations to support long-term change, particularly for cis and trans women and girls, and gender nonconforming people. We have organized the data into the following broad sections: demographics, economic justice, safety, health equity, environmental and climate justice, political participation, and education. The full report seeks to assess where New Mexico has made strides toward achieving gender justice, as well as identify the current gaps and challenges.

"...the tri-cultural myth...was so deeply ingrained ...[we have to] be very clear about tokenization versus being welcomed, integrated and invited to the table...I think especially in 2020 with the uprisings and 'racial reckoning' and then a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, we had many people asking us to come to the table...but it's very important that the invitation is authentic and our voice is actually going to be heard."

-NEW MEXICO ASIAN FAMILY CENTER

We use an intersectional feminist framework in an attempt to illustrate the diversity of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people, and to analyze the data. This framework helps us to understand the various institutional, structural, and social barriers faced by these populations. Rather than analyzing along the single axis of gender, we adopt a multiple-axis framework including race, ethnicity, class, immigration status, location, age, ability, sex, and gender.

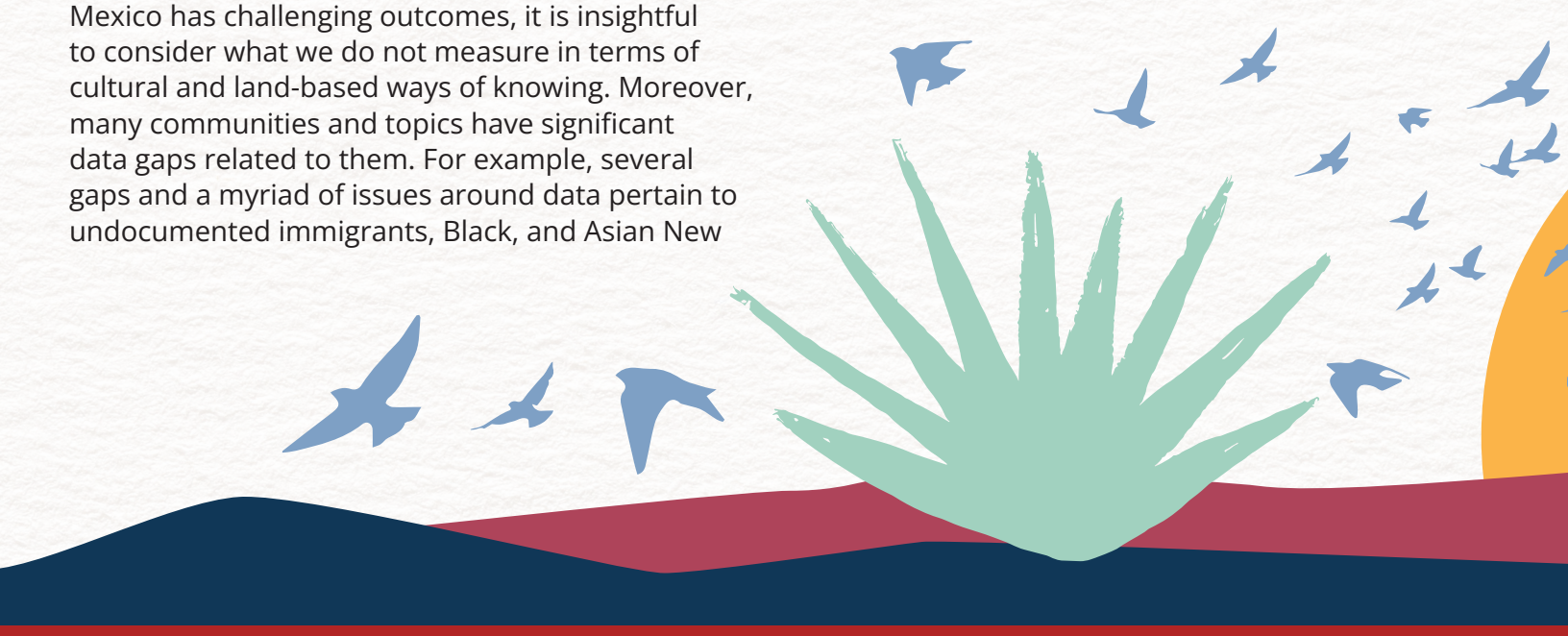
We publish this report in a national context wherein the very frameworks and data sources used throughout are being banned, discontinued, defunded, and criminalized. The work of gender and racial justice advocates, organizers, and scholars is being attacked and silenced, and research projects that focus on race and gender, defunded and canceled. Now more than ever, we remain committed to data justice, an approach aimed at countering systemic erasure and harm, as well as enacting change through justice-centered approaches and applications of data.

This approach recognizes how research and data have often been weaponized against Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, as well as LGBTQ+ communities, leading to harmful and inappropriate policies and the reinforcement of oppressive systems. Indeed, in the current national policy context, data focused on communities of color, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities will, in many contexts, simply no longer be collected, and in others be used in actively harmful manners. For many communities, such as immigrants, there is a credible fear around the potential implications of being "counted" by the government, which may lead many people to simply not respond to surveys and other data collection approaches.

We know the existing data has many limitations and there are issues and dynamics that are rendered invisible. It is important to consider what is not measured or included here. For example, while New Mexico has challenging outcomes, it is insightful to consider what we do not measure in terms of cultural and land-based ways of knowing. Moreover, many communities and topics have significant data gaps related to them. For example, several gaps and a myriad of issues around data pertain to undocumented immigrants, Black, and Asian New Mexicans. Both data and discourse in New Mexico are deeply shaped by a "tri-cultural myth" that centers White, Hispanic, and Native American New Mexicans as the largest demographic groups in our state, and invisibilizes Black, Asian, and other New Mexican communities.

Data and discourse are also informed by heteronormativity and cisgender normativity which invisibilize LGBTQ+ people. As mentioned, these gaps will likely be exacerbated by the current political context. More quantitative and qualitative data collection by, for, and about diverse populations in New Mexico is essential.

In this report, the terms "women" and "girls" include both cisgender and transgender women and girls. We use these terms with the understanding that they are capacious and include anyone who identifies with them. We also seek to include data and experiences of gender nonconforming people where possible. We know that the unique lived experiences of trans and cis women and gender nonconforming people lead to different outcomes and therefore, each warrant specific attention. Thus, where the data allows, we refer to trans women and girls, cis women and girls, and gender nonconforming people separately with data related to each population. Where we refer simply to women and girls, the data is not disaggregated, and we do not have specific data for trans and cis people. Put simply, our terms and the data are imperfect. Despite our



understanding of gender, many data sources are not inclusive, and often rely on binary understandings, reporting strictly on the notion of "sex" instead of "gender." This dissonance raises a critical point regarding data justice and the importance of marginalized communities being accurately and appropriately "counted" in a political context in which they are invisibilized, while simultaneously being hyper-visible, and attacked.

It is important to note that this report discusses many profound and complex challenges facing communities statewide and the data may be heavy and demoralizing. When presenting data that discusses challenges faced by communities, we seek to move beyond a deficit ideology that locates the primary causes of social problems within individuals and communities. Instead, we aim to identify the causal factors of problems at the structural level and offer policy recommendations that are, by and large, crafted by communities and the organizations led by them. We also acknowledge the embodied nature of knowledge and research. From a feminist standpoint, data has both empirical and emotional facets. Namely, the stark black-and-white statistics in this report describe our lives, bodies, families, and communities and, as a result, the process of reading this data may have an affective impact.

The history of our state is characterized by layers of settler colonialism, racial hierarchies, economic exploitation, environmental racism, and deep-seated patriarchy. As you will read, the legacy of this history and resulting inequities are felt acutely by women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people of color across our state. Simultaneously, throughout our history, communities have strategically organized, built power, and co-created policies that have led to tangible changes. The people, organizations, movements, and histories of our state contain immense wisdom, power, and insights for the future. New Mexican communities are deeply strategic in their approaches to creating change, from reproductive justice to early childhood education, and continue to serve as a national model.

However, social change, and policy wins specifically, are not guaranteed, nor are they easily won—movements, advocates, and those shaping policy around the state continue to work for gender and social justice in their communities in the face of constant challenges. This moment is characterized by uncertainty around many of the policies mentioned in this report and even entire federal government departments. Given the changing political landscape, the various policies and their related outcomes mentioned in this report will continue to evolve. As federal policies and programs critical to community well-being are hollowed out and defunded, we must work at the local level to protect and deepen policies that ensure New Mexican communities are safe and have access to healthcare, education, clean water, air, and land, as well as equitable economic opportunities.

This report intends to provide data for advocates, organizers, policymakers, and philanthropic leaders, as well as the public. The hope is that data around disparities can support with strategy, power building, policy design and implementation, funding and, ultimately, lead to more resources and opportunities for women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people in New Mexico. The impact we hope to achieve is for people in our state to use this data as one pathway toward gaining more agency, power, joy, hope, choices, and fulfillment. This is the future of gender justice in New Mexico.

2025 SUMMARY OF DATA

This Summary provides an overview of the report with key data from each section.
We encourage readers to delve fully into each section of the report for deeper analysis and context.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Many New Mexicans—specifically Black and Native American women, undocumented immigrant women, and LGBTQ+ communities—lack sufficient incomes to ensure their stability, well-being, and dignified long-term living conditions. However, the success of antipoverty programs indicates that, broadly speaking, poverty is an outcome of political choices and institutional inequities.

- **In 2023, 19.2% of women in New Mexico were living in poverty compared to the national poverty average of 11.1%.**
- **40% of transgender New Mexicans live in poverty, an incredibly high rate with deep impacts upon a community facing multiple oppressions.**
- **Native American and Black women, elders, and immigrants experience high rates of poverty.**
- **New Mexico's rates of kinship care, where grandparents or other kin raise children, are the highest in the country. Although this indicates strong intergenerational connections, care is often gendered, and grandmothers struggle with the financial costs and isolation.**
- **Due to strategic, community-informed policies, the state child poverty rate moved from last to 17th in the U.S. when antipoverty programs like food assistance are considered.**
- **The COVID-19 pandemic deeply exacerbated poverty, with survey data from that time indicating that 64% of New Mexican women had $1,000 or less in savings for financial emergencies and an astounding 34%, or over one third of women, had $100 or less.**

The gender pay gap persists with all women in New Mexico earning less than men, and women of color earning significantly less: Native American women made 50.5% of what White men earned, followed by Hispanic women (55.4%), Black women (64%), Asian women (76%), White women (78.9%), and multiracial women (62.2%). LGBTQ+ workers in the United States also earn less than the average worker and undocumented immigrant women earned less than any other group in the U.S.

> **"We organize around a lot of the misogyny directed towards care workers, who are largely women, doing essential work but treated with an immense amount of disrespect. They receive low compensation, but New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee also says that childcare isn't a form of education, for example. Across the care spectrum, you see the same level of disrespect in home healthcare."**
>
> **-ORGANIZERS IN THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT (OLÉ)**

- **Women and LGBTQ+ people face occupational segregation in lower-earning fields.**
- **Women incur a higher debt burden and hold almost two thirds of student loan debt in the U.S., with higher rates for women of color and LGBTQ+ people.**
- **The cost of housing increased by 54.2% from 2018 to 2022 in New Mexico, which has left many women and families housing insecure.**
- **Housing insecurity is a concern for LGBTQ+ youth in particular, with an estimated 40 to 56% of LGBTQ+ youth statewide experiencing housing insecurity.**

SAFETY

Gender-based violence remains widespread, ranging from bullying of youth to intimate partner violence to sexual violence. Additionally, our carceral state systems aimed at dealing with public safety are deeply racialized and perpetuate harm.

- **There are high rates of youth bullying and harassment with 24.1% of female students bullied on school property and 18.9% bullied electronically in the past year (2024).**
- **There are racial dynamics in youth bullying with 41.4% of Black and 28.9% of Asian American female students experiencing bullying based on race and ethnicity.**
- **LGBTQ+ youth experience high rates of bullying and harassment with 57% experiencing verbal harassment and 26% experiencing physical harassment based on sexual orientation, and 60% experiencing discriminatory institutional practices at school.**
- **Data shows higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) among lower-income families and immigrant women. To contextualize this, communities that experience higher levels of discrimination, state-sanctioned violence, poverty, and social dynamics that deprive them of power, often experience higher levels of interpersonal violence.**
- **In terms of sexual violence, 37.8% of women in the state have experienced contact sexual violence, which includes both rape and unwanted sexual contact.**
- **Individuals with mental or cognitive disabilities are nearly 3 times more likely to experience completed or attempted rape than those without a disability.**
- **The transgender community experiences disproportionately high violence and harassment with 84% of people who were perceived to be trans enduring mistreatment, verbal harassment, and/or physical or sexual assault.**

New Mexico is facing a crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Relatives (MMIWGR). Native American women in New Mexico have the highest rate of homicide among all racial and ethnic groups.

- **New Mexico had the highest number of cases of missing Native women, girls, and relatives in the country in 2018.**
- **Since 1980, the number of women in jail in New Mexico has increased by 1,657% and the number of women in prison in New Mexico has increased by 1,604%. Incarceration rates in the state are disproportionately higher for Black women and LGBTQ+ people and lower for White women.**
- **Approximately 60 to 70% of incarcerated women and girls report experiences of physical or sexual violence in childhood, and 70 to 80% of incarcerated women report experiences of intimate partner violence.**
- **New Mexico has three ICE detention centers—the Cibola County Correctional Center, the Otero County Processing Center, and the Torrance County Detention Facility—which incarcerate both people in criminal and in ICE custody.**
- **In a positive vein, youth incarceration rates in New Mexico declined by 54% from 2017 to 2022. This reduction is due to "shifting away from punitive modes of justice."**

"One thing specific to women and young girls...is how they're impacted by our criminal legal system...And of course, that population is largely nonviolent and largely incarcerated for minor drug offenses and addiction. Once women are in jails and prisons, the abuse is out of control...We've had about four cases in the past four or five years of women who were sexually assaulted by corrections guards, one who was impregnated by a corrections officer...I would say the criminal legal system is where I've seen the starkest growth in disparate outcomes for women."

-ACLU OF NEW MEXICO

HEALTH EQUITY

Next, the data indicates that geographic location, environment, economic opportunities, colonial legacies, and racism all deeply impact health and health equity. One's ZIP code—where one lives, works, eats, plays, and prays—is a critical factor in determining one's health.

- **Life expectancies are lowest in McKinley County, which is nearly 80% Native American, at 67.9 years and highest in Los Alamos County, which is 70% White, at 83.7 years. This difference of over 15 years was exacerbated profoundly by COVID-19 with Native American residents of New Mexico accounting for nearly 60% of COVID-19 deaths as of 2021, while constituting only 12.4% of the state's population.**
- **Though the rate of uninsured New Mexicans, including children, has steadily declined over the past two decades with positive impacts upon health, disparities persist, with Native American children twice as likely to be uninsured compared to other children, and undocumented women 1.8 times more likely to be uninsured than other women.**
- **As of 2023, 32 of New Mexico's 33 counties were designated Health Professional Shortage Areas resulting in long waiting periods to receive care.**
- **In terms of reproductive health, 33.3% of counties in New Mexico are classified as maternity care deserts.**
- **New Mexico has successfully expanded reproductive coverage through Pregnancy Related Medicaid with 72% of babies statewide born under Medicaid, the highest ranking in the nation.**

New Mexico has one of the most supportive regulatory environments for midwifery and the highest rate of Certified Nurse Midwife-attended births in the country, yet barriers persist in fostering a workforce of culturally and linguistically responsive, Black, Indigenous, and people of color birth workers and ensuring access to care.

- **Due to decades of organizing, New Mexico remains a "safe state" where abortion is legal. However, there are only 11 in-person providers, with the majority in Albuquerque.**
- **New Mexico has become a safe haven for trans people, and especially trans youth. We are one of five states with "shield laws" that protect out-of-state patients seeking gender-affirming care, and the providers offering it, from interference and legal repercussions. However, due to provider shortages, accessing care remains an issue.**

"Since 2021 our coalition has been working to eliminate the outdated and dangerous publication requirement from the New Mexico name change statute, and HB31 was signed into law in 2023! In that same legislative session, we achieved HB7 and HB207. HB7 is the Reproductive and Gender Affirming Care Act and HB207 is the Human Rights Modernization Act which expanded the scope of our state non-discrimination law to explicitly include educational institutions, closing a loophole in a law that has protected our communities fully since 2003."

- TRANSGENDER RESOURCE CENTER OF NEW MEXICO

- **In terms of mental health, adult cisgender women report worse mental health outcomes compared to cisgender men. Mental health outcomes are worse for LGBTQ+ New Mexicans with 27% of adult trans and gender nonconforming people reporting poor mental health compared to 13.4% of cisgender adults.**
- **Mothers and parents also experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges around caregiving.**
- **Mental health outcomes for cis adolescent girls are worse compared to their male peers. Mental health outcomes are even worse for LGBTQ+ youth with 57% of LGBTQ+ and 64% of trans and gender nonconforming youth experiencing depression.**
- **Related to caregiving, 75% of New Mexicans do not have paid family leave.**

ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE JUSTICE

The climate crisis and environmental injustice are neither gender nor race neutral. It is critical to adopt an intersectional feminist lens around climate and environment as both disproportionately impact trans and gender nonconforming people, Indigenous, Black, and other women of color, low-income people, people with disabilities, and those living in remote, disaster-prone areas.

New Mexico's climate and environment are shaped by our history of nuclear colonization as a "nuclear sacrifice zone," our status as the nation's second-largest oil and gas producer, and as a desert state on the front lines of climate catastrophe.

- **Uranium exposure and contamination from mines connected to the nuclear industry disproportionately impact Native American communities. Data indicates that 26% of Navajo women had "concentrations of uranium that exceeded levels found in the highest 5% of the U.S. population" and some infants were born with uranium levels in their urine greater than 95% of U.S. adults.**
- **In terms of climate, all 33 of New Mexico's counties are experiencing drought, our state is the "second-fastest-warming state in the nation," and is predicted to see doubled rates of heat-related illness deaths by 2030 based on forecasted temperatures.**
- **Pregnant people exposed to high temperatures are more likely to experience miscarriages, preterm birth, underweight or stillborn babies, and preeclampsia and eclampsia.**
- **There is evidence that extreme weather and climate events, such as fires and heat waves, increase rates of sexual and gender-based violence.**

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

New Mexico is a national leader in descriptive representation of female and Hispanic people and is one of the few states in the country to have equal representation of women in the state legislature. In terms of participation, New Mexico passed the 2023 Voting Rights Act, legislation that will expand voter protections and access.

- **New Mexican women were slightly more likely than New Mexican men to vote in 2020, with 57.4% of men and 59.2% of women voting. However, a gap can be observed by race and ethnicity with 72.7% of non-Hispanic White people voting in New Mexico in 2020 compared to 45.6% of Hispanic people.**
- **Age and race patterns in voting indicate that New Mexico's electoral outcomes are largely determined by White non-Hispanic voters that are over 45 years old.**
- **New Mexico ranks fourth in the country for gender parity for elected officials.**
- **The state elects more women of color than the rest of the country and women in New Mexico currently make up 52.7% of the state legislature.**
- **The demographics of women in the state legislature nearly mirror the state with 45% White, 41% Hispanic, 8% Native American, 4% Black, and 2% Asian.**
- **New Mexico was the first state to elect an all-women delegation to the House of Representatives in 2020, all of whom were women of color, including two Native American women.**
- **In terms of women in municipal offices, New Mexico ranks 22nd in the country.**
- **In terms of LGBTQ+ representation, there is insufficient data in New Mexico to make any broad claims about political participation and representation. However, currently the state legislature has at least five LGBTQ+ elected representatives.**
- **Diverse representation of elected officials is associated with increased political knowledge and civic engagement, greater levels of government trust, and the creation of policies beneficial to marginalized communities.**

EDUCATION

The data indicates that geographic location, environment, economic opportunities, colonial legacies, and racism all deeply impact quality and access to education. While New Mexicans have worse education outcomes overall than most other states, we have also recently implemented historic policies which are having positive impacts.

- **New Mexico has become a national leader in investment in early childhood development programming and is one of the few states that has integrated state infrastructure into a formal Early Childhood Education and Care Department.**
- **With 14 of our 33 counties classified as childcare deserts and places for only half of infants and toddlers with working parents, there is a statewide shortage of early childhood education providers.**
- **New Mexico fares worse than the rest of the country in terms of subject area proficiency and rates at which various groups obtain different levels of education.**

Even though New Mexican girls fare better than boys on most measures, across grade levels and in high school graduation rates, outcomes remain worse for Native American, Black, and Hispanic girls.

- **High school graduation rates are worse for English language learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities.**
- **The Yazzie-Martinez v. The State of New Mexico case continues to advocate for education equity for disabled, low-income, English language learners, and Native American students in the face of profound educational disparities and language loss.**
- **Higher education trends for women indicate that Asian New Mexican women fare best with 53.1% having a bachelor's degree, followed by 45.1% of White women, 35.7% of Black women, 23% of Hispanic women, and 17.5% of Native American women.**
- **Higher education data from the 2024 UNM Climate Survey indicates that 33% of queer and transgender students considered leaving due to feeling isolated, unwelcome, unvalued, or having to work harder than others to be valued equally.**
- **New Mexico recently implemented policies with significant impacts on education including the 2022 New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship, which provides the most extensive tuition-free college scholarship program in the country; and, the 2021 Black Education Act aimed at anti-racist education to support Black students.**
- **Due to the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship and other policies, New Mexico now ranks 21st in the nation for higher education.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATION FOCUS AREAS

The following are the various policy recommendation focus areas related to each section of the report.
An in-depth and nuanced list of policy recommendations is available in the full-length report at the end of each section.

Economic Justice Policy Recommendations include: Address Income and Wage Disparities; Expand Government Safety Net Programs; Address Workplace Discrimination; and Ensure Access to Safe, Dignified, and Affordable Housing.

Safety Policy Recommendations include: Increase Investment to Strengthen Support and Response Services for Survivors of Violence; Invest in Gender-based Violence Prevention Programs; and Shift Investments from Punitive Measures to Rehabilitative and Evidence-based Practices to Prevent Violence.

Health Equity Policy Recommendations include: Improve Access to Perinatal Healthcare; Improve Access to Reproductive Healthcare; Improve Quality of and Access to Healthcare and Healthy Food; and Improve Access to Behavioral Health.

Environmental & Climate Policy Recommendations include: Increase Data Collection and Research Efforts in New Mexico; Advocate at the Congressional Level as well as Fund and Oversee Radiation and Toxic Waste Cleanup; and Invest in Local Energy Democracy in Communities.

Policy Recommendations for Political Participation include: Increase Voter Participation; and Improve Representation of Women and LGBTQ+ New Mexicans in Elected Office.

Policy Recommendations for Education include: Ensure Access to Early Childhood Education and Care; Improve Primary and Secondary Education Outcomes; and Improve Higher Education Outcomes.

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