



The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund

LM in Action: LM Celebrates Passage of State Ballot Measures That Advance Gender Equity

While the outcome of last month's election threatens to undermine women's fundamental rights on various fronts, voters spoke directly on the issues, thereby putting in place critical protections that advance gender equity in nine states.

Minimum Wage and Paid Time Off

This November, voters in three states approved ballot measures that will advance economic justice for women.

As a result of [Alaska's ballot measure](#) passage, the state's minimum wage will increase from \$11.73 to \$15.00 per hour in 2027, and thereafter it will be tied to inflation. Additionally, Alaska will require employers to provide employees with 40 to 56 hours of annual paid sick time, a critical protection for women and families. This time off can also be used by employees who must miss work due to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Likewise, in [Missouri](#), the state minimum wage will increase from \$12.30 to \$15.00 per hour in 2026 and then will be tied to inflation. Additionally, the state will adopt paid sick and safe time that includes protections for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Employers will be required to provide employees with 40 to 56 hours of paid sick time annually.

Finally, Nebraska voters also approved [a ballot measure](#) giving workers the right to 40 to 56 hours of paid sick time every year.

These ballot initiatives will advance gender justice. As our resource, [The State of Women's Economic Wellbeing & the Law](#) map demonstrates, women—especially women of color—are disproportionately represented in minimum wage jobs as compared with white men. Low minimum wages persistently drive economic insecurity for many women who struggle to support their families with wages that are insufficient to cover the basic cost of living. Raising minimum wages, and requiring annual adjustments based on inflation, will benefit these women and their families.

LM also advocates for paid sick and safe leave laws, which are crucial for lower-wage workers whose employers would not otherwise provide paid time off. As a leader in advancing employment protections for survivors of gender-based violence, LM was glad to see the inclusion of [paid safe leave](#) in the Missouri and Alaska laws. These provisions will allow survivors of gender-based violence to address their needs related to victimization—like attending court or medical appointments, relocating, or enrolling children in a new school—without losing their jobs or sacrificing income, at a time when financial security is of the utmost importance.

Abortion Access

Of the ten states that voted on abortion access this November, seven states passed ballot initiatives protecting abortion access: Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nevada,

and New York. In an eighth state—Florida—abortion access had majority support but fell short of the 60% threshold needed to amend the Florida constitution.

The Arizona ballot initiative has already changed the status of abortion in Arizona, which before its passage had a 15-week ban. Now, Arizonans can access abortion through fetal viability. After fetal viability, patients can access abortion when necessary to preserve their life or physical or mental health.

Prior to the passage of the Missouri initiative, that state had a total abortion ban. Although ongoing litigation will determine the impact of the initiative, the ballot measure should have the effect of making abortion legal in Missouri through fetal viability.

In other states like Colorado or Maryland, abortion was already protected by statute but is now protected by the state constitution. Here in New York, LM was proud to support [Prop 1](#). This groundbreaking amendment will enshrine access to abortion in our state constitution. It will also protect against discrimination based on ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, or sex, including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy.

Looking Forward

While the federal political landscape will be extremely hostile to gender justice starting this January, the election results show that voters in both red and blue states support abortion access and policies that uplift working families and survivors of gender-based violence. Progress can still occur over the next four years in the states. Even as we work to protect our hard-fought wins and fight the erosion of our fundamental rights at the federal level, we will also work at the state and local levels to strengthen protections for survivors of gender-based violence, workers, students, and patients seeking reproductive healthcare.