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Report shows growing disparity amid ‘economic recovery’

DENVER-- With Thanksgiving Day approaching, many Coloradans can be thankful that the Great Recession is far behind them. Indicators suggest that Colorado’s job market and economy are doing fairly well and statistics show that the state has recovered and surpassed the jobs it lost since 2007.

But while the numbers and economic forecasts look encouraging on the surface, they don’t tell the full story for most Coloradans, according to findings from the [State of Working Colorado 2015-16](#). The report reveals that a majority of Colorado workers have not enjoyed broadly shared prosperity from an economic expansion that began in 2009. The result is that many Coloradans—especially minorities, single-parent families and low-wage workers—continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Among the report’s findings:

- **Job growth in Colorado lags population growth and is concentrated in low-wage jobs.** While it’s true that the unemployment rate has declined, most of the job growth in Colorado has occurred in occupations that pay below the self-sufficiency standard. Also, to keep pace with its rapid population growth, Colorado needs to create 140,600 additional jobs.
- **Despite low unemployment, there are still significant signs of slack in the labor market.** In 2014, 81 percent of the prime working-age population in Colorado was employed – still nearly 3 percentage points lower than the pre-recession high. Meanwhile, even amid a recovering economy, too many workers are still “settling” for part-time jobs that don’t provide sufficient pay or benefits.
- **Wages continue to stagnate for most Colorado workers as productivity rises.** Apart from those on the upper end of the salary curve, very few Coloradans are really feeling the economic recovery since it officially began five years ago. In fact, the report shows that Coloradans are essentially working more for less. Productivity has grown by nearly 30 percent in Colorado since 2000 while the median wage essentially stalled over the same period of time.
- **Poverty in Colorado remains stubbornly high – especially among people of color in Colorado.** Poverty rates vary widely by gender, race and ethnicity. Single mothers account for 10.7 percent of families in Colorado, but are 42 percent of all families in poverty. The poverty rate among

white, non-Hispanics in Colorado is 8.7 percent. By contrast, the poverty rate is 21.4 percent for Latinos, 19.5 percent for blacks and 20.6 percent for American Indians.

- **People of color and women still experience huge disparities in terms of opportunity and pay.**

The white median household income in Colorado was \$67,360 compared with the Latino median income of \$44,174 and the black median income of \$41,743. Meanwhile, women earn less than men at every educational level (and the gap widens with increasingly higher levels of education). Colorado women age 25 and older earned only about 79.6 percent of men's median income. Assuming progress continues along the current trajectory, the disparity in earnings between men and women in Colorado will not close until 2057.

Published by the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, the *State of Working Colorado 2015-16* is a collection of critical data designed to look beyond broad-based economic indicators to better understand how the economy is working for all Coloradans across the income spectrum.

"This report reveals alarming and widening disparities along ethnic, cultural, social and gender lines," said Claire Levy, Executive Director of CCLP. "These trends are part of the growing crisis of income inequality that must be fixed if the economic recovery is to be real, meaningful and enduring. We hope the *State of Working Colorado* will spur a dialogue between workers, employers, policymakers and lawmakers. Ultimately, we want this report to inspire policies and ideas that bridge the gaps in the economy and help working families achieve the economic security they have earned."

The full report, including an executive summary, is available at CCLP's website at <http://cclponline.org/>

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy is a nonprofit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that engages in legislative, administrative and legal advocacy on behalf of low-income Coloradans.