



**AFFORDABILITY CHALLENGES:  
WHAT VERMONTERS ARE SAYING  
& WHAT THE DATA SAYS**

LISTENING PROJECT



In the spring of 2018, Vermont Commission on Women undertook a year-long qualitative data-gathering initiative, “the Listening Project”. The Project included various events during which VCW Commissioners and community members gathered to share and reflect on their experiences of living in Vermont, as well as a 16-question online survey. These efforts were designed to collect information and stories about challenges confronting Vermont women and their communities. With data from over 2,000 survey respondents and event participants, we are sharing the project’s results and stories to highlight the unique challenges and experiences Vermont women shared; these compelling anecdotes, combined with the recent data tell a powerful story. Here we highlight the stories respondents shared about their experiences related to affordability challenges in the state.

**The survey asked Vermonters to respond to: “What do you see as the most significant challenges facing women, overall, in your community?”, here are some answers we received:**

“Especially in regards to senior women, lack of affordable housing and transportation. Too many times, I have witnessed a senior woman who lives in senior housing lose her spouse and be forced to move because rent is no longer affordable on her own. To be forced into such a transition while grieving is horrible.”

*-Chittenden county woman between 55 and 64*

“Being able to afford to live. Most of my paycheck goes to the essentials. What little if any I have to food.”

*-Bennington county woman between 55 and 64*

“Economic challenges, cost of living is higher than what women are earning. Lack of independence and agency due to transportation issues, lack of affordable quality housing, and lack of quality job opportunities.”

*-Orange county woman between 35 and 44*

“Earning a living wage and finding decent, affordable housing. Also I believe senior women (often alone) face many more challenges Like being able to afford medication and food.”

*-Addison county woman 65 or over*

“If I had to zero in on a huge policy issue...I’d say that transportation isn’t adequate for our lives. From the fact that I had pressure to be a stay-at-home mom because my kids couldn’t do their after-school stuff without a chauffeur, to the fact that I can’t support myself on what I’m able to command in a (re-) entry level job, to the fact that my friend can’t get to the low-paid and very early hours supermarket job she has because the buses don’t run that early, transportation obstacles are shaping our choices in deciding employment, residency, even family status.”

*-Chittenden county woman between 55 and 64*

### **What the data says about affordability challenges for women in Vermont:**

- 38.8% of women in Vermont working full-time do not earn enough to meet the basic living expenses for a single individual, as defined by Vermont’s Joint Fiscal Office.<sup>i</sup>
- Over 81% of Vermont’s tipped-workers are women – the highest rate in the county and the poverty rate of the state’s female tipped workers is 13.1%.<sup>ii</sup>
- In a recent VPR-Vermont-PBS Poll, 74% of Vermonters agreed that the minimum raise the minimum wage to at least \$12.55 (33% suggested we should raise it beyond \$12.55 and 41% supported raising it to \$12.55).<sup>iii</sup>



<sup>i</sup> Change the Story, “2019 Status Report: Women, Work, and Wages in Vermont,” 2019, <https://changethestoryvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WomenWorkWages2019.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Change the Story.

<sup>iii</sup> “VPR - Vermont PBS 2020 Polls.”