

# REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

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DATE: March 24, 2021

TO: Honorable Members of the City Council

FROM: Sharon M. Tso   
Chief Legislative Analyst

Council File No. 20-1578  
Assignment No. 21-01-0077

## COVID-19 Impact on Working Women

### SUMMARY

On January 27, 2021, the City Council adopted Motion (Martinez – Price) instructing the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA), and other relevant departments to report on the pandemic’s impact on working women with respect to childcare issues, paid leave policies, and the potential long-term consequences of women leaving the workplace for an extended period. The Motion further requests an evaluation of the pandemic’s impact on women in the City’s workforce and to report with recommendations to strengthen City policies to support women in the workplace.

In response to the Motion, our Office consulted with the CSW, staff from the Civil, Human Rights, and Equity Department (CHRED), and the Personnel Department – Office of Workforce Equity. This report provides information on the pandemic’s impact on working women, and a summary of key programs intended to assist women and families as part of the American Rescue Plan, which was enacted on March 11, 2021. A memorandum from the CSW and CHRED is included as Attachment 1 and it provides additional information in response to this Motion. This report also provides an overview of recent City related initiatives to support women and families, and the promotion of gender equity, as well as recommendations regarding policies and programs that may provide additional support for women in the workplace.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council:

1. Instruct the Personnel Department, in partnership with the Commission on the Status of Women, to initiate a survey to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the City’s workforce and report to the Council on the findings.
2. Instruct the Personnel Department, in partnership with a local university, to explore the development of a Management Academy, which would be designed to increase knowledge of contracting procedures, negotiations, budgeting, program development, project management, and other skills with the goal of increasing gender equity within the City’s management classifications.

3. Instruct the City Administrative Officer and the Personnel Department to report to the Executive Employee Relations Committee regarding the post-pandemic phase of employee telecommuting that may allow for more flexible hybrid home and office work schedules.
4. Instruct the Commission on the Status of Women to present the updated “Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Los Angeles” to Council when completed.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no impact to the General Fund.

## **BACKGROUND**

### COVID-19 Impact on Working Women

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the labor force nationwide and underscores the particular challenge women face in balancing family and work responsibilities. Before the pandemic, women accounted for more than half of the nation’s workforce, reflecting their importance in the economy. A number of recent reports demonstrate that women have been significantly impacted during the economic downturn. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 2.2 million fewer women in the labor force in October 2020 than there were in October 2019. Women are highly represented in many of the hardest-hit employment sectors, such as education, hospitality and leisure, healthcare, and service industry. The closure of childcare centers and the shift to remote learning for students have also caused many mothers to make the difficult decision between working and caring for their young children. A recent survey by the U.S. Census Bureau noted that one in five women became unemployed during the pandemic due to the lack of childcare.<sup>1</sup>

### Paid Leave Policies

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health officials recommend that people who contract COVID-19 should stay home and that employers should consider implementing a telecommuting program when possible. Benefits such as sick leave and family leave can help employees follow these guidelines. However, the U.S. does not have a national standard on paid family or sick leave. Paid leave policies are determined by employers, state and local laws, or negotiated through labor contracts. Pay rates vary between employers, the reasons for needing leave, and the employment status of their workers. The lack of a national policy means some employees are forced to take unpaid leave or come to work when they are ill, which may increase the rate of COVID-19 infection. The lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts certain populations, including low-income persons, who are less likely to have access to these benefits. Lack of paid leave also has a large impact on women, who take on the bulk of health care responsibilities for their family members and may have to miss work as a result.<sup>2</sup>

On March 18, 2020, President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) in response to the spread of COVID-19. The FFCRA expanded the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) temporarily to cover leave and loss of income when an employee needs to care for children because of school and childcare closures due to COVID-19. The FMLA also created two weeks of paid sick leave for childcare and other leave related to COVID-19 and

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<sup>1</sup> “The Choices Working Mothers Make.” United States Census Bureau, May 8, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “Coronavirus Puts a Spotlight on Paid Leave Policies.” Kaiser Family Foundation, December 14, 2020.

provided tax credits related to the paid leave. The FMLA applied only to certain covered employers, such as private employers with fewer than 500 employees and governmental agencies. The law became effective on April 1, 2020 and expired in December 2020. The FMLA was recently extended through September 30, 2021 by the passage of the American Rescue Plan. However, qualifying employers are not required to, but may voluntarily choose to grant paid leave to employees for FFCRA qualifying reasons and, in return, receive payroll tax credits for such leave.

### Long Term Impacts

According to a report by the American Sociological Association, the long term impacts of the pandemic will likely result in greater inequality between men and women in occupational attainment, lifetime earnings, and economic independence.<sup>3</sup> Leaving the workplace diminishes an individual's ability to gain new knowledge and experience, establish tenure, and develop professional relationships, all of which are critical to earning promotion and an increase in pay. Additional detail regarding the pandemic's impact on working women is included in a memorandum from the CSW and CHRED (Attachment 1).

### CSW Report on the Status of Women and Girls

The CSW is an advisory board that offers recommendations to ensure that all women and girls have the opportunity for full and equal participation in the affairs of City government and to promote the general welfare and human rights of all women and girls through policy, advocacy, and education. In 2015, the CSW, in partnership with the Mayor's Office and Mount Saint Mary's University, published "The Report on the Status of Women and Girls." The goal of the report was to provide information and to serve as a touchstone for more in-depth evaluations of gender equality throughout Los Angeles that would lead to action by City officials, as well as the non-profit sector. The report has five sections and covers demographics, leadership, veterans, public safety, and education and workforce development.

In October 2020, the CSW appropriated \$15,000 to partner with a local university to update the report. The CSW reports that they will need to raise additional funds to complete this effort. The proposed work plan is to research, collect, and analyze data on the City's female population with a special emphasis on indicators concerning COVID-19. Additional information on this matter is provided in the memorandum included as Attachment 1. Our Office recommends that the CSW present the updated report to Council after completion.

### Federal Recovery Efforts

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan (Rescue Plan) of 2021 was signed by President Biden on March 11, 2021. The Rescue Plan is the latest stimulus package to be adopted by Congress during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is designed to facilitate the nation's recovery from the devastating economic and health impacts that have occurred over the last year. It follows in the wake of the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 and the approximately \$900 billion stimulus included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which was approved in December 2020. The Rescue Plan will accelerate the nation's vaccination effort, alleviate child poverty, extend benefits to the unemployed, provide direct aid to working

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<sup>3</sup> "Early Signs Indicate that COVID-19 is Exacerbating Gender Inequality in the Labor Force." Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World, American Sociological Association, 2020.

families, and ensure that state and local governments can continue to provide critical services. The Rescue Plan funds key programs to assist families and working mothers, including:

#### Individual Assistance Payments

- The Economic Impact Payment will ensure that families receive greater amounts of financial assistance during 2021, rather than waiting to claim a Recovery Rebate Credit on a tax return in 2022. Those eligible will automatically receive a payment of up to \$1,400 for individuals or \$2,800 for married couples, plus \$1,400 for each dependent. Unlike the prior rounds of Economic Impact Payments, families will get a payment for all their dependents claimed on a tax return, not just qualifying children under 17.

A taxpayer will qualify for the full amount if they have an adjusted gross income of up to \$75,000 for singles and married persons filing a separate return, up to \$112,500 for heads of household, and up to \$150,000 for married couples filing joint returns.

#### Child Care Tax Credit (CTC)

- Expands the CTC to \$3,000 per child aged 6 through 17 (\$3,600 for children under age 6) and makes the credit fully refundable in 2021. The U.S. Treasury Department will issue the credit in the form of periodic payments beginning in July 2021.

#### Child Care and Development Fund

- Provides \$39 billion in emergency funds for the Child Care Development Block Grant program (CCDBG). These funds maintain the flexibility given to States through the CARES Act and can be used to provide childcare assistance to families, and to help childcare providers cover their increased operating costs during the pandemic. This emergency relief will help stabilize the childcare market and allows States to expand childcare assistance to essential workers and working families.

#### Education Stabilization Fund

- Provides \$123 billion in emergency funds to support K-12 schools in safely re-opening, of which 20 percent must address learning loss. Other set asides include: \$1.25 billion for summer enrichment; \$1.25 billion for after school programs; and, \$3 billion for education technology.

#### Head Start

- Provides \$1 billion in emergency funding to be distributed across existing Head Start agencies according to their share of total enrolled children.

#### Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Pandemic Emergency Fund:

- Provides \$1 billion for states to provide short-term targeted aid to families in crisis. States will receive funds based on their population's share of children and portion of prior TANF expenditures dedicated to cash assistance.

## Emergency Paid Leave

- Extends the FFCRA emergency paid leave program through September 30, 2021, which provides up to two weeks of paid sick and ten weeks of family medical leave related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualifying employers are not required to, but may voluntarily choose to grant paid leave to employees for FFCRA qualifying reasons and, in return, receive payroll tax credits for such leave.

Our Office is reviewing this information with the Housing and Community Investment Department (HCID) to ensure that information is disseminated at Family Source Centers citywide.

## City Initiatives to Support Women in the Workplace

- Council Initiated Support in Response to COVID-19

A number of City initiatives have been developed to assist women and working parents during the pandemic. A series of efforts initiated by Council utilizing Coronavirus Relief Funds include the Alternative Learning Program at Department of Recreation and Parks sites citywide; Childcare Business Grant Program; Childcare Stipends; Community Care Corps training and employment program; and, the Project Safe Haven domestic violence assistance program (C.F. 20-0147-S38).

Our Office, in coordination with HCID, will also recommend under a separate report the continuation and development of new programs, including workforce training and childcare services for single parents; childcare provider grants; and, additional domestic violence response programs funded through Community Development Block Grant funds made available under the CARES Act (C.F. 20-1374). As COVID-19 vaccines become more accessible to the general population, the City must prepare for individuals who wish to re-enter the job market. Supporting the childcare industry and offering workforce training in key employment sectors are essential elements in assisting and encouraging women as they return to the workplace.

- Mayor's Office

In 2015, the Mayor issued Executive Directive No. 11, which created a system for establishing Gender Equity Plans for each City department, including the creation of Gender Equity Liaisons and a Gender Equity Coalition. The Gender Equity Plans require departments to establish baseline goals and to provide regular updates on outcomes. The goals are oriented toward three key areas: recruiting women in City leadership, recruiting women into under-represented jobs, and expanding equity in City services and programs. Additional initiatives categorized under Woman's Leadership, Education/Youth, Public Safety, and Economic Development are available for review on the Mayor's website.<sup>4</sup>

- Controller's Office

In August 2020, the Controller's Office issued a report entitled "Closing the Gap: Women's Pay and Representation at the City of Los Angeles." The report found that women City employees earned 76 percent of what men made in salary. In addition, women currently represent only 28 percent of the City's workforce, the same percentage as in 2015 and far less than similar jurisdictions in California and across the country. Please note that the total percentage of employees includes departments that have a sworn workforce, such as the Police, Fire, Harbor,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lamayor.org/GenderEquity>

and Airport Departments. When separately evaluating the civilian and sworn workforce, there is greater gender diversity (60 percent men vs. 40 percent women). The report also noted that just three percent of sworn Fire Department employees and 18 percent of sworn Police Department employees are women. The Controller's Office report recommended the development of a strategic plan to better recruit, hire, and retain women in departments across the City; the development of a working group of City officials and labor partners to develop pathways to help foster gender equity among City positions; and, requiring the largest City departments to provide annual reports on their efforts to attract more women in entry level jobs that have traditionally been held by men. The recommendations were approved, as amended, by the Council on March 16, 2021 (C.F. 20-0970).

- Personnel Department – Office of Workforce Equity

The Office of Workforce Equity (OWE) is responsible for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) compliance, which investigates complaints made through the My Voice LA initiative, as well as the development of programs and policies to increase workplace inclusion.

The OWE recently proposed the development of a Citywide Anti-Bias and Inclusion Plan to the Innovation and Performance Commission. A grant award of \$250,000 is currently pending consideration by the Public Works Committee (C.F. 21-0297). The plan seeks to transform the workplace culture and address structural inequities across City departments and in service delivery. The plan has two components: a Citywide cultural assessment, followed by tailored training, interventions, and a process for increasing equity in service delivery. OWE proposes to develop on-going engagement programs focused on mentoring, social interaction among diverse groups, and social accountability. The cultural assessment will be conducted by an outside contractor with expertise in the fields of workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion and will allow City employees to provide anonymous responses. The assessment will measure concepts, such as employees' individual perceptions of their department's inclusivity, fairness, trust in leadership, sense of belonging, and developmental opportunities.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Survey of Working Women

Our Office was instructed to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on women in the City's workforce. Based on our discussions with City staff, there are only informal reports regarding the difficulty of managing work assignments and childcare duties, as well as at-home teaching responsibilities for school aged children. There are also personal accounts of feeling disconnected from colleagues and challenges in coordinating meetings remotely and on-line. To learn more about the challenges faced by City employees, our Office recommends that the Personnel Department, with the assistance of the CSW, initiate a survey to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the City's workforce and report to the Council on the findings. This information may be used to develop future policies and programs to prepare the workforce in the event of a future catastrophic event.

### Training and Workforce Development

One of the key aspects of a successful manager is to develop a broad knowledge of City rules and practices. City programs and operations can often be complex, with various federal, state, and local laws governing implementation. Successful managers may not always have direct experience or

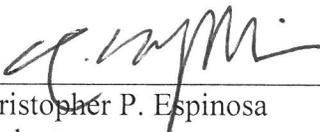
knowledge in certain matters, but they often develop a professional network and relationships with those who can assist with critical information.

One method in advancing a broad skill base for City employees is to initiate a Management Academy in which representatives from various departments and offices can participate and benefit from courses provided by professionals in various backgrounds, including real estate, finance, and construction. A wide selection of courses, combined with the camaraderie of select City employees participating in the program, should bolster the professional skills of the City's workforce. Therefore, our Office recommends that the Personnel Department, in partnership with a local university, explore the development of a Management Academy, which would be designed to increase knowledge of contracting procedures, negotiations, budgeting, program development, project management, and other skills with the goal of increasing gender equity within the City's management classifications.

Remote Work Policies / Hybrid Home and Office Work Schedules

According to a report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, flexible working hours and the ability to work remotely were identified as the most important employer-provided benefits for working parents, closely followed by paid maternity leave.<sup>5</sup> The report also notes that working parents also identified flexible working days, paid paternity leave, or on-site childcare as important benefits.

Although challenging at times, the City's shift for some administrative employees to telecommuting has been swift and largely successful. Major funding initiatives, public meetings, and other critical matters have been conducted on-line over the last year. Currently, the City's telecommuting policy is framed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also recent Motions referencing telecommuting in terms of financial savings, reduced leased costs, and environmental benefits (C.F. 20-1587, C.F. 20-1568, and 20-0584, respectively). As vaccinations become available to the general public, businesses begin to re-open, and children start returning to school, it appears that the option to telecommute may develop into a more widely used option for certain employees, such as single parents or individuals with certain health conditions. To plan for the transition of employees returning to the office, our Office recommends that the City Administrative Officer and the Personnel Department report to the Executive Employee Relations Committee regarding the post-pandemic phase of employee telecommuting, which may include the option of more flexible hybrid home and office work schedule.

  
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Christopher P. Espinosa  
Analyst

Attachment 1: Response from the Civil, Human Rights, and Equity Department and the Commission on the Status of Women

<sup>5</sup> "Working Parents, Childcare, and COVID-19." U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, July 2020.

**SUBMITTED BY:**  
**L.A. City Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department**  
**LACSW**  
**Legislative Response to**  
**Motion 20-1578 Working Women / COVID-19 Pandemic Impact**

- I. **COVID-19's Impact on Working Women:** Recent data and early indicators are showing a disproportionate economic impact on working women and women of color in particular. According to a recent publication by the Brookings Institute, COVID-19 exasperated the existing gender pay gaps and economic burdens that women shouldered pre-pandemic. Based on a 2018 analysis, Brookings found that women are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs with nearly half of all working women – 46 percent or 28 million - worked in jobs paying low wages, with median earnings of only \$10.93 per hour. The share of workers earning low wages is higher among Black women (54 percent) and Hispanic or Latina women (64 percent) than among white women (40 percent), reflecting the structural racism that has limited options in education, housing, and employment for people of color.

While COVID-19 has upended the labor market resulting in massive layoffs, the consequences are disastrous for working women and their families, largely due to their concentration in low-wage and face-to-face jobs, as well as the pre-existing disparities pre-COVID. A recently published article by CNNWire noted that the U.S. economy lost 140,000 jobs in December of 2020, and all of them held by women, with 5.4 million fewer jobs than they had in February, before the pandemic began. Meanwhile, men lost 4.4 million jobs over that same time period. Men and women started 2020 on roughly equal footing, with women holding 50.03 percent of jobs, but ended it holding 860,000 fewer jobs than their male peers. That gap is in large part due to steep job losses in three sectors: education, hospitality and retail, particularly. Moreover, among women, Latinas currently have the highest unemployment rate at 9.1 percent, followed by Black women at 8.4 percent. White women have the lowest unemployment rate at 5.7 percent.

While many higher wage jobs could transition from an in-person to remote work environment, that is not the case for the majority of low-wage jobs, such as retail sales and hospitality, two of the most common occupations among low-wage women. The unemployment rate for women jumped by more than 12 percentage points between February and April, while the rate for men increased by less than 10 percentage points. The losses for women without college degrees are even more staggering. Between March and early April, their employment rate dropped 15 percentage points compared to a drop of 11 percentage points among non-college educated men.

The National Women's Law Center reported more than 1.1 million people dropped out of the labor force in August through September – 80 percent of those individuals were women. Many of those affected found that it was impossible to continue completing paid work while also taking on a disproportionate amount of childcare and other responsibilities at home. Our childcare and school systems do not meet the needs of working mothers. One

in four working women, 15.5 million, has a child under the age of 14 at home. Some of these women work part time or have a family member on whom they can rely to provide supervision for their young and school-aged children. But more than 10 million (17 percent of all working women) rely on childcare and schools to keep their children safe while they work. These women are working at least half time and do not live with a potential caregiver at home - another adult who is either out of the labor force or working less than half time. In comparison, 12 percent of all working men are reliant on schools and childcare. Between May and August, a quarter of women working in corporate America considered quitting or reducing their working hours to improve their work-life balance, according to a report from Lean In and McKinsey & Company. Along with expectations based on gender roles, another reason women in heterosexual couples are more likely than men to leave the workforce is the fact that they typically earn less than their male partners. That means it makes more sense on a financial level for them to reduce their hours or leave the workforce entirely to pick up the growing amount of unpaid work at home.

- II. **Report on the Status of Women and Girls in the City of Los Angeles:** In 2015, the Mayor's Office in partnership with the LA City Commission on the Status of Women (LACSW), and Mount Saint Mary's University produced a first ever "*Status of Women and Girls in Los Angeles Report.*" The report has been widely used to inform the public and decision makers of the gendered impact of a variety of issues facing Angelinas. The report provided an in-depth analysis for city leaders paving the way for a number of policies to support women in the workplace.

With conditions becoming increasingly dire due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged those who are most vulnerable with women bearing the brunt of the economic burden, there is a clear need for a deeper analysis to inform COVID-19 recovery for working women. As such, the LA City Council President Nury Martinez and the LACSW under CHRED, in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Innovation proposed an update to the 2015 study to begin in 2021. We believe a study update is necessary for three primary reasons:

1. Much of the data in the current report is outdated and yet still frequently cited in City business, as such our City officials would benefit from the most current data to inform decision making.
2. A study update will allow us to measure progress across the city. Several policies and initiatives have been introduced to address the gaps that were outlined in the 2015 report. An updated 2021 report will give us an opportunity to promote the progress the city has made toward broad gender equity, as well as outline a roadmap for much needed work still needing to be addressed.
3. This is a particularly important time to take another look at the circumstances of women and girls in our city, because COVID 19 has many disproportionate impacts on women and girls, particularly women and girls of color. To emerge into equity from this crisis we need to understand these impacts, both temporary and long term.

**Proposed scope of study:** Overall the proposed 2021 report is intended to highlight three topic areas: Demographics, Economic Impact, and Public Safety. Moreover, the report will present recommendations for policy makers and city leaders to guide post COVID-19 policies and economic recovery for women and their families. Here is a brief overview for each of the topic areas:

***Topic 1: Demographics, Leadership & Health Profile:*** This section will provide an intersectional overview of who the women and girls in the City are and where women have seats at the table and where they do not in public and private leadership. This section will also explore city resources including Families First Agenda as well as COVID-19 impacts and the City's responses such as testing, vaccinations, and other immediate aid to women.

***Topic 2: Employment, Poverty & Childcare:*** This section will look at economics and the impact of COVID-19 on upward mobility for women. In line with employment we will also take a gendered look at poverty and identify pathways for wealth building and financial stability for women. Childcare is another important driver of women's ability to secure and maintain a job and we will examine how these responsibilities have shifted during COVID-19. Some of the city's initiatives such as the Angeleno cards and initiatives to support women in non-traditional fields will also be examined. Additionally, the report will consider current policies such as the expansion of paid parental leave for all working parents in the City of Los Angeles, as proposed in CF 19-0101 (Martinez-Ryu) as well as City's Childcare and Alternative Learning Facilities adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic - see: CF 20-0829 (Martinez), and the emergency public childcare centers that were proposed in CF 20-0147-S41 (Krekorian). There is a value in understanding the impact of such policies and where the City can continue to expand on poverty prevention efforts with an eye towards gender equity in order to remedy COVID-19 impact on women and families.

***Topic 3: Public Safety, Domestic Violence & Homelessness:*** This section will look at the intersectionality between domestic violence and homelessness. Unaccompanied women are the fastest growing homeless population in our City. Some of the City resources to explore in this topic area include Project Room-key participants, as well as projects devoted to homeless women (shelters, trafficking assistance, etc.).

#### **Initial Next Steps:**

1. Establish a working group of stakeholders among the CSW, Mayor's Office Innovation Team, City Council and other city departments as needed.
2. Finalize a scope of work document and proposed budget.
3. Select an academic partner to conduct the study and meet to outline scope of work and time frame.

The proposed report will serve as a blueprint to strengthen the existing policies and help to expand on additional needed initiatives to assist with economic recovery for women. The intent is to explore multi-sectional approaches to include public-private efforts and to guide the expansion of policies and programs to address some of the existing gaps for working women.

**Published Resources & References:**

- Changing workplace geographies in the COVID-19 crisis (Darja Reuschke, Alan Felstead - Sage Journals)
- Structural Discrimination In COVID-19 Workplace Protections (Ruqaiijah Yearby, Seema Mohapatra - SSRN)
- COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action (K. Kniffin, et. al. - APA PsycNet)
- The US economy lost 140,000 jobs in December. All of them were held by women. (CNN Business)
- Why has COVID-19 been especially harmful for working women? (Brookings Institute)
- COVID-19's Impact on Working Women Is An Unprecedented Disaster (Smithsonian Mag)
- <https://www.lamayor.org/GenderEquity>
- [https://www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/page/image/LACity\\_Part1\\_Demographics.pdf](https://www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/page/image/LACity_Part1_Demographics.pdf)