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## Lasting security a Mother's Day wish for many

By Adrienne Washington  
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As Mother's Day approaches each year, my son asks me what I want. I always have the same answer. "Give me something to put in the ground," like another rosebush for my garden so the gift will be everlasting.

Millions of dollars may be spent on flowers and other trinkets this weekend, but Mother's Day should be more than a commercialized Hallmark holiday.

After all, the May holiday was started by women protesting war.

Being a parent, especially a single mother, is no easy feat. In today's tight economy, it's becoming a privilege, not a choice, to be a stay-at-home mom.

"The greatest gift I can have this

Mother's Day is to see my children whole, healthy and functioning adults," said Linda Butler of Prince William County, Va., who raised herself and her two daughters out of poverty with the help of a Washington Area Women's Foundation program.

A few local policy-makers and organizations, including WAWF, are appropriately sending out an important message this weekend about parenting and providing lasting gifts for the primary caretakers of America's children.

The Children's Defense Fund, for example, is asking its supporters to call their congressional representatives to seek passage of the All Healthy Children Act. "Please join us as Mother's Day approaches to provide all moms the best Mother's Day present -- the security of knowing that their child can get the health care they need."

The organization notes that 9 million American children are uninsured and millions more are underinsured. Because every 47 seconds a child is born without health insurance, that figure computes to 1,839 babies on Mother's Day alone.

"It's like a house of cards, if [a mother] loses one piece, it all falls apart," said Nisha Patel, a child care specialist and program officer for WAWF's Stepping Stones Initiative. "If women lose child care, they lose their jobs. If they lose their jobs, they can't pay the rent. If they can't pay the rent, you lose your home," and so on.

This morning, WAWF and the Urban Institute are sponsoring their second annual briefing on the economic policies affecting low-income families led by women and the supports they need to remain in the work force. Open to the public, it will be held at the Katharine Graham Conference Center, 2100 M St. NW. More information is available at [thewomensfoundation.org](http://thewomensfoundation.org) and [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org).

The program will focus on "the lack of opportunities that keep low-income women trapped in poverty," Ms. Patel said. "And, we want the research community to have more of

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a focus on gender when considering these issues." Ms. Patel said a variety of specialists and researchers are scheduled to bring "real perspectives," from the women, such as Ms. Butler, who are most affected by these survival issues. For example, one panel will discuss how expanding child care and early education strengthens the economic security of single mothers in the District and the region.

In 2004, WAWF started the \$5 million Stepping Stones Initiative dedicated to improving the financial independence, job training, child care and health for women heading families that earn \$15,000 to \$35,000 annually. More than 5,500 women, particularly those in Wards 7 and 8 in the District and in Prince George's County, have been helped through grants to community nonprofit agencies.

Ms. Butler's life "took a 360-degree turn" after she completed a WAWF-sponsored program called Training Futures. For decades, she was a waitress earning \$12,000 annually while her children were in school. Now she earns \$50,000 as a due-diligence manager for Building Evaluations.

"Training Futures gave me all the tools that I needed; it made me feel hopeful instead of helpless, and that's a big extreme," Ms. Butler said. "Who thought a little 15-year-old girl with a baby could do that?" Ms. Butler said she dreams of buying a big house to help other single mothers and their children in need of a place to stay. She is also worried about what she views as the "epidemic proportions" of single mothers forced to leave their children without adequate care while they go to work.

"It's a lot of single mothers struggling out there. ... We need love and support from everybody," she said. "It's disheartening to be treated like second-class citizens" she said of single mothers like herself.

Though most harried single mothers "just want to have everybody leave them alone" on Mother's Day, Ms. Butler, 55, will be having "a little luncheon" with her daughters and three grandchildren.

They will celebrate Ms. Butler's achievements since her husband left them and provided no child support.

"I wanted to be an example to my girls ... and teach them to be strong and independent," she said. "How often does a mother have her children be proud of her?"

As a country and a community, we need to push for tangible tools such as safe and available day care, job training, affordable housing and decent wages for women struggling to improve their lot or simply to keep their families afloat day to day.

Mothers need gifts that last longer than the blooms from long-stemmed roses.

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