

## **Women's Community Legislative Priorities to Build a Strong Foundation for Women and Girls**

January 16, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

As advocates for women's and girls' rights, equality, justice and inclusion, the 63 undersigned organizations have come together to outline core domestic policy priorities that will help ensure that all girls and women in the United States have the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

The results of our nation's most recent elections make clear that women's concerns and priorities must be at the heart of congressional action in the year ahead. We witnessed record numbers of women running for -- and winning -- elected office. We also saw record numbers of women marching, volunteering, voting and campaigning. Women helped elect candidates who will protect and improve the health and economic security of women and families, fight violence, and affirm women's autonomy in making decisions about their reproductive health care.

**At this critical moment for our nation, we urge the 116th U.S. Congress to prioritize legislation that directly addresses women's needs and concerns regarding equal pay and workplace fairness, violence prevention, health care and reproductive rights, and equity, safety and opportunity for marginalized people and communities.** The legislative priorities we outline here enjoy broad public support, and are directly responsive to the issues that drove voter turnout and decision-making in the 2018 election.<sup>i</sup> While additional legislative action is supported by our organizations and some signatories have not taken a position on one or more bill listed here, all of the undersigned are united in our support for women's equality, safety, and opportunity. The priorities we outline here highlight legislative steps that would have an immediate positive impact on the lives of women and girls across the country while also laying a strong foundation for future legislative actions that enable all women, girls and families to thrive.

Perhaps most importantly, these priorities are intentionally inclusive of the needs, concerns, and priorities of women whose experiences are too often disregarded or relegated to the margins of policy discussions: women of color, immigrant women, women with disabilities, women who identify as queer or transgender, women who are paid low wages and afforded few or no workplace protections, and women whose access to health care and reproductive health services are in jeopardy. Across a broad range of economic, health, safety, and other policy concerns, negative outcomes are frequently exacerbated for women who also experience the compounding impact of race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, gender expression, or other dimensions of their identity. When the needs of women and girls -- particularly those needs most important to communities of color and immigrant communities -- are an afterthought, justice is denied and the ability to create effective change is undermined.

Women's success through the generations has been the nation's success. When women -- in all of our rich diversity -- are able to live and thrive with equal opportunity and dignity, our entire

society benefits. When we invest in women, girls and families, the positive impacts ripple through our communities and our economy. We invite your leadership and support to build this strong foundation for women and girls, and look forward to partnering with the 116th Congress to advance the following:

### **Equal Pay and Workplace Fairness**

Despite significant advances in women's workforce participation, many of America's workplace policies, standards, and practices have not changed with the times. The gender and race pay gaps continue to cost women and their families hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime – funds that could fuel their ability to make ends meet, build better lives for themselves and their families, and stimulate the country's economic growth. Women continue to experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace based on gender, race, disability and age, and millions of women in the United States, because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, still live without fundamental protections of their right to work and support their families. Women struggling to honor both their duties in the workplace and as caregivers to children or aging relatives at home often pay a particularly steep price in terms of wages, promotions, and retirement security.

Legislative solutions that would address economic and workplace fairness issues that are of paramount concern to women and underlie their shared concerns about meeting medical and other family expenses, include:

- Creating new tools to help **eliminate pay disparities between men and women**, such as the **Paycheck Fairness Act** (H.R. 1869/S. 819 in the 115th Congress), the **Pay Equity for All Act** (H.R. 2418 in the 115th Congress), and the **Fair Pay Act** (H.R. 2095 in the 115th Congress).
- **Strengthening and expanding anti-discrimination and anti-harassment protections**, such as the **EMPOWER Act** (H.R. 6406/S. 2994 and S. 2988 in the 115th Congress) and other new harassment legislation addressing gaps in the law, and the **Pregnant Workers Fairness Act** (H.R. 2417/S. 1101 in the 115th Congress)
- Boosting women's paychecks through an **increase in the minimum wage**, including the tipped minimum wage, such as the **Raise the Wage Act** (H.R. 15/S. 1242 in the 115th Congress)
- **Creating a national paid family and medical leave insurance program** for at least 12 weeks of partial income for a serious medical condition, for pregnancy and childbirth recovery and bonding, to care for a seriously ill family member, and for military caregiving, such as the **Family and Medical Leave (FAMILY) Act** (H.R. 947/S. 337 in the 115th Congress)

- **Creating a national paid sick and safe day standard** that enables working people to earn at least seven job-protected paid sick days, such as the **Healthy Families Act** (H.R. 1516/S. 636 in the 115th Congress)
- **Increasing access to affordable, high quality child care** and preK options and investing in caregivers and teachers, such as the **Child Care for Working Families Act** (H.R. 3773/S. 1806 in the 115th Congress)
- **Extending working rights, financial stability, and safety to domestic workers**, such as through a **Domestic Workers Bill of Rights**
- Providing working people with more **predictability, stability, and voice in their work schedules**, such as the **Schedules That Work Act** (H.R. 2942/S. 1386 in the 115th Congress)

## Violence Prevention

Women cannot succeed and thrive until we address head-on and take action to prevent the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in this country. Women and girls of all ages, income levels, racial and ethnic communities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and religious affiliations experience shockingly high rates of family and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and human trafficking. One in three women has experienced intimate partner violence, one in five has been raped, one in six has been stalked during their lifetime, and one in four girls experiences sexual assault or abuse before age 18.<sup>ii</sup> These forms of violence have far-reaching consequences for women and families, from negative physical and mental health, to job loss, homelessness, and for too many, incarceration in juvenile and adult detention facilities.

Preventing violence in all of its forms – gun violence, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, as well as state-sanctioned violence in the form of police brutality, mass incarceration, and immigrant detention and deportation – has emerged as a top concern for women and is of particular concern among millennial women and women of color. Legislative solutions that would prevent violence and protect survivors include:

- Reauthorizing the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, which has provided critical programs and resources for responding to and preventing gender-based violence since its initial authorization in 1994, and the **Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)**, which provides funding for shelter, supportive services, hotlines, and other resources to meet the safety needs of survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence, and for individuals at risk of victimization
- Addressing the inextricable **links between gun violence and domestic violence, and between domestic violence and mass shootings**, by **improving background checks** to ensure they effectively and fairly promote public safety, and by **closing legal**

**loopholes** that currently leave survivors of domestic violence, stalking, and other intimate partner violence at increased risk of gun violence, such as by expanding the definition of “intimate partner” to include dating partners and including stalking as a form of domestic violence

- Expanding access to **comprehensive sexuality education** that covers **consent and healthy relationships**, such as the **Real Education for Healthy Youth Act** (H.R. 3602/S. 1653 in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress).
- Passing legislation to end policies and practices like racial profiling that criminalize people of color, such as the **End Racial and Religious Profiling Act (ERRPA)** (S. 411 in the 115th Congress)
- Safeguarding the rights and freedoms of immigrants, especially immigrant women and children in our communities and those who seek safety from violence, such as by passing the **DREAM Act** (S. / H.R. in the 115th Congress), and passing legislation to **counter the Trump Administration’s Muslim ban, zero tolerance/family separation policies, and changes to asylum protections**, including reversing the Department of Justice’s limitation of asylum eligibility for domestic violence survivors and the proposed “public charge” regulation should it be enacted

## **Health Care and Reproductive Rights**

Health care is key to women’s well-being and economic stability. Women need affordable, comprehensive and secure health insurance across their lifespan, and have deep concerns about medical expenses, keeping their families safe from opioids and other substance use disorders, and having access to mental health services.<sup>iii</sup> Women are also deeply concerned about maintaining their ability to make their own reproductive health decisions and having access to the full range of reproductive health care services they may need, including birth control and abortion. Such decisions affect not only women’s health but also the course of their lives and the opportunities that girls and women will have in education and employment. Unfortunately, the attacks on women’s health, especially reproductive health care, are more relentless than ever, and the enormous progress women have made is at great risk.

Legislative solutions that will protect and ensure women’s access to affordable, quality health care include:

- Strengthening and protecting the **Affordable Care Act (ACA)** -- particularly its coverage of preexisting conditions, preventive health services, and reproductive health services -- as well as **Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Title X program, and other critical safety net programs**, such as by expanding health care coverage access for immigrant women through the **HEAL for Immigrant Women and Families Act** (H.R. 2788 in the 115th Congress); increasing supports to family caregivers; and increasing access to affordable long-term services and supports (LTSS),

with a particular focus on home and community-based person-centered care (HCBS) for older adults and people with disabilities;

- Protecting women's access to the **full range of reproductive health care**, including contraception and abortion, such as through the **Women's Health Protection Act** (S. 510/H.R. 1322 in the 115th Congress) and the **EACH Woman Act** (H.R. 771 in the 115th Congress)
- Addressing maternal health disparities, such as through the **Maternal Care Access and Reducing Emergencies Act (Maternal CARE Act)** (S. 3363/H.R. 6698 in the 115th Congress), the **Maximizing Outcomes for Moms through Medicaid Improvement and Enhancement of Services (MOMMIES) Act** (S. 3494 in the 115th Congress) and the **Mothers and Offspring Mortality & Morbidity Awareness (MOMMA) Act** (S.3776/H.R. 5977 in the 115th Congress)
- Addressing women's economic concerns regarding **prescription drug and other health care costs**
- **Ensuring that government entities do not allow businesses, insurance companies, and health care providers to refuse appropriate, needed care to patients based on religious objections**

### **Equity, Safety & Opportunity for Marginalized People and Communities**

As we build the America of today and tomorrow, our economy, families and communities will be strengthened only if we incorporate principles of fairness, equality and inclusiveness that enable women of every race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, immigration status, family status, disability status, sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, and socioeconomic status to prosper. Equity, safety and opportunity for women are only possible when they are a reality for all marginalized people and communities. An intersectional gender lens should be included in every policy meant to improve all women's lives.

Legislative solutions that will advance equity, safety and opportunity for marginalized people and communities include:

- Promoting **safe, healthy and inclusive school environments** in elementary and secondary school by **addressing bullying and harassment, as well as disparities in school discipline that fuel school pushout and the school to prison pipeline for students of color and students with disabilities.**
- **Ensuring non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people** across employment, housing, credit, education, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and

other key areas of life, such as through passage of the **Equality Act** (S. 1006/H.R. 2282 in the 115th Congress)

- Protecting and strengthen voting rights, such as through the **Voting Rights Advancement Act** (S. 1419/H.R. 2978 in the 115th Congress)
- Ensuring the integrity, effectiveness, and full funding of the **2020 Census**
- Improving **core basic needs programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program as well as tax benefits that help low- and moderate-income women and families,**

In addition to advancing these legislative priorities, **Congress should intentionally incorporate an intersectional gender lens in all oversight activities.** To fully understand the impact of this Administration's executive actions on our nation, Congress must consider how those actions impact women's intersecting experiences of race and ethnicity, health and ability, economic insecurity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other critical aspects of our lived experiences. Without this assessment, appropriate and effective accountability measures simply cannot be put in place.

Congress represents all of America's people – including its 157 million women and girls-- and has a responsibility to build a more fair, just and equal nation with opportunity for all. We urge the 116th Congress to chart a path forward that opens doors, breaks down barriers, and rejects policies that undermine opportunities for women to succeed.

Sincerely,

**National Organizations:**

YWCA USA

American Association of University Women

American Civil Liberties Union

National Partnership for Women & Families

National Women's Law Center

9to5, National Association of Working Women

A Better Balance

Arte Sana

Black Women's Roundtable

Caring Across Generations

CASA

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Popular Democracy

Center for Reproductive Rights  
Equal Pay Today  
Equal Rights Advocates  
Family Values @ Work  
Feminist Majority  
Girls Inc.  
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda  
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)  
Justice for Migrant Women  
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
MomsRising  
NARAL Pro-Choice America  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Domestic Workers Alliance  
National Employment Law Project  
National Employment Lawyers Association  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Organization for Women (NOW)  
National Women's Health Network  
Oxfam America  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law  
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)  
Victim Rights Law Center  
Women's March

**State/Local Organizations:**

Arizona Coalition to End Sexual & Domestic Violence  
Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Day One  
Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence  
Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs  
KWH Law Center for Social Justice + Change  
Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault  
MS Black Women's Roundtable  
NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence  
New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence  
New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.  
New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence  
Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence  
The Southwest Women's Law Center  
Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance  
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Women Employed  
Women's Law Project  
WREN (Women's Rights and Empowerment Network)

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<sup>i</sup> See, e.g.,

<https://www.ywca.org/what-we-do/advocacy/what-women-want-2018/>;  
<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/memo-2018-midterm-elections-saw-candidates-embrace-workplace-equity-issues-and-win.pdf>; <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/07/healthcare-topped-the-economy-as-the-biggest-issue-for-voters-now-heres-why.html>;  
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/01/a-look-at-voters-views-ahead-of-the-2018-midterms/>;  
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/244367/top-issues-voters-healthcare-economy-immigration.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Finklehor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H., & Hamby, S.L. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 55(3). doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.12.026.

<sup>iii</sup> See <https://www.ywca.org/what-we-do/advocacy/what-women-want-2018/>