



YWCA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

117TH Congress – First Session

Informed by YWCA's rich 160-year history and by the expertise of our nationwide network, YWCA advocates for practical solutions that meet the needs of women, girls, and marginalized communities to advance our intersectional mission to eliminate racism and empower women. In this moment of challenge for our nation, YWCA is driving an inclusive agenda to address the underlying gender equity and racial justice tensions that are so deeply embedded in our nation. In YWCA's [YWomenVote 2020 national survey](#) and [Fall 2020 bellwether state survey](#), women articulated clear expectations for Congress to take action on the following health, economic, safety, and racial justice priorities:

- **Domestic and Sexual Violence:** Support survivors and prevent domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence (88% of women support)
- **COVID-19:** Strengthen the nonprofit sector's ability to respond to the COVID-19 crisis
- **Child Care:** Strengthen the nation's network of childcare and early learning providers and increase access to quality, affordable childcare for working families (86% of women support)
- **Appropriations:** Increase federal funding and support for housing, childcare, domestic violence, workforce development, and other community services through the annual appropriations process (88% of women support)
- **Racial Justice:** Advance equity, safety, and racial justice for women and girls of color across justice, education, health, and other systems with documented racial disparities (82% of women support)
- **Mental, Behavioral and Emotional Health:** Expand the availability of mental health services in schools and communities for women and girls who have experienced trauma (92% of women support)
- **Economic Security:** Ensure safe, fair, and inclusive workplaces that expand opportunities for women, women of color, LGBTQ+ people, and historically marginalized communities (90% of women support)

YWCA is committed to working with Congress to pass legislation on these critical issues that disproportionately affect women and girls of color and have become of greater urgency due to the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please contact **Pam Yuen, YWCA USA Director of Government Relations**, at pyuen@ywca.org or 202-559-7022 with additional questions

SAFETY FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

YWCA is the largest network of domestic and sexual violence service providers in the United States. We advocate for practical solutions to protect survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence. Today, women and girls of all ages, income levels, racial and ethnic communities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and religious affiliations continue to experience violence in the form of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and trafficking. Unfortunately, with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased significantly, as many victims are being required to stay home with their abusers. The crisis put women of color at even greater risk due to the disproportionate impact of the virus and the compounding effects of health and policing systems that were built in ways that fail them and their families. Against this backdrop, YWCA urges Congress to take action on the following issues:

- Introduce the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) within the first 100 days of the 117th Congress and reauthorize this critical bill
- Introduce the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) in the first 100 days of the 117th Congress and reauthorize this bill
- Fix and increase the cap on the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund

COVID-19 RELIEF TO STRENGTHEN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

The nonprofit sector is the backbone of our communities and continues to champion on-the-ground programs, human services, and educational activities for families across the country. Prior to the pandemic, charitable organizations collectively employed over 12.3 million individuals and served as the nation's third largest employer. Today, YWCA remains a national leader in the charitable nonprofit coalition, supporting policies that contribute to a strong civic society and culture of giving with a focus on support for women, girls, and their families.

Following the COVID-19 global pandemic, the need to strengthen the nonprofit sector's ability to respond and assist in key recovery efforts has become more critical than ever. The demand for services provided by nonprofits will continue to increase as donations and other financial services have declined or failed to keep pace. As the country begins to recover and re-open following the COVID-19 pandemic, the American people will continue to rely extensively on charitable nonprofits for important services and support.

YWCA urges Congress to move swiftly to enact bipartisan policy solutions supported by over 4,000 national, state, and local nonprofits and urgently provide relief and recovery for the nonprofit sector nationwide:

- Appropriate emergency grant funding through existing federal funding streams
- Extend and expand the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) by enabling additional funding with full loan forgiveness for all nonprofits and oppose any drop in gross revenue requirements
- Allocate at least \$50 billion to stabilize the childcare sector and an additional \$15 billion through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
- Increase federal unemployment insurance reimbursement for self-insured nonprofits to 100% of costs and extend the relief through the full calendar year 2021
- Expand and extend the above-the-line or universal charitable deductions

CHILD CARE

Childcare and early learning programs are essential for working women and our nation's economic future. Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, women across all ages, income levels, and racial identities expressed deep concerns about access to high-quality and affordable child care. Today, the onset of COVID-19 has exposed intersecting public health, economic, and racial justice inequities in the childcare system, and exacerbated barriers to women's economic participation as well as inequities for women and families of color. As a result, women have endured the brunt of the pandemic, which triggered an economic "[Shecession](#)" that has displaced a disproportionate number of women and women of color out of the workforce.

Steps taken now to address our nation's childcare crisis will ensure that businesses can re-open, parents can return to work, and our nation's economy can recover. Without a significant infusion of financial support for childcare providers, it is estimated that 4.5 million lost childcare slots will be lost, translating into the elimination of approximately half the country's childcare capacity. Additionally, childcare workers—93% of whom are women and disproportionately women of color—will lose their jobs or have to permanently close their childcare businesses.

YWCA urges swift Congressional action to stabilize the childcare and early learning sector that ensures an equitable, sustainable childcare infrastructure that meets the needs of all women, families, and childcare providers. Guided by the on-the-ground experience and voices of providers, we urge Congress to:

- Pass the Child Care for Working Families Act to ensure accessible, quality, and affordable child care for all
- Increase access to living wages and skills-based training for childcare providers and educators
- Make additional investments in the childcare sector via the appropriations process

FEDERAL BUDGET/APPROPRIATIONS

YWCA is on the front lines of communities, strengthening the pillars of economic security for women and families and meeting their needs in moments of crisis. Every day, we see first-hand the critical difference that federal funding for housing, childcare, domestic violence, workforce development, and other services makes in communities served by YWCAs. Today, federal grants and funding remain a large area of financial support for YWCA programs and services across the country that impact the health, safety, and economic well-being of YWCA clients.

Faced with increased demand for services caused by COVID-19, YWCA urges Congress in the FY22 Appropriations process to increase federal funding and support for programs and services that:

- Support survivors and prevent gender-based violence, through the:
 - Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), particularly VAWA's Transitional Housing program
 - Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)
- Stabilize the childcare sector, through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
- Increase access to emergency and transitional housing, through the:
 - Emergency Solutions Grant
 - Continuum of Care Program

- Expand the availability of workforce training, particularly programs that increase women’s access to high-skill, high-wage jobs non-traditional to their gender
- Meet the behavioral and mental health of women, girls, and communities through trauma response training and community-based services

RACIAL JUSTICE

YWCA is committed to ensuring that everyone is afforded an equal opportunity and equal protection under the law. Following the nation-wide protests that swept across the country in 2020, YWCA USA released [*We Still Deserve Safety: Renewing the Call to End the Criminalization of Women and Girls of Color*](#). This three-year media review painted a disturbing picture of the racial profiling, violence, and criminalization that women and girls of color face. While 2020 underscored inequities in the justice system, racial inequities are also embedded in the laws, policies, and practices of our nation’s education, public health, and other systems of government.

The unique experiences of women and girls of color underscore the importance of expedited action by policymakers at all levels to implement and advance racial justice and safety. It is imperative that reform efforts expand gendered narratives to recognize and address the racialized violence that women and girls of color continue to experience. YWCA urges bold Congressional action to advance racial justice by:

- Passing legislation that addresses racism as a public health crisis and marshals resources across sectors to promote health and well-being in communities of color
- Passing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act and taking additional measures to enact laws that safeguard people of color from police violence and increase police accountability
- Eliminating racial and religious disparities in policing through passage of the End Racial and Religious Profiling Act
- Eliminating school discipline disparities, enhancing school climate, and protecting the rights of all students through the Counseling Not Criminalization Act and the Ending PUSHOUT Act

MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Researchers have found that exposure to multiple childhood traumas such as sexual abuse, emotional neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse among household members, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (“ACEs”) have far-reaching implications for health, education, and life outcomes. Long-term negative physical and emotional health outcomes from ACEs include heart disease, cancer and depression, and as well as difficulties with educational attainment, resulting in poor school performance, lower GPAs, higher numbers of school absences, decreased reading abilities and increased numbers of suspensions, expulsions and dropouts. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 60% of American children had been exposed to violence, crime or abuse in their homes, schools and communities, and 40% of American children were direct victims of two or more violent acts and one in 10 were victims of violence five or more times.

Against this backdrop, the onset and prolonged duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, interruptions in schooling, and the significant financial stress that many families face, have exacerbated mental, behavioral, and emotional health struggles. YWCA is particularly concerned about the impact of stress and trauma on children and young adults, especially those in low-income families and communities of color. According to the [*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*](#), mental-health-related emergency room visits among children between the ages of 5 and 11 spiked by 24 percent since March 2020. A 31

percent spike in mental-health-related emergency room visits among those between 12 and 17 years old were also experienced when compared with the same period last year.

To address these critical issues, YWCA urges Congress to take immediate action to:

- Strengthen and pass the National ACERT Grant Program Authorization Act
- Increase resources and guidance to educators, health practitioners, and other community service providers who are positioned to identify mental health, social-emotional, and behavioral health problems, to promote well-being, and to communicate directly with parents and families about the resources available to them

SAFE, FAIR, AND INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

Women are the primary source of financial support for many families and bear significant caretaking responsibilities at home. At YWCA, we believe no one should have to choose between their livelihoods and their health, their family, or their safety. Yet as a result of their dual roles as caregivers and primary breadwinners, many women in the workforce, particularly women of color, are often forced to choose between their family's economic security and their health when they or their loved ones need care. Moreover, women continue to face the economic barriers of pay inequity, sexual harassment, and discrimination.

The intersecting public health, economic, and racial justice crises have both revealed and exacerbated a depth of racial and gender inequity that has long existed in our nation with disproportionate impacts on women, women of color, and their families. YWCA urges immediate Congressional action to:

- Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act to work towards equal pay for equal work and pass legislation prohibiting the use of salary history in job interviews and negotiations
- Enact non-discrimination laws, such as the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and Equality Act
- Prohibit sexual harassment by passing the BE HEARD in the Workplace Act and EMPOWER Act
- Codify paid leave, paid sick, and safe leave laws through the passage of the FAMILY Act and Healthy Families Act