

March 29, 2012

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

The National Women's Law Center expresses its strong support for the Rebuild America Act and thanks you for your leadership in developing this comprehensive measure. The Act would promote broadly shared prosperity, expanding opportunities and improving economic security for women and their families. It would make investments the nation needs, now and for the future, and finance them in a fair and fiscally responsible way.

We particularly want to thank you for a number of provisions that are especially important to women and their families.

The Rebuild America Act recognizes that a full economic recovery will require more jobs and better jobs for women and men. It provides funding to help states and localities hire teachers and other workers providing public services; this is especially crucial for women, who have lost nearly 70 percent of the 584,000 public sector jobs cut since the recovery began in June 2009. The Act also would invest in boosting employment in manufacturing and infrastructure, and would expand access to quality job training; it will be equally important to ensure that job training programs are held accountable for reaching underrepresented populations, including women.

Women represent nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers and workers in tipped occupations, for whom the minimum cash wage is just \$2.13 an hour. A woman working full time, year round at the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 earns just \$14,500 – more than \$3,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. By raising the minimum wage to \$9.80 per hour, the Rebuild America Act would boost a minimum wage worker's annual earnings by \$5,100 per year, enough to pull a family of three out of poverty. In addition, the Act would index the minimum wage for inflation and raise the tipped wage to 70 percent of the federal minimum wage. These improvements are key steps towards economic security and fair pay for millions of women.

Many parents struggle to pay for the child care they need to get a job and be productive at work while their children receive the high-quality early learning they need to succeed in school. The Act would provide significant new funding to help states improve the quality of child care, including initiatives to ensure the safety of child care facilities and enhance the knowledge and skills of the child care workforce. It also would provide assistance to help families pay for high-quality child care programs and increase the supply of these programs in low-income

communities. In addition, it would provide resources to renovate early education and care facilities and provide additional jobs for teachers in state and local early childhood programs.

Millions of workers, including a large majority of those in low-wage jobs, are not entitled to a single paid sick day. The Rebuild America Act would enable workers to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days a year to use if they get sick, face domestic violence, or need to care for a sick child or aged parent.

Achieving retirement security is particularly challenging for women, who typically have lower lifetime earnings than men and have to stretch their smaller resources over a longer lifespan. Women rely more on income from Social Security than men do, so the Act's improvements in Social Security benefits are especially important to them. The Act also would strengthen Social Security's financing for decades to come by phasing out the cap on income subject to Social Security payroll taxes.

The Center also supports the steps the Act would take to restore fairness to the tax code and balance to fiscal policy. Women are particularly threatened by one-sided budget measures that put the burden of deficit reduction on the spending side of the budget because women disproportionately rely on federal programs to protect their health, obtain quality child care and higher education, and meet their families' basic needs. The Rebuild America Act would promote a more equitable tax system and raise needed revenues from those with the greatest ability to pay by ensuring that millionaires pay their fair share of taxes, closing the "carried interest" tax loophole for private investment fund managers, placing a small tax on trading in financial securities, ending tax breaks for corporations that ship jobs and profits overseas, and other measures.

The Center appreciates your leadership and looks forward to continuing to work with you to advance this bold agenda to Rebuild America.

Sincerely,



Emily Martin
Vice President and
General Counsel



Joan Entmacher
Vice President,
Family Economic Security



Helen Blank
Director of Leadership and
Public Policy