

December 15, 2020

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

Thank you for taking an aggressive stance in your administration's planned response to the public health and economic crisis we are facing as a nation. We also appreciate that the COVID response team will prioritize racial equity under the leadership of Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith. We strongly believe that centering race within the COVID response is essential to building back better from the pandemic.

Women, disproportionately Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women, are on the front lines of responding to COVID-19 – as health care workers, child care providers, grocery clerks, and other essential workers sustaining us through this pandemic. And yet, women are shouldering the brunt of the pain from our nation's inadequate response. During this crisis, we are more likely to lose our jobs, more likely to be doing unpaid care work at home, and more likely to be pushed out of the labor force altogether.

As a result, women are coming home to empty pantries, falling behind on their rent or mortgage and struggling to meet their own health care needs. While women and girls, disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and Latinx, are the first to lose their schooling and jobs when a crisis starts, they will be the last to return—if ever—to school or income-generating opportunities when the crisis abates.

The fact that women of color experience greater gaps in income and wealth, are more likely to work in poorly-paid jobs, and already suffer health inequities means that women of color and their families face greater risk of economic distress, unemployment, and poor health outcomes. For example, Black women are nearly twice as likely as white men to say that they have either been laid off, furloughed, or had their hours and/or pay reduced because of the pandemic. According to the latest Jobs Report, 37% of unemployed women have been out of work for longer than six months, and for AAPI women, that number jumps to a startling 45%. Furthermore, Native and Indigenous communities who already grapple with terrifying health inequities and under-resourced health systems are at high risk of life-threatening complications from coronavirus. Data coming out of various states shows that Black and Latinx people are disproportionately contracting and dying of COVID-19, largely as a result of continued patterns of structural inequality and institutionalized racism placing communities at higher risk. Additionally, language barriers and lack of cultural competency will prevent many individuals, particularly people of color and LGBTQ+ people, from critical information and treatment.¹ While the virus doesn't discriminate, its impacts reflect and amplify this country's disgraceful history of racism, misogyny, and xenophobia.

¹ [14 Black Reproductive Justice Organizations Sign-On to Urge Congress to Pass the HEROES Act \(blackrj.org\)](https://blackrj.org).

One thing is clear: the relief that has been proposed by Congress is a fraction of what is needed, and for many women, it is coming far too late. When women, particularly women of color, struggle and are made to suffer it ultimately impacts and destabilizes whole families and communities.

A top legislative priority of the Biden-Harris administration must be a COVID relief package that puts Black and Brown women, including immigrant women, at the center of our recovery from both the virus and the economic crisis in its wake. The Biden-Harris administration must work with Congress to immediately pass relief that women and girls across the nation and the world need to survive the current pandemic, to rebuild our dramatically weakened societal structures, communities, and economy, and to be able to thrive on the other side. The incoming administration must resist pressure to succumb to an austerity approach to spending, which has historically shortchanged women and people of color even as Republicans have deficit-financed trillions in tax cuts primarily benefiting millionaires and corporations. There is a much greater risk in providing too little relief than too much.

The undersigned organizations, therefore, demand that COVID-19 responses:

- 1. Put women and their families ahead of corporations and ensure women have workplace, health, and other critical protections they need.**

Women are the vast majority of the frontline workers most at risk right now. Women make up 70% of the global health workforce, and in the U.S., comprise 75% of hospital workers, 93% of child care workers, 90% of people helping in private homes, and 71% of cashiers and retail people in grocery stores.²

The incoming Administration should:

- **ENSURE CRITICAL WORKPLACE RIGHTS AND SUPPORTS:**
 - Provide personal protective equipment and issue and enforce an occupational safety and health standard that requires employers to develop and implement protocols including: air filtration, social-distancing, mask-wearing, handwashing protocols, and outbreak and exposure reporting that protect front line workers such as nurses, grocery store workers, farmworkers, home care and child care workers, shelter and crisis services providers, and delivery service workers.
 - Reject efforts to provide businesses with immunity from coronavirus-related lawsuits – including those based on negligence, failure to comply with workplace health and safety standards, and workplace civil rights violations -- at the expense of working people and the public.
 - Extend the availability of emergency paid sick days and paid family leave, now set to expire at the end of 2020, including closing all loopholes, expanding these

² NWLC Report, *When Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs*, April 2020, https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Women-in-Low-Paid-Jobs-report_pp04-FINAL-4.2.pdf

- programs to include recovering from or caring for someone with COVID-19 and safe leave for survivors, and extending the sunset date until the end of 2021.
- Extend filing deadlines so that workers do not lose their window to file claims for wage and hour, labor violations, or discrimination, including harassment and retaliation, because of the pandemic.
 - Provide funding for robust enforcement of workplace and civil rights protections including the Fair Labor Standards Act, National Labor Relations Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Equal Pay Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.
 - Pass the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and guarantee a right to reasonable accommodation for pregnant workers unless it imposes an undue hardship on the employer, allowing pregnant workers to stay healthy and economically secure.
 - Protect and expand the rights to form, join, and actively participate in unions and otherwise exercise fundamental labor rights, including the right to a workplace free from violence and harassment.
 - Gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour and phase out exclusions so that everyone—including tipped workers, people with disabilities, and young workers—is entitled to the full minimum wage from their employer, before tips.
- ENSURE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE, EQUITABLE, AND AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE AND BROAD AVAILABILITY OF COVID-19 TESTING AND TREATMENT, AND ADDRESS RACIAL INEQUITIES IN CARE:
 - Expand opportunities for health coverage, including establishing a special enrollment period and funds for marketplace outreach and enrollment efforts.
 - Guarantee COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination with no cost-sharing for all Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, TRICARE, and Veterans Affairs beneficiaries diagnosed with or presumed to have COVID-19 during the emergency period.
 - Ensure that uninsured low-income people, including immigrants regardless of status, in all states can receive COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines for COVID-19 through Emergency Medicaid, as well as ensure more robust funding for community health centers.
 - Strengthen Medicaid by increasing funding for Medicaid and home and community-based services to ensure older people and people with disabilities can remain in their homes and communities and strengthen job quality of the workforce.
 - Expand access to equitable telehealth and end discrimination in coverage of telemedicine services against people without broadband access, guaranteeing telephonic access to care, along with translation services that make such access meaningful for people with limited English proficiency.
 - Mandate extension of Medicaid coverage to at least one year postpartum; change pregnancy to a qualifying life event to trigger a special enrollment period (SEP); ensure a COVID-19 vaccine and treatment is safe for pregnant and

lactating people; and increase access to pre- and postnatal mental health services (e.g. through no cost-sharing for pregnancy-related mental health care and mandating insurance carriers accept all mental health providers at in-network rate).

- Address the need for culturally competent primary and preventive healthcare. In particular, COVID-19 “hotspots” have emerged in many rural counties with significant farmworker populations, underscoring the importance of robust funding for rural health centers. These local providers should detect, prevent, and diagnose COVID-19, as well as administer vaccines, and must have expertise on the unique occupational hazards faced by farmworkers.
- Recognize that reproductive health care, including contraception and abortion, is essential health care, and take affirmative steps to protect and expand access in the U.S. and around the world. This includes providing comprehensive funding for reproductive health care and supporting the health care providers who deliver it issuing guidance to lift the FDA’s in-person dispensing requirement for mifepristone for the duration of the public health emergency, consistent with similar directives and waivers issued to reduce risk of COVID-19, as well as initiating a full FDA review of restrictions on mifepristone; championing the Women’s Health Protection Act; eliminating restrictions on insurance coverage of abortion; championing the EACH Woman Act; protecting doctors and other health care workers from discrimination because of the health care they provide; championing the Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights Act; and restoring funding for UNFPA.
- Provide at least \$20 billion in emergency COVID funding for programs funded through the International Affairs Budget, including at least \$11 billion for bilateral global health programs and the multilateral response to support a holistic global response to COVID-19 and advance the health and well-being of women and families worldwide.

2. **Get relief to women and their families NOW.**

Even before the pandemic, women were more likely to be more economically insecure than men at *every stage* of life, with women of color experiencing larger income and wealth disparities. And women who are homeless, LGBTQ, immigrants, living with HIV/AIDS, survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse or sexual assault, incarcerated, or have a disability will struggle more in a crisis.

COVID-19 has further exacerbated these disparities as women dominate in the sectors being hardest hit by layoffs – child care, retail, restaurants, agriculture, informal, domestic work, and more. Women and girls around the world are also continuing to bear the brunt of caregiving and domestic work at home as families isolate themselves, some while trying to telework or continue to work outside the home in essential services. Yet the lack of congressional action has put our child care system in crisis, with many providers struggling to stay afloat to serve frontline workers and others permanently

shuttering in ways that will undermine parents', and especially mothers', ability to participate in the economic recovery.

We need income and in-kind support to families now to mitigate widespread economic hardship and stabilize the global economy.

The incoming Administration should:

- **HELP FAMILIES MEET BASIC NEEDS:**
 - Provide at least \$50 billion in stabilization funding for the child care sector, consistent with the Child Care Is Essential Act which passed the House on a bipartisan basis in July; an additional \$7 billion in funding through the traditional Child Care and Development Block Grant program, and increased support for Head Start, with a set aside for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start which is often the only existing childcare and development option available to rural farmworker families. High-quality, affordable child care includes living wages and a path to a union for child care providers.
 - Increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other nutrition assistance programs, as well as program flexibilities to help families put food on their table during the pandemic, increase the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 per month, and provide administrative funding to states to help with the increased need for help.
 - Increase housing assistance comprised of \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance, a universal eviction moratorium, \$75 billion in mortgage assistance, and \$11.5 billion in homelessness assistance.
 - Expand resources for rapid rehousing and addressing shelter needs; provide additional assistance to prevent homelessness, especially for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families; and equip landlords to respond responsibly.
 - Restore the expanded Unemployment Insurance benefits that expired at the end of July, reinstate expanded weeks for the more than 12 million workers who are at risk for losing UI benefits at the end of 2020, and ensure such benefits do not turn off until economic conditions improve.
 - Make underlying structural reforms to strengthen unemployment protections so that benefits reach more people, are more adequate, and are responsive to economic indicators, not arbitrary deadlines. Establish a jobseeker's allowance for workers without the employment history to qualify for traditional UI.
 - Provide income supports such as additional Economic Impact Payments, extensions to the Payroll Protection Program, and temporary expansions to the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit and Employee Retention Tax Credit.
 - Eliminate asset limits and work requirements for means-tested programs including SNAP, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and other supports.

- **ENSURE WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE SAFE:**
 - Invest in supports for survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence both in the United States and globally, who are experiencing increased danger during this period of stay-at-home orders; This includes: providing \$100 million in emergency funding for the Sexual Assault Services Program, \$225 million in emergency VAWA funding, \$100 million for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, \$100 million for HUD Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus, including increasing targeted funding to community-based organizations focused on addressing the disproportionate impact of both COVID-19 and the economic crisis on racial and ethnic minority communities by providing culturally specific services and support to women and youth of color who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; and prioritizing global non-carceral programs intended to prevent, mitigate, and address gender-based violence, including in humanitarian crises.
 - Ensure clear and uniform guidance such that: immigrant survivors of violence are protected from immigration enforcement when they seek help, survivors are eligible and able to access unemployment assistance, and survivors maintain access to courts and other legal responses to keep them safe.
 - Release and decarcerate individuals in jails, prisons, youth correctional facilities, and detention centers who do not pose a public safety risk, such as families held by ICE, pregnant women, elderly people, those housed in pre-trial detention, those held on technical parole or probation violations, or those who are nearing their release date and provide guidance to states on releasing people from prisons, jails, and detention centers.

3. Stabilize state and local governments and the services and jobs they support.

Women, particularly women of color, comprise a majority of many public sector jobs, including teachers and school support staff who are pillars in our communities. More relief to states and localities is needed to ensure they have the tools to provide health coverage, education, and essential services and to prevent layoffs.

The incoming Administration should:

- **ENSURE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR STATES AND LOCALITIES AND THE FRONTLINE NON-PROFITS THEY PARTNER WITH:**
 - Provide at least \$1 trillion in state and local fiscal relief, specifically providing flexibility in using these funds to address both needs directly related to the coronavirus pandemic and the evolving economic crisis, so that state and local budget shortfalls do not precipitate service cuts and loss of (primarily women’s) jobs.
 - Further the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP), equipping states to combat this public health crisis and support the workers – many of them women – who are on the frontlines.

- Ensure that non-governmental human service organizations that partner with state and local governments have the financial resources and emergency equipment needed to continue operating domestic violence programs, transitional housing and shelter programs, rape crisis centers, legal services, and emergency food programs.
- **INVEST IN SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH:**
 - Invest at least \$175 billion in our education systems to support educators, staff, students, and families.
 - Increase capacity for educators to respond to trauma affecting girls and femmes of color, particularly those who identify as Black, Indigenous, and Latinx, using culturally competent and gender-responsive strategies.
 - Invest in the development of robust alternatives to exclusionary discipline, which disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth.
 - Expand services and attention to girls and gender-expansive young folks with disabilities to meet the unique and specific challenges to accessing education programming and other services connected to school attendance.
 - Provide increased technological support for students in K-12 who struggle with access to internet and broadband services and provide laptop/tablets for at home and virtual learning; ensure support for K-12 students who are limited-English proficient and are in English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs; provide translated materials to parents when necessary with lists of resources to access support.
 - Improve access to mental health and wellness support for children in underserved communities, work to eliminate the stigma of seeking treatment, and ensure the presence of mental health professional in schools to address trauma and other mental health needs.
 - Suspend all standardized testing to enable schools to prioritize social-emotional learning and meeting the needs of students.
 - Extend monthly payment relief for federal student loan borrowers for the duration of this crisis—inclusive of borrowers with commercially held federal loans, such as Perkins and FFEL loans, and ensure that pauses on repayment count towards Public Service Loan Forgiveness and other repayment plans eligible for forgiveness.

4. Advance Equity: center and lift up those most harmed by COVID-19

This outbreak does not ignore racial, ethnic and gender disparities—and neither should our response. Throughout the Biden-Harris administration response to the pandemic, we must ensure that the most impacted communities have a meaningful seat at the table: informing our understanding of the crisis, shaping our interventions, and building our evaluations.

The incoming Administration should:

- **ADOPT A PROCESS THAT WILL SET EQUITY AS AN AFFIRMATIVE GOAL IN ALL RECOVERY PROGRAMS:**
 - Ensure all COVID-19 relief, resources, and benefits are available to everyone, with a focus on dismantling barriers to access for Black, Brown, and immigrant communities, regardless of status. This includes providing access to testing, treatment, and vaccinations; federal funding for in-language resources and disaggregated data collection on AAPI communities; and eligibility for individuals to receive stimulus checks, Emergency Medicaid, and Unemployment Insurance—regardless of immigration status.
 - Mandate data collection on racial disparities; track data on how relief funds are spent to ensure transparency and accountability; and assess the impact of recovery efforts and relief funds on racial and gender equity.
 - Take steps to specifically address the needs of historically marginalized groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community, older women, adolescent girls, Indigenous women, and women living with disabilities, both domestically and globally, in measures to address this crisis.
- **DO NO HARM: SUSPEND HARMFUL ACTIONS THAT EXACERBATE HARDSHIP AND INEQUALITY:**
 - Suspend harmful rules and abandon harmful rulemakings that strip people of access to civil rights and core basic needs.
 - Prohibit immigration enforcement at hospitals, clinics, and other sensitive locations such as food distribution sites and emergency shelters.
 - Prevent the removal of immigrant survivors seeking protections under VAWA or the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and ensure timely access to work authorization and deferred action while seeking immigration relief.
 - Ensure that there is a thorough investigation of medical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect inflicted on women at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities, including privately run detention facilities; hold the private detention facilities, DHS, ICE, CBP and its employees and subcontractors wholly accountable.
 - Reject efforts by anti-abortion policymakers across the country and in Congress to shut down abortion access, using the pandemic as a cover to do so. At a time when people’s reproductive health care needs will likely increase, and our public safety nets are already being undermined by disastrous federal policies, federal and state governments should be eliminating barriers to accessing health care, not creating new ones.

Our rights are not a bargaining chip. Our health and livelihoods don’t come second to corporations. Given the interconnected nature of our world, we cannot hope to eliminate this threat anywhere unless we eliminate it everywhere. The only way forward to prosperity for our country is to center the needs of women, especially women of color. It is far riskier to not provide enough relief than to provide too much relief. Women will lead the way forward to an economy that works for all of us, and not just the privileged few.

Endorsement is an indication of solidarity within our movement and a recognition of the urgency of these policies. Endorsement does not necessarily mean that orgs have expertise in or are actively working towards each priority or policy listed.

SIGNED

We Demand More Coalition

9to5

A Better Balance

Abortion Access Front

African American Ministers In Action

All* Above All Action Fund

All-Options

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Federation of Teachers

Better Life Lab, New America

Birth In Color RVA

Black Women for Wellness

Caring Across Generations

Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities

Catholics for Choice

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Reproductive Rights

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Chicago Foundation for Women

Coalition of Labor Union Women

Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

Every Texan

Family Values @ Work

Feminist Majority Foundation

FreeFrom

Futures Without Violence

Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality

Girls for Gender Equity

Girls Inc.

Global Justice Center

Higher Heights Leadership Fund

In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda

Institute for Women's Policy Research

Interfaith Voices for Reproductive Justice (IVRJ)

Jewish Women International

Justice for Migrant Women

Legal Momentum, the Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund
Me too International
MomsRising
MS Black Women's Roundtable & Mississippi Women's Economic Security Initiative
Mujeres Latinas en Acción
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Crittenton
National Council of Jewish Women
National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)
National Organization for Women (Northern New Jersey)
National Organization for Women (California)
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Law Center
New American Leaders Action Fund
One Fair Wage Action
Oxfam America
Paid Leave for All
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Action Fund
PL+US
Power to Decide
Resilience, formerly Rape Victim Advocates
Service Employees International Union
She the People
Supermajority
The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
TIME'S UP Now
UltraViolet
United State of Women
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Vote Run Lead
Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania
Women Employed
Women's Health Specialist
Women's March
Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Women's Law Project
Women's Media Center
YWCA USA