

March 11, 2021

Submitted via email

Re: Women's Community Letter of Support for Julie Su as Deputy Secretary of Labor

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the 68 undersigned organizations committed to advancing women's equality and economic security, we write to express our strong support for Julie A. Su as Deputy Secretary of Labor.

The Deputy Secretary of Labor is the nation's second most senior official tasked with ensuring the well-being and rights of working people and advancing their employment opportunities. In this position, Ms. Su would oversee the day to day operations of the Department of Labor (DOL), and in partnership with the Secretary of Labor, direct DOL's interpretation and enforcement of a number of laws vital to women's economic security and right to be free from workplace discrimination, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act; the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA); the Family and Medical Leave Act; the Affordable Care Act's requirement of break time for nursing mothers; the executive orders prohibiting sex discrimination and other forms of discrimination by federal contractors; and a range of executive orders setting labor standards for federal contractors' employees, including on minimum wage and a right to earn paid sick days, in addition to overseeing a range of workforce training initiatives. These policies are essential to closing the gender wage gap: they remove barriers to women's employment opportunity, including sex discrimination; raise women's wages; allow women to meet caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing their employment; and ensure women's health and safety so they can continue to support their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the deep gaps in our economic and social infrastructure that have resulted from decades of underinvestment and policy choices that failed to center the needs of women, especially Black, Latina, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other women of color. These communities are bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession: as essential workers risking their lives for minimum wage and as those who have borne the devastating brunt of job losses. Women make up [more than three in four healthcare](#) workers, and are on the front lines of COVID-19 risk as a result. Women – disproportionately Black women and Latinas – also make up [more than eight in ten](#) of those working as home health aides, personal care aides, and nursing assistants. These women are among the lowest paid workers across all industries and occupations, meaning they are frequently risking their lives to care for patients while being paid poverty-level wages.

Women have borne the majority of job losses since the pandemic hit, and the repercussions of these job losses may be felt for years to come, as women navigate barriers to re-entering the workforce in an economy that has fundamentally shifted available job opportunities. At the same time, the lack of supports for caregiving during the pandemic has forced women workers out of the workforce in droves. The total number of women who have left the labor force since the start of the pandemic [reached over 2.3 million in January 2021](#), leaving women's labor force participation rate – the percent of adult women who are either working or looking for work – at 57.0%. Before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate had not been this low since 1988. Black women and Latinas continue to be hit particularly hard by the economic crisis, and much of the job loss has been borne by workers in low-paid jobs, like retail, hospitality, and child care. Especially in this moment, **women and their families deserve**

a Deputy Secretary of Labor who is devoted to advancing the rights of women workers and committed to robust enforcement of the laws that protect them. Ms. Su is such a leader.

Ms. Su has spent her entire career fighting for the rights of women workers, first as a groundbreaking civil rights attorney and currently as the Secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, leading an agency of over 11,000 employees to secure fair labor and workplace conditions for California workers and businesses. Her career demonstrates her deep understanding of the role that gender and race play in employers' exploitation of low-paid workers. In 2019, accepting the [Margaret Brent Award](#) from the ABA, [Ms. Su had this to say about her own dedication to fighting for the rights of women workers](#): "It has been the greatest privilege of my professional life to support such workers, largely women workers in industries like garment, janitorial, restaurant and domestic work, to use the law to imagine a different future."

As a civil rights attorney with Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles Ms. Su represented women workers across low-paid industries, challenging extreme and dehumanizing labor conditions. In a well-known case litigated when she was barely out of law school, Ms. Su represented more than 70 Thai workers—almost all of whom were women—who had been trafficked to the United States and kept inside a two-story apartment complex ringed with barbed wire, forced to work 18 hour days, and [paid less than a dollar per hour](#) to produce clothing. Ms. Su sued on behalf of these workers, as well as Latina garment workers working for the same company, and won, ultimately establishing new precedent to hold abusive employers accountable and winning more than \$4 million in back pay for the workers. In 1995, she co-founded Sweatshop Watch, a coalition working to end the exploitation that occurs in sweatshops. In 2001, when she was 32 years old, Ms. Su [won a MacArthur "genius" grant](#) for her work furthering workers' rights and civil rights.

In her current role, and in her time as California Labor Commissioner from 2011 through 2018, Ms. Su has expertly overseen and enforced state labor laws. Ms. Su has made combatting wage theft a top priority. For example, in 2012, one year after she came on board, the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (the Department) assessed [more than five times](#) the amount of owed minimum wages [and more than seven times](#) the amount of owed overtime pay than in 2010. For women workers, who make up [more than six in ten](#) workers in the lowest-paying jobs across the country and are typically paid less than men in the same occupations, fighting against wage theft is of utmost importance for achieving equal pay. This need is especially acute for women of color, who endure not only a gender wage gap but a racial wage gap. Furthering her equal pay work, Ms. Su was the [co-chair of the California Pay Equity Task Force](#), a group formed to assure effective implementation of California's Fair Pay Act. In addition, her experience administering the country's first statewide paid family and medical leave program will be invaluable in understanding the long-term wage effects for the record number of women who left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic.

Notably, Ms. Su also paid special attention to ensuring that workers could report wage theft free from retaliation; under her leadership, among other reforms, the Department [conducted interviews](#) with victims of wage theft offsite where they could speak more freely and [reworked](#) the Department's complaint form to ensure witnesses to retaliation could confidentially report what they had seen. This demonstrates a uniquely valuable attention to detail about what victims of workplace abuse, too often women of color, require to feel safe to come forward and fight for themselves and their co-workers. Ms. Su's knowledge about how to create safe and healthy workplaces for all workers, and especially low-

paid women workers, will be indispensable at the Department of Labor, particularly in the present moment. In addition, her experience administering the country's first statewide paid family and medical leave program will be invaluable in understanding the long-term wage effects for the record number of women who left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic.

At this moment of dire need for women workers across the United States, Julie Su will provide thoughtful and time-tested leadership to the DOL. We offer strong support for the nomination of Julie Su and urge you to confirm her quickly.

Sincerely,

National Women's Law Center

9to5

A Better Balance

AFL-CIO

African American Ministers In Action

All* Above All Action Fund

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Federation of Teachers

American Psychiatric Association Women's Caucus

Asian American Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance - APALA

Building Pathways

Center for Disability Rights

Center for Parental Leave Leadership

Centro Legal de la Raza

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)

CLUW - Philly

Colorado Fiscal Institute

Equal Rights Advocates
Family Forward Oregon
Feminist Majority Foundation
Futures Without Violence
Garment Worker Center
Gender Justice
Good Jobs First
Institute for Women's Policy Research
IUOE Local 137
Jobs With Justice
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Justice for Migrant Women
Legal Aid at Work
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights
MomsRising/MamásConPoder
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Asian American Professionals
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Jewish Women Ca
National Council of Jewish Women, Greater Long Beach & West Orange County Section
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Skills Coalition

National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues
North Carolina Justice Center
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates
One Fair Wage
Oregon Tradeswomen
Paid Leave for All
Partnership for Working Families
People's Parity Project
Public Rights Project
RAISE High Road Restaurants
Service Employees International Union
Southern California Black Worker Hub for Regional Organizing
TIME'S UP Now
Tradeswomen Inc.
United State of Women
Women's Law Project
Work Equity
YWCA USA