

April 27, 2020

**Dear Members of Congress,**

In times of crisis and in the face of great adversity, leaders must make a choice. To rise to the challenge, or shrink away from responsibility.

To leave no one behind, or settle for good enough.

To do no harm, or deepen divides and further inequities.

As COVID-19 rapidly spreads across the United States and throughout the world, threatening the lives, health, and livelihoods of millions, our elected officials are facing these very choices. The work they've done so far has been critical but is a fraction of what is needed and leaves out many of the most marginalized.

**Most notably, women and their families – who are particularly vulnerable to the devastating health and economic impacts of this pandemic – are being left behind, left out, and in some cases, actively attacked.** Across the world women predominate in frontline jobs that are powering communities during this crisis. They cannot take sick days, and day in and day out put the needs of others above their own. They are:

- Health care workers, janitors, grocery store and market cashiers, and delivery service people, child care and home care workers, and shelter advocates
- Smallholder farmers and farmworkers around the world
- Informal sector workers—making up 95 percent of the sector in some regions—such as street vendors, goods traders, and seasonal workers

Women are also overrepresented in many of the industries – including hospitality, restaurant, child care and other service sectors – that are already seeing massive job loss. Women who are undocumented are overrepresented in these categories, yet are still being left out of the key relief provisions that Congress has passed so far.

The pain extends beyond the workplace and into our personal lives. Around the world, women are caring for children whose schools and child care centers are closed, and for family members who have fallen ill or are sheltering in place. This scarcity combined with social norms that undervalue the needs of women and girls means that they eat last and eat the least, their health care needs remain unmet, and while they 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.

COVID-19 is having an even greater impact on women of color and Indigenous women. 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. Around the world, ethnic or religious minorities, migrant women, and other women who are historically and systemically marginalized face racism, discrimination and xenophobia when trying to access basic services, such as health care or support for gender-based violence. While the virus doesn't discriminate, its impacts reflect and amplify centuries of discrimination.

The undersigned organizations therefore demand that COVID-19 responses:

## **1. Put women and their families ahead of corporations, including ensuring 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 two-thirds of cashiers and retail people in grocery stores.

We need Congress to:

- **ENSURE BASIC LABOR RIGHTS:**
  - Provide personal protective equipment and protective occupational safety and health standards for 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;
  - Enact paid sick time and paid family and medical leave to protect all of us and our families – no exceptions – and ensure that these protections continue after the current crisis;
  - Ensure that families who employ personal assistance services to provide care for an adult child with a disability can access that paid family and medical leave if the caregiver is unavailable;
  - Enact employee protections to ensure no parent or caregiver experiences job loss because of lack of child care now or during re-entry after the crisis;
  - Extend EEOC filing deadlines so that workers do not lose their window to file a claim for discrimination/sexual harassment because of the pandemic;
  - Provide funding for robust enforcement of civil rights protections including Title VII, the Equal Pay Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 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 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.
  
- **ENSURE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE TO ENSURE EVERYONE'S MEDICAL NEEDS ARE MET:**
  - Expand opportunities for health coverage, including special enrollment periods and outreach and enrollment efforts, and guarantee COVID-19 testing and treatment with no cost-sharing, including for currently ineligible immigrants;
  - 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;
  - Expand and extend Medicaid coverage for pregnant and postpartum women by: providing them with accurate information on the pandemic and their rights; continuing coverage past 60 days postpartum, and increasing access to pre- and post-natal 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);

- 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, passing the Women’s Health Protection Act, eliminating restrictions on insurance coverage of abortion, passing the EACH Woman Act, protecting doctors and other health care workers from discrimination because of the health care they provide, passing the Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights Act, and restoring funding for UNFPA.

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

Women predominate in the sectors being decimated by this crisis – child care, retail, restaurants, agriculture, informal, domestic work, and more. Women 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. We’re also 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, or have a disability will struggle more in a crisis. We need income and in-kind support to families now to mitigate widespread economic hardship and stabilize the global economy. Specifically, we need Congress to:

- **HELP FAMILIES MEET BASIC NEEDS:**
  - Increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits temporarily by 15 percent, increase the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 per month, and provide administrative funding to states to help with increased need for help;
  - 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;
  - 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. The economic pain from this recession will linger long after the public health crisis has abated;
  - Eliminate asset limits 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 to help rape crisis centers transition to remote services and meet the needs of survivors; ensuring that immigrant survivors of violence are protected from immigration enforcement when they seek help; providing uniform guidance to states managing unemployment assistance to ensure eligibility and access to obtaining unemployment assistance for survivors; and maintaining access to courts and other legal responses to keep survivors safe;

- prioritizing global programs intended to prevent, mitigate, and address gender-based violence, including in humanitarian crises;
- Release individuals in jails, prisons, 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.**

More relief to states and localities is needed to ensure they have the tools to provide health coverage, education, and essential services; to maintain and protect voting rights; and to prevent layoffs. Women, and particularly women of color, comprise a majority of many public sector jobs in our communities, including teachers and school support staff. We are also in danger of losing at least half of our child care programs in the U.S. if we don't provide dedicated money to states to stabilize the childcare system. Failure to do so would make it more difficult for women and their families to return to work, undermine women-owned small businesses, and jeopardize the security of the childcare workforce, which consists primarily of women of color and immigrant women. Specifically, we need Congress to:

- ENSURE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR STATES AND LOCALITIES AND THE FRONTLINE NON-PROFITS THEY PARTNER WITH:
  - 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.
- STABILIZE THE CHILD CARE SECTOR AND ENSURE PROVIDERS HAVE THE TOOLS AND SUPPORTS THEY NEED TO PROVIDE CARE DURING THIS PANDEMIC:
  - Provide at least \$50 billion to the Child and Development Block Grant to help provide essential duty pay to child care workers in programs that remain open during the crisis and to pay substitutes; paying providers to cover ongoing operating costs while they are closed for public health reasons or open but with reduced enrollment to serve children of essential workers; purchase supplies and training to facilitate health and safety practices; Eliminate copayments or tuition for families during this public health and economic crisis while ensuring that providers are still paid; and other pressing needs;
  - Help child care providers navigate small business loan application processes and get clear guidance from the SBA to banks about lending to family child care providers.

### **4. Do No Harm. All relief efforts must include provisions that center and lift up those most harmed by COVID-19**

This outbreak is exposing the deep structural inequities that make communities that have been pushed to the margins more vulnerable to crises in good times and in bad. These structural inequities in our systems do not ignore racial, ethnic and gender disparities—and neither should our response to this pandemic. Barriers to accessing health care should be eliminated and public safety programs strengthened. Specifically, we need Congress to:

- ADOPT A PROCESS THAT WILL SET EQUITY AS AN AFFIRMATIVE GOAL IN ALL RECOVERY PROGRAMS:
  - Mandate data collection on racial disparities and address the disparities in the response to COVID-19;
  - 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;
  - 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.
  
- SUSPEND HARMFUL ACTIONS THAT ARE EXACERBATING HARDSHIP AND INEQUALITY:
  - Suspend harmful rules and abandon harmful rulemakings that strip people of access to civil rights and core basic needs and ensure immigrants can access help regardless of status, including by halting DHS and DOJ public charge rules;
  - Prohibit immigration enforcement at hospitals, clinics, and other sensitive locations such as food distribution sites and emergency shelters;
  - 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. 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

1. A Better Balance

2. Abortion Access Front
3. American Association of University Women (AAUW)
4. American Civil Liberties Union
5. American Humanist Association
6. Birth In Color RVA Virginia
7. California Asset Building Coalition
8. California National Organization for Women
9. Caring Across Generations
10. Catholics for Choice
11. Center for Reproductive Rights
12. CHANGE (Center for Health and Gender Equity)
13. Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation
14. Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
15. Closing the Women's Wealth Gap
16. Coalition of Labor Union Women
17. Community Catalyst
18. Community Change Action
19. Day One New York
20. DC Jobs With Justice
21. Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project
22. End Rape on Campus
23. Equal Rights Advocates
24. Family Values @ Work
25. Feminist Majority Foundation
26. Futures Without Violence
27. Gender Equality Law Center
28. Georgia NOW
29. Global Justice Center
30. Hollaback!
31. Human Rights Watch
32. Ibis Reproductive Health
33. If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
34. Illinois National Organization for Women
35. In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
36. Institute for Women's Policy Research
37. International Women's Health Coalition
38. Ipas
39. Justice for Migrant Women
40. Justice For Muslims Collective

41. KWH Law Center for Social Justice and Change
42. Legal Aid at Work
43. Legal Voice
44. Make It Work Nevada
45. Maryland National Organization for Women
46. Mass NOW
47. Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable
48. MomsRising/MamasConPoder
49. Montana Chapter of the National Organization for Women
50. MS Black Women's Roundtable
51. NAF
52. NARAL Pro-Choice America
53. NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland
54. National Abortion Federation
55. National Abortion Federation
56. National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
57. National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
58. National Association for Female Executives
59. National Association for Female Executives
60. National Center for Lesbian Rights
61. National Council of Jewish Women
62. National Domestic Workers Alliance
63. National Health Law Program
64. National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH)
65. National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
66. National Network to End Domestic Violence
67. National Organization for Women
68. National Organization for Women - Oregon Chapter
69. National Organization for Women - Seattle Chapter
70. National Organization for Women of New Jersey
71. National Partnership for Women and Families
72. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV)
73. National Women's Law Center
74. National Women's Health Network
75. NC National Organization for Women (NC NOW)
76. Nevada NOW
77. New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
78. North Carolina Justice Center
79. Ohio NOW

80. PAI
81. Period. The Menstrual Movement
82. Physicians for Reproductive Health
83. Planned Parenthood Action Fund
84. Population Connection Action Fund
85. Population Institute
86. Power to Decide
87. Promundo-US
88. Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
89. Resilience, formerly Rape Victim Advocates
90. RI NOW
91. Sakhi for South Asian Women
92. ServeUSA
93. Sexual Violence Law Center
94. SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change
95. State Innovation Exchange
96. Supermajority
97. Supermajority Education Fund
98. TIME'S UP Now
99. UltraViolet
100. United State of Women
101. URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
102. #VOTEPROCHOICE
103. VA NOW
104. Washington State NOW (National Organization for Women)
105. West Virginia NOW
106. West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
107. Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
108. Women Employed
109. Women's March
110. Women's Fund of Rhode Island
111. Women's Law Project
112. Women's Rights and Empowerment Network
113. WV FREE
114. YWCA USA