

Dear Federal Elected Officials and Candidates:

2020 has laid bare deep inequities that were built into the nation from its inception.

As advocates for women's and girls' rights,¹ equality, justice, and safety, the XXX undersigned organizations are united in demanding policies that center women and girls of color and ensure that all women and girls can succeed and thrive. Our country can no longer look away as Black, Latina, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and other women and girls of color bear the brunt of oppressive social and economic systems in the U.S. and around the world.

The continued oppression and violence that Black families—and Black women—face is a stain on our country, paining us. The murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and far too many others have galvanized us, bringing millions to the streets across the nation and around the world in righteous solidarity. This historic reckoning on racial injustice spurred by the unjust, horrific continued state violence against Black communities demands immediate, comprehensive action to stop further violence, hold bad actors accountable, and redress the harms inflicted.

This moment of reckoning follows years of crises that have wrought violence on other marginalized communities as well, from putting babies in cages at our borders to banning people from the country based on religion. We have seen attacks on rights to education for survivors of sexual assault, on access to reproductive health care, on LGBTQ+ individuals, and much more. This reckoning makes clear that centering the needs of women and girls of color is the only way forward to rectify centuries of structural racism, to ensure we can all thrive in a post-COVID reality, and to recover from this economic implosion by building economic and social systems that work for everyone.

This moment comes during a global pandemic that has taken the lives and livelihoods of millions. COVID-19 is wreaking particular havoc on women—especially the women of color who are on the frontlines of the crisis we face today. While the work of these women is finally being recognized as essential, inaction and mismanagement have left them unprotected, undervalued, and underpaid. And now, women are bearing the brunt of the recession with women-dominated sectors like restaurants, hospitality, and child care bleeding millions of jobs. Women are also paying an economic price as they take on the lion's share of unpaid caregiving, with many of our children more disconnected than ever from a school community, many child care and after

¹ Advocates are providing the policy priorities in this letter to advance gender justice and address many facets of sex discrimination. In this letter we use the phrase "women and "girls" and explicitly note that this includes transgender women and girls. This work also impacts many others harmed by sex discrimination including folks who are gender non-conforming, gender non-binary, gender-fluid, LGBTQ+ communities more broadly, and all people with gestational capacity, who may or may not identify as women or girls. The policy proposals put forth in this letter are meant to improve the lives of women and girls as well as all who face sex discrimination regardless of their gender identity.

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school programs still closed or operating at lower capacity, and fears that nursing homes are not safe places for their loved ones.

We are seeking our collective liberation and we will not rest until that is a reality.

Our vision for equality and equity can only be achieved when we incorporate principles of justice, fairness, and inclusiveness that enable women of every race, ethnicity, and national origin, religion, immigration status, income level, family status, disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity to prosper. In order to build the country of today and tomorrow that works for all of us and shape the world that we want for women and girls everywhere, we demand that our federal elected officials and any incoming Administration prioritize the following:

- **Provide all women and families with the resources and supports they need to meet basic needs, including but not limited to sufficient income, an affordable and accessible home, and adequate nutrition.**

In the wealthiest country in the world, there is no excuse for people to lack the basic necessities.

The pandemic has highlighted the systemic inequality and structural racism that make it disproportionately more difficult for communities of color, immigrant communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities to put food on the table, a roof over their heads, and have the resources to meet basic living standards. Decades of underinvestment in communities of color, racist and sexist tropes that characterize women of color, especially Black women, as undeserving, and the failure to recognize that our political and economic systems (rather than personal choices) are at the root of poverty means that millions of women across the country cannot afford the basics and are bearing the brunt of inequality.

We need to meet both the increased need stemming from the recession caused by the COVID-19 crisis and shore up public benefits so that people can access them quickly when they need them outside an economic crisis—without facing barriers intended to discourage their use and stigmatize recipients. To do this, our elected leaders must center the needs of women of color in our budgets, raise additional revenues in a fair and progressive way, and dismantle the systems that exploit women of color. This means reforming unemployment insurance and establishing a jobseeker's allowance so that families who lose a job or hours can meet their basic needs as they search for new work; allowing states to make survivors of domestic or sexual violence who leave their jobs due to that violence eligible for unemployment insurance; expanding refundable tax credits (such as the Earned Income and Child Tax Credit); increasing the adequacy of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - our nation's frontline defense against hunger; investing in fair and affordable housing; expanding Supplemental Security Income and Social Security to ensure workers who face disability have income security and seniors can retire in dignity; and supporting these investments with revenues from progressive sources.

- **Ensure comprehensive access to health coverage and equitable care, including abortion services, birth control, maternal health care, and gender-affirming care.**

Everyone deserves access to the health care they need, when and where they need it, without financial difficulty, discrimination, barriers, or stigma.

The pandemic laid bare the failures and deep inequities inherent in our current health care system, known intimately for centuries by people pushed to the margins. In particular, women of color and those who struggle to make ends meet experience persistent and consistent discrimination across the health care system caused by racism and structural inequality. They are less likely to have health coverage, more likely to be denied or experience delayed care due to cost or fear of discrimination, and more likely to have their health concerns ignored or not taken seriously. The result is worse outcomes across the board, including higher COVID-related mortality and higher rates of maternal and infant death, and ultimately lower life expectancy, especially for the Black community. Furthermore, people's decisions around pregnancy and parenting are disrespected, devalued, and criminalized, and politicians continue to pass medically unnecessary laws that shame, judge, and harm those seeking abortion and other reproductive health services.

We must dismantle the systems that have created unequal and unjust health care access while making sure to center the communities that have for too long been relegated to the margins and while prioritizing sexual and reproductive health care. Elected leaders must do everything in their power to eliminate barriers to care, particularly for Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, immigrants, individuals with low or no incomes people living with disabilities and/or chronic conditions, those who live in rural areas, people whose primary language is not English, LGBTQ+ individuals, sexual assault survivors, and those living at the intersections of multiple identities. This includes ending abortion restrictions, discrimination in health care, and harmful restrictions on insurance coverage. Our elected leaders must work to expand access to comprehensive, quality, affordable health care for all - including birth control, abortion, maternal health care, and gender-affirming care – and make the investments necessary to make that access a reality for everyone. This must include collecting and reporting identity and circumstance-based data and promoting culturally responsive care.

Our leaders must also respect that individuals can make the decisions about pregnancy and parenting that are best for them and support them in those decisions. Our leaders must ensure that all communities live in safe, healthy environments with the basic resources necessary to thrive. And because good health and the decision of when or how to parent are intrinsically tied to other conditions, including access to safe drinking water, adequate housing, education, safe working conditions, and living free from violence, our leaders must acknowledge that health does not begin and end at care and coverage. A true investment in the broader social determinants of health is necessary to ensure health justice for all.

- **Build a robust care infrastructure that treats paid and unpaid care as a public good, including paid leave for all, child care for all, and services and supports for people with disabilities and aging adults.**

Building a care infrastructure as the foundation of our recovery will not only reverse our nation's history of devaluing caregiving, but ensure caregivers and provide quality jobs for care workers.

The failure to provide the significant resources necessary for a care infrastructure before the pandemic has contributed to and made worse the challenges communities across the country are facing and deepened the racial and gender inequalities of the pandemic's impact. Without care solutions, millions are struggling to both provide care and engage in paid work. Women, especially women of color, are disproportionately feeling the burden of these challenges as women are most likely to be providing care to children, family members with disabilities or aging family members, and as the majority of the care workforce.

We need elected leaders to advance [paid sick and safe days and paid family and medical leave](#) policies for all, including survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking, and regardless of the size of their employer, to ensure everyone can meet their care obligations without risking financial insecurity. Our leaders must also ensure [high-quality, affordable child care for all families](#) that meets their diverse needs and preferences, and that values and resources the child care workers doing this essential work. We must support the dignity and independence for people of all ages and abilities by creating a new, holistic system of long-term care that builds and expands on Medicaid and Medicare to provide sustainable long-term supports and services and guarantee the respect, dignity, and recognition that home care workers and other care workers deserve.

- **Advance non-carceral, trauma-informed violence prevention to ensure the safety, agency, and self-determination of women, girls, trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming people.**

We must prevent violence in all of its forms – gun violence, gender-based violence and harassment, hate crimes, and human trafficking, as well as state-sanctioned violence in the form of police brutality, mass incarceration, and immigrant detention and deportation.

However, systems of policing, prosecution, prisons, immigrant and juvenile detention, punishment, and surveillance have consistently failed to protect Black, Brown, Indigenous women and girls. In fact, many of these systems have been primary sites of racialized gender-based violence, violation, and criminalization. Black and Indigenous women have historically and continue to experience some of the highest rates of violence, including lethal, physical and gender-based violence. Black women also have the highest rates of stops, police violence, arrests, incarceration, and carceral control among women, and represent the fastest-growing prison and jail populations in the

country. Black women also bear the brunt of the financial impacts of mass incarceration. Moreover, most incarcerated women (among whom Black women are significantly overrepresented) report histories of domestic and sexual violence. And migrant women, many escaping from gender-based violence in their countries, face further trauma and violence inflicted in detention camps in the U.S.

Girls are also the fastest growing population in the juvenile legal system--with Black and Indigenous girls disproportionately overrepresented in youth prisons. Nearly two in five of girls incarcerated are there because they committed status offenses--acts that are only illegal due to age, such as underage drinking or running away. Such punishment is particularly cruel given that oftentimes these status offenses are fueled by underlying trauma, such as abuse or other toxic stress. Youth incarceration fails to provide the services these girls need to cope with stress or trauma, but also cuts them off from other community and educational resources.

Elected leaders must reject responses to violence that legitimize and place more power and resources into structures which devalue and harm Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other women of color, including the lives of women, girls, trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming people. We must create and support systems that interrupt and end the criminalization and deportation of Black and Brown women and girls. Our elected leaders must scale up non-criminalizing and non-coercive, voluntary, accessible, harm reduction-based and trauma-informed responses to unmet mental health needs, drug use, involvement in the sex trades, survival theft, and community and interpersonal violence. These responses must prioritize, promote, and protect the safety, agency, and self-determination of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, girls, trans, and gender-nonconforming people.

Our leaders must also prioritize the prevention and response to gender-based violence and harassment. Responses to violence must honor the experiences and demands of survivors of sexual harassment and assault and domestic violence by ensuring our laws shift culture, promote prevention, and provide justice. Finally, our leaders must ensure that women have access to resources that will enable them to escape, avoid, and heal from violence, including gender-based violence and sexual assault. Survivors need living wage employment; quality, accessible, and affordable housing; immigration status; affordable, quality, and accessible health care; comprehensive, culturally appropriate community-based mental health care; universal, quality, and accessible childcare; and healthy environments.

- **Further workplace justice by building worker power to ensure women, trans, and gender non-conforming people can work with equality, safety, and dignity.**

As people are losing their jobs and wages, they are more desperate to keep a paycheck at any cost and less willing to risk retaliation by reporting unsafe conditions or discrimination, increasing the risk of sexual harassment and other forms of workplace harassment, coercion, and abuse.

We must ensure that the workplaces people will return to are just, redress long standing imbalances of power, and tear down the systemic and structural racism and sexism in the workplace. Elected leaders can do this by addressing workplace discrimination, combatting and preventing harassment, and centering women, people of color, and other workers who are marginalized.

Our leaders can begin to build just workplaces by guaranteeing equal pay through increasing transparency around pay and pay setting, and shifting the burden to employers to prove they are providing equal pay. We also need living wages—starting with a higher minimum wage without exclusions for tipped workers, people with disabilities, or anyone else—along with policies to ensure that employers provide adequate hours; fair treatment for part-time workers; and the input, stability, and predictability in work schedules that people need to meet their obligations on the job and in the rest of their lives. We deserve to work without fear of sexual harassment and assault and our leaders can begin to achieve this by ensuring our laws shift workplace culture, promote prevention, and provide justice. Our leaders must also require employers to provide pregnant people with reasonable workplace accommodations so they do not have to choose between continuing to work and be paid or maintaining a healthy pregnancy. And we must protect and strengthen workers' right to organize and act collectively to challenge injustice and hold employers accountable. Achieving gender justice also means that there must be non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people in employment, but also in housing, credit, education, health care, public spaces and services, federally funded programs, and other key areas of life.

- **Transform schools into places where every woman, girl, trans, and gender non-conforming student feels safe, valued, and included.**

All students need civil rights protections and wraparound supports that will allow them to thrive and succeed through public education without the constraints of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and transphobia. The pandemic has caused great disruption in students' lives and has revealed the significant lack of resources that schools have to support the emotional and mental health needs of students. Too many schools instead misuse their limited resources on criminalizing children—especially Black, Indigenous, and immigrant children; Black and Brown girls are pushed out of schools when school discipline is entwined with criminalization and mirrors criminal systems.

To ensure every student feels safe, valued, and supported —no matter their race, national origin, or immigration status, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, pregnancy and related conditions, or parental status, elected leaders must fulfill the promise of Title IX and other federal civil rights laws to end discrimination in schools, including ending sexual violence and other forms of sexual harassment. We must develop resources for more effective responses and prevention of gender-based discrimination and violence in schools; support students who are parents or pregnant and parenting; resource and prioritize effective enforcement of civil rights protections for students; and create clear, well-resourced pathways to higher education for women and girls of color, including student loan forgiveness. We must replace

discipline practices that push Black, Brown, Indigenous, and immigrant girls out of school with resources to help all students grow socially, emotionally and academically; defund school police; remove metal detectors; and invest in student counseling and restorative justice supports. Our leaders must work to permanently dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline; equitably fund schools based on need; and actively recruit, train and support a more diverse teacher and school leader workforce.

- **Strengthen our democracy and build political power for women and girls.**

Voting is a central principle of a democracy.

But women of color not only face constant voter suppression due to their race and oppressive laws that intend to keep them from the polls, but must also navigate barriers due to their disproportionate share of jobs as caretakers and hourly wage earners that make it difficult for them to vote. Black women, girls, and their communities, in particular, face longstanding structural barriers to participation in the electoral process. We must increase access to democracy for women and girls of color, especially Black women and girls.

Elected leaders can increase access to democracy for women and girls of color by providing several options to vote, including early voting and mail-in voting; enacting automatic voter registration; offering more accessibility for voters including language access; and updating voting machines. Our leaders must also ensure that the U.S. Postal Service, which plays an utmost important role during this and future pandemics when mail-in voting may be the safest way to vote, will be adequately funded and safeguarded against delays. In addition to having the ability to vote, all people in the United States must be counted to ensure proper representation in Congress and proper allocation of resources. We must ensure the integrity, effectiveness, and full funding of the 2020 Census. Additionally, for democracy to work, we also need federal judges that are fair, equitable, and committed to pursuing racial equality and gender justice.

- **Ensure a feminist foreign policy that recognizes that the rights we demand at home are also due to women and girls worldwide.**

Injustices against women and girls globally persist, paralleling struggles in the U.S. for equity and dignity.

Gender-based violence, attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic injustice, exclusion from leadership, and inherently patriarchal, racist, and colonial systems fuel poverty and social injustice around the world. These systems of oppression and cyclical poverty both reflect and entrench multiple, often intersecting, forms of discrimination, such as those based on race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, language, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, Indigenous identity, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, nationality, or migrant status.

Our elected leaders must re-engage with the global community, including through the United Nations, and align our policies, resources, and partnerships to challenge oppressive structures that perpetuate gender inequality and social injustice. Evidence shows that political, security, and socio-economic outcomes improve when women and girls in all their diversity are healthy, educated, and able to access their human rights. This means redefining “security” to include the ability to live free from violence, persecution, climate impacts, and economic exploitation; fundamentally prioritizing peace; embracing a progressive, inclusive, and rights-based agenda; advancing bodily autonomy; and centering people who face the greatest barriers to exercising their human rights.

Women have been at the forefront of change in our country and across the globe for centuries. We are the backbone of democracy, and the past few years have been no different. Women have spent the last three-and-a-half years protesting, volunteering, voting, campaigning, and organizing. We have witnessed record numbers of women running for—and winning—elected office. And we have helped elect candidates who will protect and improve the health and economic security of women, girls, and families, fight violence and harassment, and affirm the right to decide if, when, and how to have and raise a family.

We women together continue to be strong, resilient, and powerful. We are public leaders, community voices, family breadwinners, front-line responders, generational caretakers, and much more. We are essential to our families, our communities, the economy, and the nation’s future. And we have the political will to enact the practical, effective solutions that will make our shared vision a reality.

Work with us to rebalance the power inequities that have baked racial and gender injustice into the systems that drive this country—into our economy, our education systems, our health systems, our justice systems, our global engagement, the very foundations of our democracy.

Together, we will realize a world in which all women and girls can live, learn, work, and love in safety, dignity, and equity.

Sincerely,

[INSERT NAMES OF ORGANIZATIONS]

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

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***Many organizations and coalitions represented in this letter have developed detailed policy agendas focused on the priorities listed above. For additional resources, please consider the following: Repro Blueprint, Childcare Principles, Feminist Foreign Policy, National Agenda for Black Girls.*