

# DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S CAUCUS

## CORE PRINCIPLES

Through record engagement and activism, the women of this country helped deliver the Democratic majority and the most diverse Congress in history. We have been at the forefront of the fight for equal pay, affordable health care, including reproductive health care, and freedom from violence and discrimination. Our agenda as follows reflects the common theme that when women have access to the tools they need to succeed their communities and the world are more peaceful and prosperous.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Women and families can't afford to wait any longer for equal pay. Despite being breadwinners in most families with children, women who work full time, year-round still only make 80 cents on the dollar for men's earnings. For women of color it is even less. Black women make only 61 cents, Latinas make 53 cents, and Native women make 58 cents for every dollar paid to white men. While Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women make 85 cents for every dollar paid to white men, many AAPI communities experience drastically wider pay gaps. Close to two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women, and women are far more likely than men to hold low-wage jobs. Although women are nearly half the U.S. workforce, they make up only a small percentage of employees in the skilled trades and other non-traditional occupations. Women's lower wages also exacerbate the student loan crisis, with women holding two-thirds of outstanding student debt. In addition, just 17 percent of the workforce has paid family leave, fewer than 40 percent of workers has access to paid personal medical leave, and nearly one in three private-sector workers does not have a single paid sick day. Women still face pregnancy discrimination and are forced out of a job or denied reasonable accommodations. And high-quality child care, essential for children to learn in safe, nurturing environments while parents work, is increasingly unaffordable. Moreover, the child care workers providing this essential public good – most of whom are women, and disproportionately women of color and immigrant women – earn poverty level wages, undermining their economic security. These issues are interrelated, with pay discrimination and barriers to economic opportunity jeopardizing women's ability to access the health care they need, afford child care, or reach their full potential. *Women deserve economic opportunity, security, and policies that recognize the demands of work and family.*

### SAFETY & FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

Sexual violence robs women of their ability to provide for their families and advance in the workplace, schools, and the military. One in three women experience sexual violence in their lifetime, one in five women are sexually assaulted on college campuses, and 56 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys in grades 7-12 are sexually harassed in any given school year. Moreover, 60 to 70 percent of women face sexual harassment during their careers, with Black and Brown women disproportionately impacted, and over 49,000 cases of human trafficking are reported annually in the U.S. with women and girls representing 75 percent of those trafficked. In the wake of #MeToo, women and men are bravely coming forward to share their stories of sexual harassment and assault and demand change to our laws and institutions. Women and families are also facing the threat of gun violence, with women 21 times more likely to be murdered with guns in the U.S. than in other high-income countries and most mass shootings related to domestic or family violence. Women, particularly women of color, are also disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, which threatens the safety and economic security of all people. As a nation built by immigrant families, we also recognize that women and families seeking refuge deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Our nation's immigration policies must be humane. Cruel policies, such as family separation, will not be tolerated. *Women and girls deserve to feel safe and secure in all aspects of life.*

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## CORE PRINCIPLES

### EQUALITY FOR ALL

The fact that women, particularly women of color and LGBTQI+ individuals, continue to face pervasive discrimination in all aspects of life permeates our society and makes our hard-earned rights vulnerable. Discrimination robs individuals of their ability to care for themselves and their families. *Women and LGBTQI+ individuals deserve dignity and equality under the law.*

### ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE & REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

All people deserve access to affordable and comprehensive health care, as well as the dignity, autonomy, and economic security to make the health care decisions that are best for them. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), more women and their families have insurance coverage to get the care they need. However, constant attacks on the ACA undermine the health and well-being of Americans. Instead of attacking the ACA and access to care, women and families deserve action to address the maternal mortality crisis, lower health care costs, and expand access to care, including reproductive health care. Women need access to family planning to lead fully productive lives and control their own destinies. Restrictions on reproductive care and insurance coverage of reproductive health care, including abortion, particularly harm those who already face barriers to health care including communities of color and those struggling to make ends meet. Attempts to restrict access to sex education, contraception, counseling, and abortion at home and abroad are a harmful violation of women's freedoms. *Women deserve quality, affordable health care, and to have control over their own bodies.*

### SUPPORTING WOMEN SERVICEMEMBERS & VETERANS

For too long, the contributions and distinct challenges faced by women servicemembers and veterans have been forgotten or ignored. Women servicemembers are vital to our nation's defense, and their growing inclusion in all military fields, including combat arms, can only strengthen our military's readiness. Representation of women in the military has increased to 17 percent, a far cry from the 2 percent representation in 1970. Despite this positive trend, military and veteran institutions and cultures fall desperately short in their support for women servicemembers and veterans. Military Sexual Trauma continues to plague our armed forces and service academies. Some Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities lack the ability to provide equitable care or services women veterans need, including care for sexual violence. The U.S. must ensure the VA can address the needs of women veterans who struggle to access the benefits they have earned, and continue to face barriers such as homelessness, unemployment, as well as barriers to the medical care they need. *Women servicemembers and veterans deserve our recognition, support and respect.*

### EMPOWERING WOMEN GLOBALLY

Promoting gender equality, advancing people's health and well-being, and upholding human rights so all people are free from violence and discrimination are essential to ensuring economic, social, and political empowerment for women and girls. When women are empowered, their countries are more peaceful and prosperous, benefitting our own national security. *Women and girls around the world deserve education, economic opportunity, safety, and health care, including reproductive freedom.*

The Democratic Women's Caucus recognizes that there is a wide array of legislation that would benefit the lives of women and their families across the country. These issues are interconnected, and true equality cannot exist until all people are able to live freely with dignity, autonomy, and economic security. We believe the following agenda is a starting point toward those goals:

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

*Women deserve economic opportunity, security, and policies that recognize the demands of work and family.*

- **Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7).** Women working full-time, year-round still face, on average, an annual wage gap of over \$10,100. The Paycheck Fairness Act will help ensure equal pay and families' economic security by breaking patterns of discrimination and strengthening the Equal Pay Act. *The Paycheck Fairness Act passed the House of Representatives March 27, 2019.*
- **Raise the Wage Act (H.R. 582).** Nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women. Since 2009, the federal minimum wage has been just \$7.25 per hour, not nearly enough to live on. Since 1991, the federal minimum cash wage for tipped workers has been just \$2.13 per hour. By raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025, the Raise the Wage Act will give 33.5 million Americans a pay increase, including one in four women workers. *The Raise the Wage Act passed the House of Representatives July 18, 2019.*
- **Child Care for Working Families Act (H.R. 1364).** Too many families do not have access to high-quality early learning and care that will help their children thrive without breaking the bank. The Child Care for Working Families Act would address the current early learning and care crisis by making child care more affordable, increasing pay for workers, and facilitating more high-quality providers.
- **FAMILY Act (H.R. 1185).** More than 100 million people lack paid family leave through their jobs, and 60 percent of workers cannot access medical leave insurance through their employers. The FAMILY Act would build a strong and comprehensive national family and medical leave insurance program that provides cash benefits to working families with significant caregiving and medical needs.
- **Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (H.R. 1534).** Federal employees are among those who do not have paid family and medical leave, forced to choose between a paycheck and their caregiving responsibilities or addressing their own personal health issues. The Federal Employee Paid Leave Act would ensure that the nation's largest employer, the federal government, offers comprehensive paid leave. *The Federal Employee Paid Leave Act passed the House of Representatives July 12, 2019 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.*
- **Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (H.R. 2694).** Sixty-two percent of pregnant women and new moms are in the workforce, yet pregnant workers can be placed on unpaid leave or forced out of their job when they need a simple accommodation. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act would address legal ambiguities and help ensure that pregnant women are treated fairly on the job.
- **Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784).** More than 37 million workers lack access to paid sick days, forcing them to choose between earning a paycheck and caring for their health. The Healthy Families Act would create a strong national paid sick days standard that will boost families' financial stability and lower health care costs.
- **Expanding Access to Good-Paying Jobs through Education and Training.** Women are nearly half the U.S. workforce, but make up only a small percentage of employees in the skilled trades and other non-traditional occupations. Women experience occupational segregation, often steered toward low-paying and female-dominated jobs that further the cycle of poverty. By increasing access to job training and education programs for women – especially for low-income women of color – we can increase wages and participation in the workforce.
- **Equality for our Nation's Athletes.** Female athletes are paid significantly less than their male counterparts despite performing the same or even better work. Despite the U.S. Women's Soccer Team's success, U.S. Soccer pays the Women's National Team as little as 38 cents on the dollar compared to the Men's National Team. Our athletes deserve equal pay for equal work, and equity across investment and workplace conditions.

### SAFETY & FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

*Women and girls deserve to feel safe and secure in all aspects of life.*

- **Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (H.R. 1585).** VAWA is landmark legislation responding to our nation's crisis of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. VAWA saves lives, providing law enforcement with tools to combat violence and survivors with resources and protections to rebuild their lives. VAWA is up for reauthorization, providing an opportunity to bolster and modernize the legislation. *VAWA reauthorization passed the House of Representatives April 4, 2019.*
- **BE HEARD in the Workplace Act (H.R. 2148).** In the wave of #MeToo, workers have bravely come forward to share their own harrowing experiences of harassment and discrimination and demand systemic change. The BE HEARD Act answers that call by providing a comprehensive set of reforms, including by strengthening existing civil rights laws and expanding workplace protections, extending anti-discrimination protections to all workers, and promoting prevention efforts.
- **EMPOWER Act (H.R. 1521).** Workplace harassment is an abuse of power, robbing women and men of a safe and dignified work environment and harming their ability to care for their families. The EMPOWER Act is a bipartisan package to protect against harassment and discrimination and ensure equitable workplaces.
- **Hold Accountable and Lend Transparency (HALT) Campus Sexual Violence Act (H.R. 3381).** One in five women and one in 16 men are victims of sexual assault on college campuses. The HALT Act would strengthen prevention and enforcement efforts so that students can learn in safe environments and institutions are held accountable.
- **Not Invisible Act (H.R. 2438).** The epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women has long been overlooked, with indigenous women facing murder rates that are 10 times higher than the national average. The Not Invisible Act of 2019 seeks to establish an advisory committee and best practices for law enforcement on combatting the epidemic of missing persons, murder, and trafficking of Native Americans and Alaska Natives, and designates an official within the Bureau of Indian Affairs charged with improving coordination of violent crime prevention efforts across federal agencies.
- **Asylum Seeker Protection Act (H.R. 2662).** The United States has a long tradition of honoring asylum protections for individuals who are forced to leave their home country to escape danger or violence. Despite its name, the Trump Administration's cruel "Migrant Protection Protocols" (aka Remain in Mexico) policy puts this vulnerable population, often including pregnant women and children, at unnecessary risk by denying timely entry to the U.S. This bill ensures no taxpayer funds are used to enforce this dangerous policy.
- **Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act of 2019 (H.R. 3451).** The Pew Research Center reports that there are more than 5 million children in the United States living with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. The vast majority of those children are U.S. citizens. Through no fault of their own, these children are vulnerable when their parents are the subject of immigration enforcement, detention, and removal actions. The HELP for Separated Children Act of 2019 would protect children whose parents are involved in immigration enforcement actions.
- **Zero Tolerance for Domestic Abusers Act (H.R. 569).** One in six women has experienced stalking victimization, and nearly half of intimate partner homicides were committed by a dating partner. Yet, current loopholes do not prohibit individuals who have abused dating partners or convicted stalkers from accessing guns. The Zero Tolerance for Domestic Abusers Act would clarify that convicted stalkers and those who have abused dating partners are prohibited from buying or owning a firearm.
- **End the Climate Crisis.** Women are often more vulnerable to the effects of climate change because they are more likely to be poor, have more limited mobility, and are more dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. Climate change endangers the safety of women and families, exacerbating instability and conflict, and placing a strain on financial resources.

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## POLICY AGENDA

### EQUALITY FOR ALL

*Women and LGBTQI+ individuals deserve dignity and equality under the law.*

- **Equality Act (H.R. 5).** In many states, there are not clear or explicit protections against sex discrimination in housing, credit, education, employment, and more when that discrimination is tied to sexual orientation or gender identity. The Equality Act updates the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other statutes to explicitly provide that existing protections against sex discrimination include protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, public education, access to credit, jury service, federal funding, housing, and public accommodations. The Act also closes longstanding gaps in civil rights law by adding new protections from discrimination on the basis of sex. *The Equality Act passed the House of Representatives May 17, 2019.*

- **Equal Rights Amendment (H.J.Res.38 and H.J.Res.35).** The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is a constitutional amendment declaring that women shall have equal rights in the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) would outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex and bolster the entire women's agenda. *Virginia became the last state to ratify the ERA on January 27, 2020. Now, Congress must act to facilitate expeditious ratification. The Equal Rights Amendment Resolutions passed the House of Representatives on February 13, 2020.*

- **Dignity of Incarcerated Women.** Women are the fastest growing population within the United States' prison system. Most prisons deny women adequate access to sanitary items and some prisons still shackle pregnant inmates while giving birth, putting both mother and baby at risk. Creating livable conditions and establishing holistic re-entry programs for women is vital to reducing recidivism and the number of women entering the criminal justice system each year.

- **Protection of Voting Rights.** Voting rights are essential to who we are as Americans, to the cause of equality, and a measure of the health of our democracy. Yet across this country, the right to vote is under attack. In particular, women of color have been targeted by voter disenfranchisement in the form of voter suppression, targeted voter intimidation, and attempts to rollback protections in the Voting Rights Act. As we approach the 100th Anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, we must work to advance justice so that all Americans can freely exercise their right to vote – a fundamental cornerstone of our American Democracy.

- **Woman on the Twenty Act (H.R. 3082).** The Administration indefinitely delayed plans to feature abolitionist Harriet Tubman on the new \$20, putting politics above recognizing this historic figure and finally including a woman on United States currency. The Woman on the Twenty Act will ensure that Harriet Tubman is featured on the \$20 bill after 2022.

### ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE & REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

*Women deserve quality, affordable health care, and to have control over their own bodies.*

- **Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act (H.R. 987) and Protecting Americans with Preexisting Conditions Act (H.R. 986).** Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, being a woman is no longer a pre-existing condition and essential health benefits such as maternity care are covered. Democrats are passing legislation to further strength protections for people with pre-existing conditions, lower prescription drug costs, and reverse the Trump Administration's health care sabotage. *H.R.986 passed the House of Representatives May 9, 2019, and H.R. 987 passed the House May 16, 2019.*

- **Women's Health Protection Act (H.R. 2975).** Since 2011, more than 400 laws have been passed that restrict and regulate abortion for medically unnecessary reasons. The Women's Health Protection Act will improve women's health by protecting health care providers' ability to deliver abortion services and patients' ability to receive these services free from medically unnecessary and onerous restrictions.

- **EACH Woman Act (H.R. 1692).** For too long, politicians have interfered in women's health decisions by banning insurance coverage of abortion for women struggling to make ends meet, as well as Federal employees and their dependents, Peace Corps volunteers, Native Americans, women in federal prisons and detention centers, including those detained for immigration purposes, and military servicewomen, veterans and their dependents. The EACH Woman Act would reverse the Hyde Amendment and related abortion coverage restrictions so that every woman is able to consider all the options available to her, regardless of how much money she makes or how she is insured.

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## POLICY AGENDA

### ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE & REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

- **MOMMA's Act (H.R. 1897) and the Healthy MOMMIES Act (H.R. 2602).** The United States has a maternal and infant mortality crisis with the highest rates among developed nations. According to the CDC, 60 percent of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable, and black and Native women are three times as likely as white women to die of pregnancy-related causes, representing one of the widest racial disparities in women's health. The U.S. must rectify this injustice and immediately act to ensure the health and wellbeing of pregnant women.
- **Newborn Screening Saves Lives Reauthorization (H.R. 2507).** Each year thousands of children are born with a genetic, metabolic, hormonal or functional condition that is not otherwise apparent at birth. Today, a simple set of tests performed at birth can detect these life-threatening illnesses before any symptoms begin. The Newborn Screenings Saves Lives Reauthorization Act will ensure that infants continue to receive comprehensive and effective screenings.
- **The Lower Drug Costs Now Act (H.R.3).** Prescription Drug companies are charging Americans prices that are three, four, or even ten times higher than what they charge for the same drugs in other countries – even though they admit they still make a profit overseas. With the Lower Drug Costs Now Act, House Democrats are taking bold action to level the playing field and lower prescription drug costs for every American. *The Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act passed the House of Representatives on December 12, 2019.*

### SUPPORTING WOMEN SERVICEMEMBERS & VETERANS

*Women servicemembers and veterans deserve our recognition, support and respect.*

- **Access to Contraception for Women Servicemembers and Dependents Act (H.R. 2091).** The Department of Defense provides health care to over 1.5 million women of reproductive age. The Access to Contraception for Servicemembers and Dependents Act will ensure that all women who receive health care through the military are treated the same as civilian women, with access to all FDA-approved methods of contraception and contraceptive counseling services with no co-pay, as well as ensure the military provides servicemembers with comprehensive family planning education, and will codify protections regarding emergency contraception for sexual assault survivors. *H.R. 2091 passed the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.*

### EMPOWERING WOMEN GLOBALLY

*Women and girls around the world deserve education, economic opportunity, safety, and health care, including reproductive freedom.*

- **Keeping Girls in Schools Act (H.R. 2153).** Today, 130 million girls are not enrolled in school. When girls hit adolescence, they are most at risk of dropping out due to forced marriage, pregnancy, or family pressure. The Keeping Girls in School Act provides USAID with the tools to address and reduce barriers keeping girls from school at the secondary level and codifies the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, requiring an update every five years. *The Keeping Girls in School Act passed the House of Representatives on January 28, 2020.*
- **Global HER Act (H.R. 1055).** The Trump Administration reinstated and expanded the Global Gag Rule, which bans foreign NGOs that receive U.S. health funding from even providing referrals for abortion. It forces providers to choose between their global health assistance and providing patients with comprehensive care and has led to the closure of clinics around the world. The Global HER Act would permanently repeal the Global Gag Rule.