

TO: Biden-Harris Transition Team  
FROM: All\*Above All, American Association of University Women (AAUW), Black Women's Health Imperative, Girls for Gender Equity, Girls Inc., Grantmakers for Girls of Color, In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Jewish Women International (JWI), Justice 4 Migrant Women, 'me too' Movement., MomsRising, NARAL Pro-Choice America, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), National Birth Equity Collaborative, National Council of Jewish Women, National Crittenton, National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Partnership for Women & Families, National Women's Law Center, Paid Leave for All, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, She The People, Supermajority, The Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality's Initiative on Gender Justice & Opportunity, TIME'S UP, UltraViolet, United State of Women, VoteRunLead, Women's March, and YWCA USA.  
SUBJECT: Fulfilling the Biden Agenda for Women – Structural Changes  
DATE: November 20, 2020

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President-Elect Biden campaigned on an ambitious [Agenda for Women](#), including his pledge to recreate a White House Council chaired by a senior member of the Executive Office of the President and tasked with guiding policy throughout the federal government that affects women and girls, including on economic issues, health care, racial justice, immigration, and gender-based violence. He has also pledged to “to seek gender parity and full diversity in [my] national security political appointments, and...across [the] government.”<sup>1</sup>

This memo outlines proposed structural reforms to advance the President-Elect's pledges for gender equity and achieve his bold Agenda for Women. Please note, this memo only outlines structural changes to the Council and its function, not a broader set of policy priorities, which will be presented at a later date.

As President, President-Elect Biden should:

- Issue an Executive Order on day one of the Biden Administration creating a White House Council on Gender *Equity* (“the Council”). This change of name (from a White House Council on Gender Equality) better reflects the Administration's commitment to addressing the intersectional structural and systemic issues underlying gender

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<sup>1</sup> See The Biden Agenda for Women (<https://joebiden.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Womens-Agenda.pdf>); Biden for President Fact Sheet, International Women's Day 2020 (<https://joebiden.com/fact-sheet-international-womens-day/>).

and racial injustice (for cis and transgender women and girls and nonbinary people). The Council should be led by an Assistant to the President, adequately staffed and resourced with high-level representatives designated from domestic and globally focused executive branch departments and agencies. The Council should include three Deputy Assistants to the President: One focused on Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) who identify as women and girls, one focused on Gender-Based Violence (given President-Elect Biden's long and strong commitment to fighting gender-based violence), and one co-located with Cabinet Affairs to coordinate the interagency processes. Although two of these staff members will specifically address policy priorities as they relate to BIPOC women and girls and gender-based violence, both portfolios will be fully integrated into the entirety of the Council's work.

- Request the Council to spearhead the development of a government-wide strategy to advance gender equity within the first year of the Biden Administration and set budgetary targets to achieve it.

### **Statement of Need**

Women and girls are 50% of the population but continue to disproportionately face systemic sexism and racism. Women are paid only 80 cents for every dollar paid to men, and when broken down by race, the gap is even wider. Women, particularly Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American Pacific Islander and other women and girls of color, are overrepresented in low-wage jobs, shoulder greater caregiving responsibilities, and more often live in poverty. Sexual and reproductive healthcare, essential for sustainable economic development, are intrinsically linked to equity and well-being and are critical to maternal, newborn, child, adolescent, family and community health. Reproductive and sexual healthcare - including abortion - has never been more seriously under attack. For example, in 2019 alone, 25 separate abortion bans were enacted across 12 states. Barriers to reproductive and sexual healthcare disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, Latinx, AAPI and other communities of color; young people; LGBTQ people; immigrants; and people struggling financially. Black and Indigenous women and girls disproportionately experience gender-based violence (domestic/intimate partner violence, sexual assault, etc.). Black women and girls are specifically at greater risk of school pushout and involvement with the criminal legal system, conditions that are related to poverty, childhood trauma, and structural biases that prevent their full participation in our democracy. They also remain underrepresented in leadership roles in the private and public sectors. According to the World Economic Forum, it could take 2017 years to close the economic gender gap globally. At the same time, we know that equity pays dividends; globally, economists

estimate that closing the gender gap in the workforce would add between \$12 and \$28 trillion dollars by 2025.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women and girls and magnified and exacerbated the challenges they've faced for decades, particularly for women and girls of color and women in low-wage jobs. The global pandemic has exposed longstanding systemic inequities (especially in healthcare) rooted in racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and other systems of oppression that have shaped the experiences of women and girls throughout the nation and around the world. The Council will play a critical role in shaping actionable responses to these challenges, especially for women and girls who stand at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

### **Prior U.S. Initiatives**

President-Elect Biden's proposal to create a Council in the White House builds on previous high-level U.S. initiatives to advance the status of women. Prior administrations have taken a variety of approaches to focus greater attention on women—some choosing to focus on interagency coordination, some focusing on external outreach and engagement, and some focusing on both.

These prior efforts have made clear that there is a real need for maximum coordination across the White House and executive agencies and across external and internal engagement efforts to better align our domestic and foreign policy work. There are several concerns that should be prioritized. First, it is essential to ensure that the work of the primary policy development shops in the White House—namely the Domestic Policy Council (DPC), National Economic Council (NEC), and the National Security Council (NSC)—is well integrated and coordinated with the Gender Equity Council. Second, the work of this Council must be intentional in advancing an overarching government-wide strategy to promote gender equity as both a domestic and foreign policy priority. Third, the Council must be sufficiently staffed with full-time senior-level staffers solely focused on the administration's gender priorities, with a robust racial equity lens, as well as senior-level officials in executive agencies tasked with implementation. Fourth, the Council must be fully resourced and rigorously tracked through monitoring and evaluation efforts.

### **Recommendations**

The Biden Administration should meet its commitment to elevate gender equity as a domestic and foreign policy priority and achieve gender parity in appointments by enacting reforms in leadership and policy.

## Leadership

- **Create White House Council for Gender Equity**. President-Elect Biden should fulfill his pledge to create the first-ever White House Council on Gender Equity (CGE) on day one of the administration, by Executive Order. To ensure that the Council has sufficient authority to advance gender equity in high-level policy debates, the Chair of the Council should be a full-time Senior Advisor with the title of Assistant to the President. This Chair will have the power to convene principal level meetings and capability of working across domestic and national security departments and agencies. The Council should also include a Deputy Assistant to the President focused on policy priorities for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color who identify as women and girls, a Deputy Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff charged with coordinating the participation of all agencies and departments in the work of the Council (co-located with Cabinet Affairs), and a Deputy Assistant to the President focused on Gender-Based Violence who will chair the revived Interagency Working Group on GBV and coordinate the proposed [National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence](#). The Chair of the Council should have a confidential assistant who can assist with overall administrative needs of CGE. In all, this would total to 5 full time staff in the Executive Office of the President for CGE.

The Executive Order should make clear that the members of the Council include the heads of each of the major White House policy offices (DPC, NEC, NSC, and OMB), and that a senior commissioned officer who reports directly to the head of the office should be designated to oversee the work of the office on gender equity and to work with CGE. At the NSC, this should take the form of a Senior Director on Gender.

Other White House offices, including OVP, OFL, Cabinet Affairs, CEA, Digital Services, and Counsel, should designate a senior staff member to work on gender equity and with CGE. Outreach to gender equity organizations would be handled by staff housed in OPE and report both to the head of OPE and CGE.

- **Designate high-level officials in executive branch departments and agencies**. The Executive Order should also include all Cabinet members as members of the Council. To operationalize the involvement by these members, all cabinet agencies should be directed to appoint, within 100 days of the signing of the Executive Order, a high-ranking, full-time official tasked with advancing gender equity. These officials would be responsible for participating in the White House Council and implementing gender equity efforts at the agency level and

could occupy a new or stand-alone position with an appropriate title to communicate seniority and broad scope of work. Alternately, cabinet secretaries could endow an existing deputy or undersecretary with responsibility for ensuring a focus on gender equity across their department. As an initial matter, within the first 100 days, each agency must analyze the scope of any existing efforts focused on gender equity, identify gaps, and assess and strengthen past efforts to better address the needs of BIPOC women and girls and other historically marginalized groups. This review should also evaluate structural needs to implement gender equity work effectively, and should coordinate not only with relevant women's offices and gender advisors, but also with racial justice and civil rights efforts and across the entire department so that appropriate funding is included in department/agency budgets. This will ensure that all Council participants have the resources that they need to carry out a bold and intersectional gender equity agenda. The results of this 100-day review should be submitted to CGE, who will compile a report to the President.

## Policy

- **Issue a government-wide strategy to advance gender equity.** As President, President-Elect Biden should use his authority—through an executive order or another presidential directive—to promulgate a government-wide strategy to advance gender equity (for both cis and transgender women, girls, femmes, and gender expansive and nonbinary people) with a particular focus on BIPOC and marginalized communities, as both a domestic and foreign policy priority, supported by agency implementation plans. Pursuant to this strategy, the federal government should update existing core policies—such as the National Security Strategy—to reflect the prioritization of gender equity as a domestic and global goal and national security imperative. To help the government track and deliver on its strategy, within the first year of the Administration, the White House Council on Gender Equity should identify time-bound, measurable goals—both domestic and global—that are fully funded and assigned to particular government agencies, which subsequently should develop implementation plans within 100 days.
- **Require agency strategic plans, government policies and programs to undergo intersectional gender impact analyses.** The Biden Administration should require a gender impact assessment for agency strategic plans, federal policies and programs, including for federal contractors and other implementing partners, to ensure maximum efficacy and prevent deleterious outcomes on the basis of gender and at the intersections of race, ethnicity, sexual identity,

disability, etc. The White House Council for Gender Equity will serve as a resource for such assessments.

The Council would also work closely with OMB and any White House Office on Innovation or Technology to collect, analyze and track data, and produce data visualizations and dashboards, including data disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and other factors, to improve decision making. GBV should be a key area of focus to improve data on prevalence and cost and other critical issues.

- **Focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.** In addition to a laser focus on BIPOC women and girls within the Council, leadership should also coordinate closely with a White House Office of Equity and Inclusion to further advance the administration's priority to reach out to Black, Latinx, Asian-American Pacific Islander and Indigenous communities, women, girls, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups to listen and respond to their concerns and lived experiences; provide a platform that engages their voices to effectively shape the federal rules, policies and programs that critically affect their lives and well-being; promote the effective enforcement of laws designed to protect them; and remove discriminatory or unnecessary impediments to their access to vitally-needed government services and benefits.