



December 17, 2020

Joe Biden  
President-Elect  
United States of America  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Kamala Harris  
Vice President-Elect  
United States of America  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

On behalf of the over 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we write to offer our thoughts on executive action that can immediately be taken by your administration and transition team to support the economic security and education of women and girls.

#### **COVID Relief**

The pandemic has had an especially devastating impact on women. Essential workers are predominantly women, occupying positions that are largely undervalued and underpaid. From cashiers and food service preparers, to health care workers and child care providers, women account for more than half of all frontline workers. Yet, they go to work without the essential protections they need to remain safe and with the uncertainty that they may not have access to paid leave to care for themselves or their loved ones in times of emergency. As a result, nearly 2.2 million women have left the workforce between February and October and many others are contending with reduced work hours. Women of all races face higher rates of poverty than men and these economic contractions will only widen the poverty gap, especially for Latinas, Black and American Indian or Alaska Native women who are disproportionately represented among women living in poverty.

We urge you to provide the requisite protections to women on whose shoulders our economy depends. Actions to be taken without delay by the administration in coordination with Congress:

- Provide stimulus payments that enable women to weather the economic recession and prevent families from falling further into poverty, including experiencing food and housing insecurity.
- Restore unemployment insurance benefits and ensure relief is tied to labor conditions and economic recovery so workers receive the relief they need as economic conditions warrant.
- Extend the availability of paid sick days and paid family and medical leave to all working people, eliminating exemptions that allow employers to deny benefits to employees.

- Improve access to health care and guarantee no-cost access to COVID-19 treatment and vaccination.
- Reject efforts to provide businesses with immunity from COVID-19-related lawsuits.
- Secure funding for child care consistent with the Child Care is Essential Act that passed the House with bipartisan support.
- Provide states with a substantial infusion of resources to stabilize their education budgets and support their students, particularly for girls of color and other marginalized groups so that they do not bear the brunt of learning loss and discrimination.

### **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY**

Job creation and economic opportunity are critical issues for women, many of whom continue to struggle with economic insecurity and wage discrimination. Economic security is a foundational aspect of everyday life, and is particularly important for women's ability to support themselves and their families. Women are overrepresented in low-wage jobs – nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers in the United States are women and 24 percent of minimum wage workers are women of color. Women face particular challenges in the workforce, including harassment, discrimination and occupational segregation. The gender pay gap persists such that women working full time still typically make 82 cents on the dollar as compared to men, and women of color experience even wider gaps.

There is much the Biden-Harris administration can do to ensure women's fair treatment in our workplaces, including:

#### **Day 1**

- Amend Executive Order 13658 to raise the minimum wage for all workers on federal construction and service contracts to at least \$15 per hour and require federal contractors to pay tipped workers the same minimum wage as any other worker, before tips.
- Announce new White House initiatives to promote equal pay and to close gender and racial wage gaps, such as issuing an executive order that prohibits federal contractors from relying on job applicants' salary history to set pay and requires federal contractors to include salary ranges in job announcements.

#### **First 100 Days**

- Require employers to collect and report compensation data by race, ethnicity and gender to the EEOC and OFCCP, including but not limited to reinstatement of the EEO-1 Component 2 pay data collection.
- Create a designated role within the office of the Secretary of Labor to prioritize gender and racial equity issues across departments and programs.
- Require federal contractors to publicly disclose data on gender and race wage gaps and display that information on an easily accessible public website.
- Require that all agency appointees at the Department of Labor and any vacancies among NLRB board members and EEOC commissioners are filled without delay. These appointees

must represent the diversity of our nation's workforce and be fully committed to ensuring and expanding workers' rights under the law.

- Rescind Executive Order 13950, "Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" which is overly broad and has deterred the delivery of critical diversity training programs.

### **EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

Since the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which respectively prohibit race and sex discrimination in federally funded education programs, schools have made significant strides in providing equal access to education. Despite these gains, equal does not mean equitable, as barriers remain for women of color and women from low income and underserved communities. Though Title IX protections are in place across the education continuum, two-thirds of college students experience sexual harassment and nearly half of students in grades 7–12 face sexual harassment. The gender divide in STEM programs remains wide, with women still concentrated in areas of study that lead to lower-wage occupations. And women hold nearly two-thirds of all outstanding loans—around \$929 billion – crippling their educational advancement and economic security. COVID-19 has further exacerbate these inequities in our K-12 schools and institutions of higher education and fully revealed the work that remains to provide safer, more inclusive, and culturally responsive institutions that are sufficiently nimble to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

We urge you to take immediate action on the following priorities to break down barriers and ensure more equitable access to education:

#### **Day 1**

- Cancel outstanding federal student loan debt that disproportionately impacts women and places an especially acute burden on women of color. Student debt cancellation has the potential to increase the net wealth of women, help reduce the racial wealth gap, boost GDP, reduce unemployment, and provide much-needed stimulus to help women weather the pandemic and the associated recession.
- Suspend enforcement and implementation of the new Title IX Sexual Harassment Rule and issue interim guidance that draws from key portions of the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and the 2014 Questions and Answers. Interim guidance should: clarify that discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender stereotypes constitute a violation of Title IX; and address new challenges arising from the remote learning environment and the growing rate of retaliatory cross-complaints filed against student survivors by their harassers.

#### **First 100 Days**

- Create a White House interagency task force that addresses sexual harassment prevention and response in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. The task force should take a gender justice approach, with an explicit focus on race, gender, LGBTQ status, disability, national origin and the intersections between their identities, to make students

feel safe and prevent school pushout from harassment, including sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

- Increase appropriations for the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women’s (OVW) campus grant program and funding for K-12 schools, in order to fund climate surveys on sexual harassment in schools. The Administration should also reinstate priority areas for discretionary grants at OVW, focusing on institutions with the highest need.
- Restore the Clery Handbook to ensure that schools provide timely and transparent data on the crime on and around college campuses, and amend it as necessary to reflect any new Title IX guidance and rules.
- Increase the size of the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to expand the office’s ability to meet its policymaking and enforcement responsibilities. Ensure that OCR has the resources to process complaints in a timely manner and effectively enforce civil rights laws, including by providing technical assistance to recipients.
- Strengthen and expand the Office of Civil Rights’ data collection processes to prevent the elimination of data categories and ensure students are not denied equal access to educational opportunity, including access to advanced coursework and AP courses.
- Form a task force to develop an accountability framework for colleges and universities to improve the experiences and outcomes of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Enforce meaningful consequences for underperforming institutions.

### **CONCLUSION**

AAUW stands steadfast in its commitment to improving the lives of women and their families, and is ready to serve as a resource to your administration and transition team as we work on these critical policies together. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202.728.7617 or Leticia Bustillos, Federal Policy Manager, at 202.785.7724 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Kate Nielson  
Director of Public Policy & Legal Advocacy