

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC, 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

Thank you for your leadership in recognizing the disproportionate impact of the economic crisis on women. We write to respectfully urge you to include the following proposals that would benefit women and families in a future infrastructure or recovery package.

There are 2.3 million fewer women working or looking for work since before the pandemic, and women's labor force participation is at a 33-year low. Unemployment rates for Black women, Latinas, Asian women, and Native women remain high, and over 40 percent of unemployed women have been out of work for 6 months or longer. This pandemic has forced so many businesses to close or to cut jobs, and several other factors have led women to leave or keep them from re-entering the workforce. This includes school closures, an unstable child care industry, the lack of paid family and medical leave, and the gender wage gap. With \$64 billion in women's lost wages and economic activity at risk annually if these trends continue, we must act on the needs of women and their families to Build Back Better. As you consider an infrastructure or recovery package, we want to highlight that infrastructure is not just roads and bridges; it is also the social infrastructure such as child care that enables our society to function. As such, we encourage you to consider the following proposals for the next package:

Child Care for Working Families Act

The *Child Care for Working Families Act* would provide high-quality affordable child care for all families by capping the amount families pay out of pocket for child care. The bill would also improve compensation for child care workers. Currently, there are not enough resources in the child care system to sustain programs. We urge you to include this legislation in your next package along with all necessary funding to support implementation. While the \$40 billion enacted in the American Rescue Plan is a good start, we must continue making strong long-term investments in the child care sector to keep programs afloat and allow them to thrive during and post-COVID.

Even before the pandemic, a child care crisis was unfolding across our nation as care was unaffordable and inaccessible for many families, and workers were paid poverty-level wages. The pandemic has exacerbated this crisis with 171,400 fewer child care workers today and up to 4.5 million child care slots

at risk of being permanently lost. As we create a recovery plan to put Americans back to work, we must remember that parents need more than a job to return to; they need somewhere safe and affordable to send their children.

FAMILY Act

The *Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act* would permanently guarantee up to 12 weeks of paid leave for medical conditions, the arrival of a new child, or to care for a family member.

Just 20 percent of private sector workers have access to paid family leave, and 42 percent have short-term disability insurance. This results in a loss of \$22.5 billion in wages each year due to missed work. Paid leave not only boosts the economy, it also has a range of individual and public health benefits. Providing workers paid leave stems the spread of illnesses, including COVID-19, and allows workers to access treatment faster. For children whose parents have paid leave, it has been proven to increase rates and duration of breastfeeding, improve on-time vaccination rates, reduce hospital admissions, and improve health outcomes.

No parent should have to choose between their family's health and their paycheck.

Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act

The United States has the highest pregnancy-related death rate in the developed world, with Black women three to four times more likely than white women to die from pregnancy-related complications and are also more likely to experience maternal morbidities. The *Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act* will address our urgent maternal health crisis and help to close racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes. Specifically, this package of 12 bills would strengthen programs to improve maternal health during COVID-19 and future public health emergencies; make critical investments in social determinants of health; provide funding to community-based organizations; and grow and diversify the perinatal workforce. It would also invest in programs to expand access to treatments and support for maternal mental health conditions; study the health risks facing pregnant veterans; and improve maternal health care and support for incarcerated moms, among other changes.

American Family Act

The *American Family Act* would increase the maximum child tax credit, provide the credit monthly instead of annually, and make the credit fully refundable.

The child tax credit helps 48 million families annually, especially women-led and minority households. One-third of all children do not have access to the full benefit because their families earn too little to qualify for the maximum credit. The *American Family Act* would help the lowest-income families and lift 27 million children out of poverty.

Paycheck Fairness Act

The *Paycheck Fairness Act* provides new tools to strengthen workplace protections and pay equity required by the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Specifically, it would prohibit retaliation for discussing salaries

with colleagues, prohibit employers from requiring salary history during the hiring process, require employers to legally justify pay disparities, and provide workers with more recourse for wage discrimination lawsuits. The bill would also empower the Department of Labor to investigate wage disparities and collect pay data, and direct the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to help enforce pay equity laws and collect wage data.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits sex-based wage discrimination by requiring employers to pay men and women the same wages for the same work. However, nearly 60 years later, women working full-time throughout the year only earn 82 cents for every dollar paid to men, while Black women earn 63 cents, Native women earn 60 cents, and Latinas 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. The common-sense provisions of the *Paycheck Fairness Act* will improve the economic security of American families and help uplift our entire economy.

Raise the Wage Act

The *Raise the Wage Act of 2021* would gradually increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour over five years and index future increases to median wage growth. It would also phase out the subminimum wage for tipped workers, which often leaves women and other tipped workers vulnerable to harassment.

Sixty percent of low-wage workers are women. As we have known for decades, minimum- and low-wage jobs do not pay nearly enough for families to survive. The Congressional Budget Office has predicted that this wage increase would lift 1.3 million Americans out of poverty, including 600,000 children. Raising the federal minimum wage would also reduce the gender and racial pay gaps. A \$15 by 2025 federal minimum wage would raise wages for nearly 19 million women and nearly one-third of all Black workers and one-quarter of all Latinx and Native American workers.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to improving the lives of women and families. We stand ready to assist as you continue to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and build a stronger foundation for our economy.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Brenda L. Lawrence
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Lois Frankel
Co-Chair
Democratic Women's Caucus



Veronica Escobar
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Member of Congress

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Anna G. Eshoo
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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