



Women's Economic Justice

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Centering the needs of women in policy decisions, especially women who face intersecting oppressions, will not only help achieve greater gender and racial equity but also a stronger economy for everyone. The COVID-19 crisis and ensuing recession and the renewed attention to entrenched racism have underscored what women—particularly women of color and low-paid women—face every day: the burden of generations of sexist and racist institutions, norms, and policy choices that systematically limit women's power and devalue their work. Responding to the challenges brought on by the pandemic presents a critical opportunity to overturn generations of oppression by building a more equitable economic framework.



THE BIG IDEA: A historic investment in America's care infrastructure combined with new workplace policies will not only help overturn generations of systemic sexism and racism but will accrue benefits to our entire society and economy.

TCF's 2021 Women's Economic Justice Policy Priorities

1. Establish Universal Child Care
2. Secure Paid Leave for All
3. Provide Universal Long-Term Services and Supports
4. Value the People Who Provide Care

5. Support Essential Workers and Their Families

6. Promote Workplace Conditions for Gender Justice and Building Power

1. Establish Universal Child Care

Care is at the center of our nation's economy, democracy, and society. The failure to provide the significant resources necessary for a care infrastructure before the pandemic has exacerbated care challenges across the country and deepened the pandemic's racial- and gender-specific impacts. Millions of women are struggling to both provide care and engage in paid work. Women of color in particular are disproportionately providing care to children, family members with disabilities, or aging family members, and comprise the majority of the care workforce, while also either serving as essential workers or losing their jobs and being forced to look for new ones. Building a robust care infrastructure—a publicly funded system that recognizes care as both an individual and social responsibility, values care workers, and supports family members to both care and provide financially for each other—will support economic recovery, growth, and prosperity, and support racial and gender equity and family well-being. The next administration and Congress should take a multi-step approach to building a universal care infrastructure, starting with child care and early education:

- **Stabilize the child care sector** by enacting legislation that has already won bi-partisan support in the House of Representatives this year, including at least \$50 billion in emergency funding to stabilize the child care

The full report "The Century Foundation's Top Policy Priorities for 2021" can be found at <https://tcf.org/content/report/century-foundations-top-policy-priorities-2021/>

sector and provide safe child care options, including covering the additional costs connected to providing care during a pandemic.

- **Build a sustainable and equitable child care system.** Declare child care a public good and pass legislation to ensure all families have safe, affordable, high-quality, convenient child care options in their own homes, family care homes, or child care centers that meet diverse needs and values and provide resources to the child care workers who do this essential work, building on smart legislative solutions like the the Child Care for Working Families Act and the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act.
- **Establish universal pre-K for three- and four-year-olds.**
- **Provide child care assistance for college students** and ensure military family child care is fully funded as part of any child care package.

2. Secure Paid Leave For All

Another critical piece of care infrastructure that needs attention is paid leave. The next administration and Congress should advance paid sick and safe days and paid family and medical leave policies for all, including survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking—regardless of the size of the employer—to ensure everyone can meet their care obligations without risking financial insecurity.

In the short-term, Congress should:

- **Close loopholes in the emergency paid leave policies** that were included in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), as was done in the HEROES Act. This effort should include increasing wage replacement levels for caregiving; covering all workers, regardless of the type or size of their employer; providing funding for education and outreach so people know they are eligible; and extending protections the emergency provisions through at least 2021. Families also need the guarantee of permanent paid sick

leave and comprehensive paid family and medical leave moving forward. Congress should:

- **Pass the Healthy Families Act**, which guarantees at least seven paid sick days for one's own health needs, and to care for loved ones health-related needs.
- **Ensure paid leave for all, by passing the FAMILY ACT** and incorporate lessons learned from state paid leave laws, including expanded job protection, progressive wage replacement, and longer leave durations.

3. Provide Universal Long-Term Services and Support

The ability of most aging people and people with disabilities to access affordable long-term care at home or in a safe community simply does not exist. Many Americans cannot afford the costs of care in this essential component of the care infrastructure, and there is not enough money in the public system to adequately compensate caregivers. To support the dignity and independence for people of all ages and abilities, the next administration and Congress should create a new, holistic system of long-term care that builds and expands on Medicaid and Medicare to provide sustainable long-term services and supports for the target population, and:

- **Support high-quality care** by covering the costs of making home care jobs good jobs.
- **Expand public support** for in-home and community-based services (HCBS).

4. Value the People Who Provide Care

Most caregivers, the people who take care of our aging parents and our young children, are unpaid or underpaid. The work in this often overlooked part of the care infrastructure is primarily done by women—disproportionately women of color—making it harder for them to care for themselves and

their own families, and putting them at risk to be exploited by employers. The next administration and Congress should:

- **Pass the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights** to raise wages and standards and ensure dignity for domestic workers and other care workers.
- **Support family caregivers** and the sandwich generation through the above initiatives and by providing training, financial compensation, and health assistance to family members who care for children, people with disabilities, and aging relatives.
- **Pass the Social Security Caregiver Credit Act**, which would allow family caregivers to receive Social Security credit for serving as caregivers of dependent relatives for up to five years of care provision.

5. Support Essential Workers and Their Families

Women, and women of color in particular, are being hit hardest by the COVID-19 health and economic crises, as they are more likely to be put at risk because they work in jobs that are deemed essential. Policy is needed to ensure that these workers and families are safe, healthy, and can achieve long-term financial security. The next administration and Congress should:

- **Support the Essential Workers Bill of Rights** to protect frontline workers through health and safety measures, higher compensation, collective bargaining, paid leave, and other crucial provisions.
- **Support the essential worker provisions** in the HEROES Act, including the Heroes' Fund to provide premium pay to those on the frontlines family care resources to cross generational support.
- **Support the COVID-19 Worker Protection Act**, which would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a strong, enforceable standard to help protect workers from the spread of COVID-19.

6. Promote Workplace Conditions for Gender Justice and Building Power

All working women—but especially mothers and women of color—experience significantly lower wages compared to men. The reasons behind this are varied and overlapping, including but not limited to occupational segregation, the devaluing of jobs that are considered “women’s work,” the impacts of sexual harassment, and outright discrimination. The next administration and Congress should take these steps to address this gross financial disparity:

- **Promote pay transparency** and employer accountability by passing bills such as the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would increase the availability of pay data, close loopholes in the Equal Pay Act, and make it harder to discriminate in pay on the basis of sex.
- **Pass the Raise the Wage Act** to gradually raise the federal minimum wage for all workers—including tipped workers and workers with disabilities—to \$15 per hour, which would reduce the pay gap for the disproportionate number of women of color occupying low-wage jobs.

From the mismatch between school and work schedules to the lack of both predictability and flexibility to care for newborns and other loved ones, current workplace rules were not created with caregivers in mind. To help put an end to unfair work schedules, the next administration and Congress should:

- **Pass the Schedules That Work Act**, which grants certain employees the right to request flexibility in scheduling and provides workers in specific industries greater predictability in their scheduling and hours.
- **Pass the Part-Time Worker Bill of Rights**, which would ensure greater parity in pay, benefits and promotions for part-time workers.

The Century Foundation's Top Policy Priorities for 2021

The pandemic has exacerbated the gender imbalance in power and resources in the workplace, disproportionately hurting women of color. The way forward requires policies that protect against workplace harassment and pregnancy discrimination and that build collective power. The next administration and Congress should:

- **Pass the Be Heard in the Workplace Act and the EMPOWER Act** to comprehensively address workplace discrimination, including sexual harassment.
- **Pass the Pregnant Worker Fairness Act**, which the House approved in September 2020.
- **Strengthen the right to organize** and to form a professional organization such as a union, because when people join together to act collectively, they gain important economic boosts and legal protections for workers regardless of gender.