

**An Agenda for Change:**  
*An Illinois Perspective on Creating a Better Future  
for America's Women and Girls*

*December 2009*



**SHRIVER  
CENTER**

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy Pollack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and a long, sweeping tail.

Wendy Pollack  
Director, Women’s Law and Policy Project  
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law  
Chicago, Illinois

## **Advisory Committee Members**

### **Gaylon Alcaraz**

*Executive Director*  
Chicago Abortion Fund  
Chicago

### **Stephanie Altman**

*Programs and Policy Director*  
Health and Disability  
Advocates  
Chicago

### **Sue Augustus**

*Managing Director*  
National Program Support  
Teams, Corporation for  
Supportive Housing  
Chicago

### **Patrick Brosnan**

*Executive Director*  
Brighton Park Neighborhood  
Council  
Chicago

### **Margaret Byrne**

*Director*  
Illinois Clemency Project for  
Battered Women  
Chicago

### **Kathy Chan**

*Policy Director*  
Illinois Maternal and Child  
Health Coalition  
Chicago

### **Kathleen Doherty**

*Executive Director*  
Between Friends  
Chicago

### **Elisabeth Forbrich**

*Executive Director*  
YWCA Lake County  
Waukegan

### **Jill Geltmaker**

*Associate Director—  
Community Integrations*  
Heartland Alliance  
Chicago

### **Lisa Gilmore**

*Training Coordinator and  
Anti-Violence Project  
Therapist*  
Center on Halsted  
Chicago

### **Lola Harty**

*Teen Parent Services  
Coordinator*  
Jackson County Health  
Department  
Murphysboro

### **Janet Hasz**

*Executive Director*  
Supportive  
Housing Providers  
Association  
Chicago

### **Jill Hayden**

*Director of State  
Governmental Affairs*  
Illinois Primary Health Care  
Association  
Springfield

### **Amber Hollibaugh**

*Chief Officer of Elder and  
LBTI Women's Services*  
Howard Brown Health Center  
Chicago

### **Martha Holstein**

*Long-Term Care Consultant*  
Health and Medical Policy  
Research Group  
Chicago

### **Beth Jones**

*Health Service—Nurse*  
Community High School,  
District 94  
West Chicago

### **Melissa Josephs**

*Director of Equal Opportunity  
Policy*  
Women Employed  
Chicago

### **Sharon Kayser**

*Executive Director*  
Apna Ghar  
Chicago

### **Kathy Kempke**

*Coordinator of Prevention  
Education*  
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago  
West Suburban Center  
Glen Ellyn

### **Sharmili Majmudar**

*Executive Director*  
Rape Victim Advocates  
Chicago

### **Denice Wolf Markham**

*Executive Director*  
Life Span  
Chicago

### **Christopher Merrett**

*Director and Professor*  
Illinois Institute for Rural  
Affairs, Western Illinois  
University  
Macomb

### **Nancy Nelson**

*State Director—Advocacy*  
AARP Illinois  
Springfield

**Malik Nevels**

*Executive Director*  
Illinois African American  
Coalition for Prevention  
Chicago

**Christina Obregon**

*Women's Initiative Organizer*  
Brighton Park Neighborhood  
Council  
Chicago

**Maria Pesqueira**

*President and CEO*  
Mujeres Latinas en Acción  
Chicago

**Wendy Pollack**

*Director, Women's Law and  
Policy Project*  
Sargent Shriver National  
Center on Poverty Law  
Chicago

**Polly Poskin**

*Executive Director*  
Illinois Coalition Against  
Sexual Assault  
Springfield

**Hedy Ratner**

*Co-President*  
Women's Business  
Development Center  
Chicago

**Yadira Ruiz**

*Stepping Stones Director*  
YWCA McLean County  
Bloomington

**Lyn Schollett**

*General Counsel*  
Illinois Coalition Against  
Sexual Assault  
Springfield

**Gail Smith**

*Executive Director*  
Chicago Legal Advocacy for  
Incarcerated Mothers  
Chicago

**Lauren Sugerman**

*President*  
Chicago Women in Trades  
Chicago

**Shannon Sullivan**

*Executive Director*  
Illinois Safe Schools Alliance  
Chicago

**Pam Sutherland**

*Vice President for Public  
Policy*  
Planned Parenthood of  
Illinois  
Springfield

**Nina Tarr**

*Professor of Law*  
University of Illinois College  
of Law  
Champaign

**Kate Walz**

*Senior Attorney*  
Sargent Shriver National  
Center on Poverty Law  
Chicago

**Laurie Wardell**

*Director of Employment  
Opportunity Project*  
Chicago Lawyers' Committee  
for Civil Rights Under Law  
Inc.  
Chicago

**Celeste Watkins-Hayes**

*Assistant Professor of  
Sociology and African  
American Studies*  
Northwestern University  
Evanston

**Kim Wells**

*Executive Director*  
Corporate Alliance to End  
Partner Violence  
Bloomington

**Jill White**

*Assistant Professor, Nutrition  
Science*  
Dominican University  
River Forest

**Annetta Wilson**

*Executive Director*  
Sankofa Safe Child Initiative  
Chicago

**Barbara Wingo**

*Director*  
Anna Bixby Women's Center  
Harrisburg

**Esther Wong**

*Executive Director*  
Chinese American Service  
League  
Chicago

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## *Introduction*

Throughout American history the federal government has played a critical role in advancing the human rights of women and girls—achieving progress in their economic security, physical and mental well-being, and reproductive health. These advancements have benefited all women and girls; however, not all women and girls have benefited equally. New and continuing challenges that impede the universal well-being of women and girls require each branch of the federal government to develop a renewed and strengthened commitment to promote opportunity expansively and guarantee equality for all.

Women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the costs of poverty in the United States. They make up over 55 percent of our nation's 39.8 million people who live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> And they constitute more than 55 percent of the 17.1 million who live in extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> The poverty gap between women and men persists even when factors such as age, work experience, education, and family structure are taken into account. In Illinois about one in eight (12.37 percent) adult women 18–64 have income levels below the federal poverty level, with black adult women experiencing a poverty rate of 25.3 percent and Hispanic adult women a rate of 17.3 percent, compared to white adult men's rate of 6.2 percent.<sup>3</sup> And nearly one in five (17.1 percent) young women and girls under 18 live below the poverty level.<sup>4</sup> Key to eliminating poverty in our society is investing in the well-being of our nation's women and girls.

Central to the government's responsibility to help women and girls reach their potential is the need for comprehensive antidiscrimination policies and a humane safety net. Federal policies and programs must guarantee quality education and skill development, gainful employment, comprehensive health care, economic security, freedom from violence, and adequate and affordable housing. Policy objectives must also address the discrimination and disparities that some women encounter based on immigration status, geographic location, criminal record, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age. Integrated approaches that bridge these areas in a way that recognizes the fundamental human rights of all individuals are critical to promoting the well-being of women and girls.

In light of this need to bring about change for women and girls, the Women's Law and Policy Project of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law has collaborated with women's advocates throughout Illinois to develop a set of federal policy recommendations that have been inspired by our work in communities across the state and that will bring about justice, economic advancement, and brighter futures for women and girls, their families, and their communities.

## **Education**

Education, from preschool through higher education, offers one of the best routes to economic security. This is particularly true for women. Higher education is central to an individual's ability to secure a job with family-sustaining wages and benefits. More women than men have college degrees, and this greater investment in their education pays off in higher wages, but women earn less than men with the same educational level.<sup>5</sup> Without attaining educational milestones, women really suffer. In Illinois, while more young men than young women drop out of school before obtaining their high school diplomas and both face more limited employment and earnings prospects than their better educated peers, the negative impact of dropping out on lifetime earnings is more severe for women.<sup>6</sup> To guarantee equal opportunity for all women, access to quality education at all levels and in all areas of study must be ensured and student success at every stage supported. To accomplish this goal, there must be greater investment and innovation in our nation's education system and specifically in women and girls' advancement throughout the system.

### **❖ Invest in early childhood education.**

Early child care and education programs are imperative to both the long-term cognitive and social development of children and the economic security of families and communities.<sup>7</sup> While the 2010 fiscal year budget creates a number of new early childhood initiatives, more funding is needed for Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers after-school program.

### **❖ Promote children's education through adequate nutrition programs.**

While the 2010 fiscal year budget increases funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, more funding is needed to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals in school and at home. Needed is increased support for several nutrition programs—including the Child and Adult Care Food Program—that are up for reauthorization. The Access to Nutritious Meals for Young Children Act should be enacted to strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

### **❖ Prohibit gender discrimination in education by strengthening Title IX.**

Women and girls should receive equal access to educational opportunities from prekindergarten to graduate school. The perpetuation of sex stereotyping leads to discrimination and sex segregation. Title IX provisions must be enforced within all areas of academia, especially in regard to fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics where women are underrepresented. Since Title IX has been in effect, there has not been a significant change in girls' access to high-skill, high-wage CTE (Career and Technical Education) courses that are primarily dominated by male students.<sup>8</sup> The original Title IX regulatory protections to ensure equality must be restored. The 2010 budget increases funding for the Women's Educational Equity Act, but more resources are needed to help women achieve representative parity in education in the classroom and on the playing field.

❖ **Prevent girls and young women from dropping out of school.**

Since households headed by someone without a high school degree are at the greatest risk of becoming poor out of any educational grouping, high school completion for our nation's youths must be promoted.<sup>9</sup> One in four girls in the United States does not graduate with a regular high school diploma in the standard, four-year period.<sup>10</sup> The numbers are even worse for girls of color: half of Native American female students, four in ten black female students, and nearly four in ten Hispanic female students drop out of high school.<sup>11</sup> This has serious consequences for girls' futures: female dropouts are significantly less likely to be employed and in Illinois earn less than \$8,500 per year for the rest of their lives.<sup>12</sup> Women make less than men at all levels of education, but the wage gap between men and women is the highest among high school dropouts.<sup>13</sup> In Illinois more resources need to be directed toward programs for students who have dropped out: for every \$100 that Illinois spends on enrolled high school students, only \$0.59 is spent for students who drop out.<sup>14</sup> The high school dropout crisis must be addressed in the upcoming reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. Steps must be taken both to prevent students from dropping out through targeted interventions and to provide for the educational needs of those students who have dropped out. A particular focus on the academic needs of girls and young women should be prioritized within the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act and the implementation of the Administration's new High School Graduation Initiative.

❖ **Ensure success in school for elementary and secondary students who are parents or expectant parents and students who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence.**

As concern grows over the dropout crisis across the country, there is growing interest in the causes, such as the violence in our schools and on our streets, and in the detrimental effect on the education of all youths. However, there has been less focus on domestic violence, sexual violence, and adolescent pregnancy and parenting—issues that have particularly contributed to the academic failure of young women and girls.

Nationwide 33 percent of female dropouts report that becoming a parent was a major factor in their decision to leave school.<sup>15</sup> However, research shows that students who leave school to care for a family member or fulfill parenting responsibilities are the dropouts most likely to report that they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided adequate support.<sup>16</sup> For pregnant or parenting students, schools should make appropriate accommodations, including acknowledging parental responsibilities as a valid cause for absence and providing homebound instruction and tutoring resources and ancillary services such as child care, transportation, and parenting classes through referrals to school- or community-based support services. Pregnant and parenting students are especially in need of targeted case-management and counseling services: in 2005 in Illinois over 8 percent of new mothers under 20 were diagnosed with postpartum depression, 13.6 percent of women under 20 reported physical abuse by an ex-husband or ex-partner before and during pregnancy, and 14.2 percent of women under 20 reported physical abuse by a husband or partner before and during pregnancy.<sup>17</sup> Health professionals within schools must be able to give accurate information about the full range of reproductive health services and recommend a course of action regarding student pregnancies so that students may make fully informed decisions. Schools must also encourage young fathers to

take responsibility as expectant parents and parents by granting them appropriate accommodations at school.

Students who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence also encounter unique challenges in working to complete their education. They may face harassment or struggle to maintain their safety in the classroom, as they travel to and from school, or at home. Teachers and school administrators need training to ensure that they understand and are sensitive to these students' educational and related needs. School districts should be required to establish clear protocol regarding how to deal with a student's disclosure about domestic or sexual violence and implement procedures that accommodate survivors in a manner that emphasizes confidentiality, safety, and educational success.

Since the two groups—youths who are parents or expectant parents and those who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence—overlap extensively, policies should reflect the reality that the variables of teen pregnancy and exposure to violence are linked. Research suggests that many adolescent mothers come from families with a history of problems, including physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and domestic violence, and many adolescent mothers directly experienced childhood maltreatment.<sup>18</sup> Although reports vary widely, as many as two-thirds of young women who become pregnant as teenagers experience sexual or physical abuse at some point in their lives.<sup>19</sup> Pregnant adolescents report significantly higher rates of physical abuse than pregnant adult women.<sup>20</sup> In 2008, of the teens who called the City of Chicago Domestic Violence Help Line, 39 percent had dependent children and 15.5 percent reported being pregnant.<sup>21</sup> With the highest rates of intimate violence being reported by lower-income, younger couples and lower-income parents reporting physically abusing their children at a rate almost double that of higher-income parents, adolescent mothers have a relatively high risk of exposure to violence in their family and intimate relationships.<sup>22</sup> The violence experienced by these students who live in poor urban neighborhoods is compounded by the relatively high rates of community violence in such areas.<sup>23</sup>

All of these students confront barriers in working to complete their education and need more and improved resources to ensure that they stay in school. In Illinois the Ensuring Success in School Task Force, established by the Illinois General Assembly, is documenting the experiences of elementary and secondary school students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of domestic or sexual violence and is identifying model policies and programs for Illinois public school districts to implement to help this population of students complete their education. For example, how should school districts comply with court orders that require the perpetrator, a fellow student, to “stay away” from the survivor? How do we counter the rise in homeschooling for violence survivors, particularly in small towns and rural areas of the state when schools do not take the steps necessary to ensure safety? How can school districts collaborate with local community-based organizations to improve the support systems for students? The Administration should follow Illinois's lead and create a national task force to identify the barriers to school attendance and success and to recommend policies and programs to combat the failure of schools to support and retain these students.

❖ **Require school districts to track separately the school-transfer and dropout rate of expectant and parenting students.**

To encourage all students to reach their maximum academic potential, state boards of education need better information about the challenges to school districts when working to accommodate expectant and parenting students. States need to keep schools accountable by adopting as quickly as possible the uniform graduation rate definition established by the U.S. Department of Education. School districts should also improve data collection measures by separately tracking and making publicly available the school-transfer and dropout rate of pregnant and parenting students.

❖ **Foster safe schools through antibullying measures and social and emotional learning standards that promote an appreciation for diversity, including lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, and questioning (LBGTQ) children and youths.**

Bullying and harassment create an unsafe environment where distractions force students to divert their attention from their academic development to find ways to cope with these negative experiences. With more than half (52 percent) of Illinois students reporting that they had been verbally harassed and nearly a quarter (23 percent) of students reporting that they had been physically harassed or assaulted in school in a recent study, schools need comprehensive policies and procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment and well-trained school personnel and students who can intervene in incidents of mistreatment.<sup>24</sup> School staff members should be required to receive training in antibullying measures as part of their accreditation and professional development. Comprehensive whole school bullying programs oriented around the goal of empowering students to resolve conflict positively are necessary to increase awareness of this widespread problem and encourage staff and students to take preventive action against bullying.

Antibullying and harassment policies must explicitly address the specific dynamics resulting from harassment based on an individual's gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, language, disability, status as a survivor of domestic or sexual violence, or status as a parent or expectant parent. Less than half (45 percent) of Illinois students in 2003 reported that they were protected by school antiharassment policy that specifically mentioned sexual orientation or gender-identity expression. Any controversy surrounding sexual orientation and gender-identity expression must not be used as a lightning rod to divide us at the expense of the safety of LBGTQ children and youths. Only half (52 percent) of Illinois students report feeling very safe in their schools, and over a third (37 percent) say that at least one personal characteristic makes them feel unsafe, including physical appearance, race or ethnicity, gender-identity expression, and actual or perceived sexual orientation.<sup>25</sup> In order to create safer schools, school districts need to implement social and emotional learning standards that emphasize diversity and promote acceptance of individual differences.<sup>26</sup> Safety is a floor, not a ceiling. Fostering safe, supportive learning environments where all students feel respected and valued is critical to children and youths' personal and academic development.

❖ **Support the community school model.**

The federal government should enact the Full-Service Community Schools Act to allow the U.S. Secretary of Education to award grants for the support of full-service community schools. By providing a range of on-site programs and services that support the healthy development of students, community schools are an innovative educational model keeping youths safe and promoting academic success. As the first state in the nation to codify community schools into its state school code, Illinois offers a strong example of how to link community-based organizations with schools to decrease the academic achievement gap and maximize students' academic potential.

❖ **Make postsecondary education affordable.**

Most of the fastest-growing occupations require postsecondary education or training (either a vocational certificate or a degree).<sup>27</sup> However, 57 percent of low-income working families do not have family members with more than a high school diploma or general educational development certificate (GED).<sup>28</sup> In Illinois more than two in five women have only a high school diploma or less.<sup>29</sup> The 2010 fiscal year budget's increase in Pell Grant funding is a first step in making higher education more available; however, access to financial aid remains a difficult barrier to higher education for low-income families. In order to encourage low-income students to pursue higher education, federal education reform should eliminate limits on the number of school semesters that a Pell Grant may be used and make Pell Grants a mandatory program to avoid annual disagreements over appropriations. The federal government should collaborate with states to establish matching-fund programs that would provide high school graduates with grants for two years of postsecondary education along the lines of the Michigan Promise program. Such a program, combined with the increases in the Income Protection Allowance and the new Income Based Repayment Plan, would be a stimulus for further educational achievement.

❖ **Increase college graduation rates.**

Low-income students, including adults who are working and parents, need supports to ensure their college success. Getting the information and services that they need to enter and complete a college degree can be challenging. For these students, intensive, easy-to-access student services are the key to educational and career success. Support services must be an integral part of the President's American Graduation Initiative.

❖ **Ask students.**

As policymakers rethink our education system more broadly, they must go beyond the analysis and recommendations of education and other experts to seek and prioritize input from our nation's students about their educational and related needs.

## **Employment and Skill Development**

Eliminating sex-based employment discrimination and establishing policies that recognize the everyday reality of workers' caregiving responsibilities are necessary for ensuring women's economic security. At the nexus of poverty and employment issues is a federal welfare policy that has prioritized caseload reduction and immediate placement in dead-end low-skill jobs at the expense of a real safety net and the promotion of further education and skill building. Better training and educational opportunities, strict enforcement of fair employment laws, and the creation of policy where fair employment protections do not exist are all imperative in empowering women to increase their earning power and develop economic independence. Efforts must be made to ensure that women are included in the newly emerging sectors of the economy as well as the traditionally male occupations.

### **❖ Establish equal pay for equal work and safeguard workers from unfair practices.**

While the enactment of the Lilly Ledbetter Act is a major step in helping women assert their right to equal pay, disparities remain. Women earn, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.<sup>30</sup> Women of color experience even greater disparity: African American women earn only 62 cents, and Latinas only 53 cents, for every dollar earned by white, non-Hispanic males.<sup>31</sup> In Illinois women make just 73 cents for every dollar that Illinois men make.<sup>32</sup> In order to make for fair workplaces, enactment of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, the Paycheck Fairness Act, and the successor bill to the Civil Rights Act of 2008 is vital.<sup>33</sup> The enforcement mechanisms of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division, Women's Bureau, and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division must be strengthened and better funded to protect women from sex-based discrimination in the workplace.

### **❖ Raise and index the minimum wage.**

Women make up more than two-thirds of minimum-wage workers.<sup>34</sup> The current federal minimum wage level of \$7.25 an hour is far below its 1975 level when, in 2008 dollars, it was \$8.72 an hour.<sup>35</sup> Even though the federal minimum wage increased to \$7.25 an hour in July, it is still below the 1975 level, and a mother who is a full-time year-round minimum-wage worker with two children is still more than \$3,000 below the current federal poverty level.<sup>36</sup> The minimum wage should be raised to \$9.50 by 2011 and indexed to inflation, along with an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit and an expansion of the credit to include all low-income adults. Everyone engaged in full-time work deserves a wage that supports a decent standard of living.

### **❖ Protect overtime pay.**

For workers who earn overtime pay, overtime wages make up about a quarter of their total earnings.<sup>37</sup> Regulatory changes are needed to make home health care workers, the vast majority of whom are women, eligible for minimum wage and overtime pay. Protections for overtime pay also need to be better enforced for the millions of women in traditionally female-dominated jobs such as retail, service, and sales positions.

❖ **Establish parity for part-time workers.**

Women account for more than two-thirds of part-time workers in the United States.<sup>38</sup> In addition to having limited access to paid sick leave and employer retirement plans, part-time workers receive lower salaries and fewer benefits than their full-time colleagues. After reaching a minimum threshold of hours worked, part-time workers should receive wages and benefits that are at least proportional to what their full-time counterparts receive. Although the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act gave states the option to make part-time workers eligible for benefits, federal action is needed to mandate that part-time workers are eligible for benefits based on their earnings and that being available for and seeking only part-time work is not a reason for denial of benefits.

❖ **Increase funding for job training that promotes career pathways.**

Low-income women need pathways to career-oriented jobs that provide family-sustaining wages and benefits. The Administration should promote partnerships among community organizations, educational institutions, and businesses—such as Illinois’s Job Training and Economic Development program or the Joyce Foundation’s Shifting Gears Initiative—that create educational supports for workers seeking job training. Initiatives in job training not only promote personal economic growth for disadvantaged individuals but also help communities develop economic sustainability by creating competitive businesses and a skilled labor force. The new green jobs training initiative, new quality workforce data initiatives, and increased funding for education and training at community colleges must promote women’s employment and gender equity.

❖ **Expand the capacity of the welfare system to advance long-term economic stability.**

In order to promote low-income individuals’ opportunities to escape poverty, applicants and recipients of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and other public benefit programs must be seen as integral to the U.S. economy. They must be seamlessly folded into the larger workforce, education, and economic development systems and not treated as just an afterthought. For this to happen, the TANF program must connect clients with resources and implement a service delivery model that promotes mobility from low-wage jobs, meet service needs that go beyond cash assistance, and improves service delivery. Key in the development of an improved TANF program is a well-trained workforce of caseworkers.<sup>39</sup> Frontline staff members who oversee comprehensive case management in welfare offices should have the necessary skills to perform client assessment, career coaching, referral, and ongoing follow-up rather than just manage the financial and clerical aspects of cases. Other measures that are critical to meeting the needs of TANF clients more comprehensively include limiting the caseload sizes of individual caseworkers, supporting welfare office staff through incentives for the highest caliber of work, and valuing the presence of people of color in the administrative ranks of welfare offices.<sup>40</sup>

Illinois’s experience with the TANF program illustrates problems that low-income families are encountering across the country: while unemployment and child poverty have grown over the past decade, Illinois has had one of the largest caseload reduction in the country, and there has been only a slight uptick in TANF cases in recent months while Illinois families are consistently discouraged from even applying for benefits.<sup>41</sup> The reauthorization of the TANF program is an

opportunity to make the following changes: remove access barriers; mandate and overhaul the Family Violence Option (FVO) provision; incentivize performance measures based on clients' employment, earnings, education, and skill development and address barriers to work, not caseload reduction; when unsubsidized employment is unavailable, provide subsidized employment through programs that build skills and work experience such as transitional jobs and bridge programs; extend benefits beyond the sixty-month lifetime limit for those who are unemployed, underemployed, disabled, or are survivors of domestic or sexual violence; ban the family cap; ban full-family sanctions; raise cash benefits to an adequate level; cover immigrant victims of violence and all immigrants who are legally present; eliminate the mandatory child-support-cooperation requirement; and eliminate the use of TANF funds for "marriage promotion" projects and other policies or programs which discriminate on the basis of family structure.

Although most states have adopted some form of the FVO, an overhaul is necessary since the FVO is underutilized and is not serving its intended purpose. In Illinois recent data show that less than 1 percent of the TANF work-eligible caseload has received an FVO waiver. Only 45 Illinois TANF recipients received an FVO waiver in October 2009. Necessary changes include replacing the state option with a mandate with minimum standards for screening, service referral, caseworker training, and waivers; amending the regulations to allow states to deduct individuals who receive FVO waivers from the federal work participation rate upfront, not after the rate is calculated and applied only if a state does not meet its participation rate; expanding the FVO to include survivors of sexual violence (sexual assault, child abuse, teen-dating violence, and stalking); and mandating TANF and Medicaid coverage for battered immigrant women and their children.

❖ **Increase the number and retention of women in nontraditional employment.**

Measures must be taken to help women increase their earning power through developing careers in nontraditional fields. Developing a strong public awareness campaign such as the "Woman Can" campaign and coordinating the efforts of the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are crucial to advancing women's participation in nontraditional employment. Creation of a national-level council (i.e., a Concrete Floor Commission) would identify existing barriers and develop strategies to achieve progress of tradeswomen in the male-dominated blue-collar and green-collar industries. Since the current federal benchmark for the utilization of women within federal construction contracts and subcontracts has not been updated from a level of 6.9 percent of total work hours since 1980, the federal government must reaffirm its commitment to gender equity in the workplace by reevaluating the affirmative action goals for women set by the Office of Federal Contracts and Compliance Programs in the regulations implementing Executive Order 11246, the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Guidelines for Federal Contractors Regarding Race, Color, Gender, Religion, and National Origin. Needed improvements in the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) Act include increased funding (to \$100 million) and grants, including grants linked to large projects and public works initiatives, to support capacity building and advancement opportunities for tradeswomen.

❖ **Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to cover more workers.**

FMLA has been critical in helping women maintain their jobs by providing employees with unpaid leave when they need to care for a newborn, newly adopted child, seriously ill family member, or their own health. However, FMLA currently covers only employers who have fifty or more employees—leaving many employees in the private sector without employment protection. FMLA should be changed to cover all employees, including part-time workers. FMLA should also be amended to cover more reasons for leave, including time-off for parents attending their children’s school activities. The waiting-period provision for eligibility to take leave should be removed. This provision makes employees who have been at their place of employment for less than a year or had worked less than 1,250 hours in the preceding year ineligible for FMLA coverage.

❖ **Require employers to provide paid FMLA and sick leave.**

FMLA, while a help to so many women, has had limited effectiveness because it does not require employers to provide paid leave. The Labor Department found in a 2000 study that over 3.5 million workers needed to take time-off from work but did not do so—nearly 78 percent of these workers cited their inability to forgo pay as the primary reason for not taking leave.<sup>42</sup> The proposed Family Leave Insurance Act would provide paid family and medical leave, and the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act, passed by the House, would guarantee federal workers four weeks of paid leave for the care of a newborn or adopted child. The federal government should mandate paid sick days for less serious illnesses in order to support women in the workplace. The federal government should enact the Healthy Families Act to require employers with fifteen or more employees to provide a minimum of seven paid sick days a year for employees to take care of their health needs and those of their family members.

❖ **Make high-quality, full-day, full-year child care affordable and accessible.**

Quality child care helps communities both now and in the future by supporting parents in the workplace and helping children learn and develop skills to succeed in life. Many families, however, cannot afford or do not have access to high-quality child care. Poor families who pay for child care spend a greater proportion of their monthly income on child care than families at or above the poverty level.<sup>43</sup> Only one in seven children eligible for federal child care assistance is served by the program.<sup>44</sup> More funding should be provided through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit should be made fully refundable and indexed to annual changes in the cost of living so that more low-income families will be able to afford child care services. Child care assistance should also be available to parents enrolled in school or training programs and to those looking for work. The reimbursement rates paid to child care providers for children receiving federal child care assistance should be raised, and higher reimbursements for higher-quality care should be provided. Children’s early learning experiences would greatly benefit from federally funded statewide systems that require states to establish health, safety, and child development standards for child care centers; rate child care providers based on quality of services; and provide grants to help child care facilities reach and maintain high standards. Federal child care policy should especially address the needs of hard-to-serve populations—including children with special needs based on physical disabilities or developmental delays; infants and toddlers; parents with nontraditional work schedules; children in limited-

English-proficient families; and children of teen parents.

❖ **Strengthen child support.**

With one in four children—seventeen million—receiving child support services, the child support program is an essential component of the federal-state safety net.<sup>45</sup> For poor families that receive child support, it constitutes 30 percent of family income.<sup>46</sup> While federal child support spending is cost-effective by collecting \$4.73 in support payments for every public dollar spent, it also promotes economic stimulus because low-income families spend child support income in their communities to meet basic household expenses.<sup>47</sup> The Child Support Protection Act should be enacted to restore permanently funding cut from the child support enforcement program by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Enactment of the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 would also permanently restore funding cuts and help families by requiring 100 percent family distribution by prohibiting TANF assignment of child support rights, requiring full distribution to current and former TANF families, and mandating states to disregard a portion of support income in the TANF program that is at least equivalent to the TANF earned income disregard. Additionally included are the requirement that states when calculating food stamp benefits deduct 20 percent of child support income received by families, the elimination of cost recovery of Medicaid birthing costs through child support, and the prohibition of treating incarceration as “voluntary unemployment.” Also important for strengthening the child support program is funding for grants that aim to improve parent-child relationships and expand transitional job programs and public-private career-pathway partnerships.

❖ **Empower workers to advocate for themselves.**

Collective bargaining benefits workers by empowering them to negotiate better wages and benefits. On average, unionization raises women workers’ wages by over 11 percent and is even more beneficial for low-income women workers by raising their wages by over 14 percent.<sup>48</sup> Women workers in unions are about 19 percent more likely to have health insurance than their nonunion counterparts, and they are almost 25 percent more likely to be in a pension plan than those not in unions.<sup>49</sup> Through collective organizing, workers attain greater fairness in the workplace and employers receive greater productivity in return. The Employee Free Choice Act should become law.

❖ **Recognize and support women-owned businesses.**

Women-owned businesses are vital to the health of the national economy. Majority women-owned firms are growing at nearly twice the rate of all firms (42 percent versus 24 percent); however, 35 percent of women-owned businesses earn less than \$10,000 annually and only 13 percent of them have employees.<sup>50</sup> With women owning 40 percent of all businesses, much should be done to improve women’s ability to develop their enterprises, create jobs, and stimulate the economy.<sup>51</sup> Women’s access to capital would improve with increased microlending initiatives and the creation of a national New Entrepreneur Tax Credits plan. The Community Reinvestment Act should be made applicable to all small-business lenders, the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Community Express loans should be established as a permanent program, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act should be amended to require collection of gender- and race-based

lender data, and more initiatives to encourage investment in women-owned businesses should be developed.

❖ **Recognize and eliminate family-responsibilities discrimination.**

Most workplaces do not accommodate the everyday reality of workers' caregiving responsibilities, making work-family balance difficult if not impossible. Since women still bear the primary responsibility for caregiving, this has a disproportionate impact on women. The link among greater caregiving responsibilities, lower wages, more hours of work, and women persists. Needed changes in workplace policies and practices include paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, greater flexibility, and scheduling predictability in the workplace.<sup>52</sup>

❖ **Create job-guaranteed leave and nondiscrimination protections for survivors of domestic or sexual violence.**

Job preservation is key to helping survivors of domestic and sexual violence attain self-sufficiency and leave abusive relationships. Besides having devastating effects on individuals and families, domestic and sexual violence has an economic impact on all of society: intimate-partner violence victims lose a total of nearly 5.6 million days of household productivity and nearly 8 million days of paid work—the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs—per year leading to an estimated \$858.6 million in annual lost productivity.<sup>53</sup>

In 2003 State Sen. Barack Obama was the chief sponsor of the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA), the most comprehensive set of employment protections for survivors of domestic and sexual violence in the country. VESSA provides unpaid, job-guaranteed leave for workers who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence or who have family or household members who are survivors; VESSA prohibits employers from discriminating against such workers. VESSA has proven to save survivors not only their jobs but also their lives and was amended this year to cover all private employers with fifteen or more employees. It is time for action on the federal level so that no worker is threatened with job loss simply because the worker is a survivor of domestic or sexual violence. In considering these employment-related provisions in the upcoming reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), VESSA should be established separately from FMLA and should consist of paid leave. President Obama should take immediate action by using his executive powers to ensure that all federal employees have job-guaranteed, paid time-off and protections from discrimination along the lines of Illinois's VESSA.

❖ **Strengthen and enforce HUD Section 3.**

The Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provision known as HUD Section 3 has been in place for many years. It requires recipients of HUD funding to provide employment and contracting opportunities to residents of public and subsidized housing and other low-income individuals. Female-headed families make up the vast majority of households receiving any HUD program assistance. While housing authorities must comply with Section 3 for their staff, most jobs created by HUD spending are contracted out and are mostly construction related. The implementing regulation is notable for its ineffectiveness in producing the intended outcomes. Under current law, recipients may be in compliance without ever hiring one low-income person. While legislative

action to strengthen Section 3 is ideal, the Administration does not have to wait for Congress to act. Changes in the regulations that ensure employment and contracting opportunities to the intended beneficiaries of Section 3 can be accomplished now. For example, current regulation requires that only “new hire” positions be subject to Section 3. This limitation does not consider the reality of hiring and layoff within the construction industry—the industry sector with the most employment opportunities subject to Section 3.

## **Violence Against Women and Girls**

Violence against women and girls—including sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking—has a devastating impact on women and their families in all aspects of their lives. Each year nationwide an estimated 5.3 million intimate-partner violence incidents affect U.S. women 18 and older, resulting in nearly 2 million injuries, more than 550,000 of which require medical attention.<sup>54</sup> In 2007 there were 115,006 domestic crimes and 5,596 criminal sexual offenses reported in Illinois.<sup>55</sup> Violence against women strains the financial stability of women, their families, and their communities: women who experience violence are economically vulnerable because they are more likely than other women to be unemployed, suffer health problems that can affect employability and job performance, report lower income, and rely on welfare.

### **❖ Increase funding for Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) programs.**

Recent steps have been taken in the 2010 fiscal year budget blueprint to support VAWA programs, yet the proposed funding remains largely the same as the previous year's budget. Policymakers should be mindful that the current economic climate is contributing to an increase in intimate-partner violence and demand for domestic violence services, yet service providers do not have the resources needed to assist all those who seek help. Policies should be enacted to guarantee low- or no-cost legal representation for survivors of domestic or sexual violence; such policies should include obtaining domestic violence and sexual assault protective orders and addressing issues related to employment and family law. The federal government must increase its investment in services that support survivors of domestic and sexual violence and distribute the full amount appropriated in an equitable way to grow service capacity.

### **❖ Increase funding for crime victim assistance programs.**

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding should be increased to support the work of direct-victim-service providers—domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and victim witness assistance programs. Domestic and sexual violence creates volatile situations, such as homelessness, in victims' lives: 92 percent of homeless women experience severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63 percent are victims of intimate-partner violence as adults.<sup>56</sup> By assisting survivors in the traumatic aftermath of crime, these programs help survivors regain stability in their lives and become economically secure.

### **❖ Ensure that rape victims receive justice by reducing DNA testing backlogs in state crime laboratories.**

Delays in processing DNA testing obstruct efforts to achieve justice for victims of sexual violence. In Illinois the backlog of DNA cases has more than tripled between the 2002 and the 2007 fiscal years to more than ten thousand overdue tests, while the number of forensic scientists, including trainees, declined 3 percent during the same time.<sup>57</sup> A lack of government funding nationwide has prevented crime laboratories from expediting rape-kit testing and has consequently marginalized rape victims in the criminal justice process. The seriousness of rape cases must be recognized and this problem prioritized by requiring state crime laboratories to utilize breakthrough DNA technologies better. In Illinois, law enforcement discretion regarding

whether to hand a rape kit to the state police for analysis too often results in many kits never being analyzed and survivors never knowing that their kits were not submitted. Law enforcement should be required to deliver every kit collected from a hospital to a state police laboratory. The Justice for Survivors of Sexual Assault Act of 2009 should be enacted to create incentives for state and local governments to eliminate their DNA testing backlogs and ensure timely processing of rape kits. Furthermore, victims of sexual assault should not be required to pay for rape-kit testing—states should assume the full costs of the kits, regardless of circumstances, and should prohibit parties receiving payment, such as hospitals, from billing rape victims.

❖ **Educate judges, attorneys, and law enforcement about violence against women and girls.**

Advocates throughout Illinois have been voicing their concerns that victims of domestic and sexual violence are not receiving sensitive treatment by law enforcement and the court system. Judges, attorneys, and law enforcement should be required to complete training on how to interact with survivors of violence in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

❖ **Improve data collection and accessibility regarding domestic and sexual violence cases for local law enforcement and state attorneys.**

The federal government should take action to require more transparency and accessibility in local and state data collection regarding cases of domestic and sexual violence to ensure that state attorneys remain accountable for sentences made in these cases.

❖ **Reauthorize and fund fully the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).**

Every day nearly nine thousand requests for domestic violence services go unmet in the United States due to domestic violence programs' limited resources.<sup>58</sup> The federal government should act to ensure that resources are available for the thousands of victims who are turned away each day. As the single largest source of funding for the basic operating costs of domestic violence programs, FVPSA funds sustain such programs' efforts to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of victims through emergency shelter and long-term advocacy resources.

❖ **Prevent teen dating violence.**

The problem of teen dating violence is widespread in the country and yet severely underreported: a 2005 study found that one in three teenagers knew a peer who had been physically hurt by a partner in a dating relationship, yet only 33 percent of teenagers who had been in or known about an abusive relationship said they told anyone about the abuse.<sup>59</sup> The Teen Dating Violence Prevention Act of 2009 should be enacted to provide services as well as educational and counseling programs for runaway and homeless youths or other at-risk youths who are survivors of domestic or dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. By assisting adolescents in identifying and building healthy relationships today, such efforts will contribute to the adolescents' long-term safety and personal development.

❖ **Create social supports and services for prostituted and trafficked individuals and prosecute those who profit from the exploitation of women and girls.**

Efforts must be made to reduce the stigma faced by women and girls who are exploited by prostitution. A national effort is necessary to create awareness among local law enforcement about the need to protect prostituted individuals and develop a coordinated effort to prosecute those who perpetuate the industry—traffickers, pimps, and solicitees. Prostituted and trafficked women and girls need access to resources such as education, job training, and health services that will help them develop healthy and self-sufficient lives. Public perception of the sex trade industry must be transformed to respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of the sex industry’s victims.

❖ **Create a public health campaign about violence against women and girls and reenergize the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women.**

The federal government should establish a coordinated effort to educate the public about issues related to violence against women and girls. An ongoing commitment is needed to increase awareness about domestic and sexual violence through existing social services such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children. The federal government should also build upon the momentum of the appointment of a White House Advisor on Violence Against Women by strengthening the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women with new membership and a revitalized agenda.

## ***Accessible and Comprehensive Health Care***

Comprehensive health care reform must address how the issues of accessibility and control of cost affect women. In Illinois 15.7 percent of women lack health insurance.<sup>60</sup> Nationally nearly 17.5 million women, most of whom are from low-income working families, were uninsured in 2008.<sup>61</sup> Since women are more likely than men to need health care services throughout their lives and have lower incomes and fewer resources than men, women are disproportionately burdened by economic barriers to obtaining health care: a 2007 study found that more than three of five adult women under 65 reported a problem in paying medical bills or a cost-related problem in getting needed health care or both, compared with about half of men.<sup>62</sup> Women's greater need for health care goes beyond reproductive health issues—38 percent of women 18 and older have a chronic condition, such as hypertension or diabetes, which requires ongoing medical care, compared to 30 percent of men 18 and older.<sup>63</sup> Compared to 42 percent of men 18 and older, 56 percent of women 18 and older in the United States regularly use a prescription drug.<sup>64</sup> Both improved quality of health care and more affordable and equitable coverage are necessary for women to be able to achieve healthier futures and economic stability.

### **❖ Establish equity in health care coverage.**

Women, who are more likely than men to have part-time jobs and shoulder more child-rearing responsibilities, are more likely than men to be covered as a dependent by their spouses' employment coverage. This consequently makes women more vulnerable to losing insurance should they become widowed or divorced or if employee costs for family coverage become too expensive. Single women in Illinois are twice as likely to be uninsured as married women due to married women's coverage through their spouses.<sup>65</sup> Older women's tendency to have lower levels of employment and lower income than older men make older women more likely to be uninsured.<sup>66</sup> Women of color are especially at risk of being uninsured. In Illinois 34.1 percent of Hispanic women are uninsured, followed by 24.7 percent of black women, 10.6 percent of Asian women, and 11 percent of white women.<sup>67</sup> This racial disparity is mirrored at the national level where 37.3 percent of Hispanic women lack insurance followed by 22.4 percent of black women and 12.8 percent of White women.<sup>68</sup> Health care reform needs to address these disparities by promoting diversity among health care providers and requiring that providers adopt culturally sensitive policies and procedures.

### **❖ Make health care affordable for all.**

While women use health care services more than men, women have fewer financial resources than men to pay for their health care needs. Four in ten low-income women either delay or forgo medical care due to high cost.<sup>69</sup> One-third of low-income women do not fill a prescription because they cannot afford to do so.<sup>70</sup> More than one in five minority women in Illinois and nearly 18 percent of all women nationwide did not make a visit to a doctor in the past year due to cost.<sup>71</sup> Federal and state health care reform should ensure that health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket health costs are based not on factors such as gender and health status but on a family's ability to pay for health care.

❖ **Ensure comprehensive coverage and accessibility.**

Health care reform should guarantee comprehensive benefits and health care services at all stages of an individual's life. Preventive services, treatment for chronic conditions, reproductive services, and end-of-life care are all essential to women's health. In order to guarantee that women receive equitable and quality health care, legislation that prohibits insurance providers from engaging in gender rating should be enacted. Moreover, insurance providers should be barred from the discriminatory practice of denying coverage to individuals solely on the basis of their status as a survivor of domestic or sexual violence or for having previously had a Cesarean section.<sup>72</sup> Women must have sufficient access to health care: 48 percent of Illinois women and 43 percent of women nationwide live in a primary care health professional shortage area, and 45 percent of Illinois women and 42 percent of women nationwide live in a mental health professional shortage area.<sup>73</sup> A federal-level task force should be established to examine the need for birthing centers and women-focused health centers within primary care providers and their ability to provide services to populations lacking access to health care because of prohibitive costs. Hospital emergency room departments should be given incentives to provide high-quality treatment and services for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence.

❖ **Prevent infant and maternal deaths.**

Lacking coverage and access to pregnancy-related support services, one in seven pregnant women is uninsured, and many more are underinsured.<sup>74</sup> The infant mortality rate for Illinois is 7.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>75</sup> This is higher than the national rate of 6.86.<sup>76</sup> This is an issue of racial disparity: in Illinois the infant mortality rate is 6.1 for whites and 14.4 for blacks.<sup>77</sup> This gap is mirrored at the national level where the infant mortality rate is 5.76 for whites and 13.63 for blacks.<sup>78</sup> These differences are indicative of inequalities in socioeconomic status and access to medical care. The health of women and children across the country can be improved by increasing funding for the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Drug Treatment programs for pregnant and parenting mothers.

❖ **Promote healthy lifestyles.**

Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) research showing that blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately affected by obesity indicates that the federal government should act to promote healthy lifestyles within these communities.<sup>79</sup> One of the ways to accomplish this is to promote the representation of people of color in the field of dietetics. The low number of minority dietitians has a detrimental effect on minority communities' access to information about nutrition and its connection with related diseases.<sup>80</sup> Vast food deserts—areas that lack access to grocery stores with fresh produce and healthy food—contribute to the poor nutrition of Americans.<sup>81</sup> The federal government should conduct a public health campaign to raise awareness of this problem, promote healthy food access, and educate the public about the causes and consequences of diet-related health problems including heart disease and diabetes.

## **Reproductive Health Care and Rights**

Improving reproductive health care and ensuring that women's reproductive rights are protected are critical goals that contribute to women's overall health. Low-income women face unique challenges in their efforts to secure their reproductive rights, and recent antichoice proposals as part of health care reform put all women at risk. Over the past decade, abstinence-only sex education and the lack of affordable birth control have limited women's personal decision making about their own bodies. While the Administration has taken important steps in the 2010 fiscal year budget to improve sex education programs and support contraception initiatives, action needs to be taken to ensure that women have access to the full range of reproductive health care services. In order to reduce the chronically high rates of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, women and girls need access to medically accurate information and comprehensive health services. An essential component of preventive care, the national family planning program should be recognized as a valued health care necessity.

### **❖ Support comprehensive sex education programs.**

Each year in the United States nearly 750,000 teenage females 15-19 become pregnant.<sup>82</sup> More than one in four (26 percent or 3.2 million) adolescent females between 15 and 19 have a sexually transmitted infection.<sup>83</sup> In order to make healthy, responsible decisions, teens need access to comprehensive sex education. President Obama's decision to end abstinence-only programs and direct funds to a teenage pregnancy prevention initiative is a welcome change from the past decade's misguided policy that directed more than \$1.3 billion to ineffective abstinence-only programs.<sup>84</sup> However, much remains to be done to reverse the negative consequences of past policy which has contributed to a decrease in contraception use among teens and a corresponding increase in the teenage birth rate after a fourteen-year decline.<sup>85</sup> Congress and the President should enact the Responsible Education About Life Act, which will direct funding to states for comprehensive sex education including medically accurate information about abstinence, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections. Instead of reinstating the failed Title V abstinence-only program, health care reform must include funding for the Personal Responsibility Education for Adulthood Training program, which will provide a funding stream for comprehensive sex and health education.

### **❖ Support publicly funded family planning services.**

Approximately half of U.S. pregnancies, more than three million each year, are unintended.<sup>86</sup> However, without publicly funded family planning, the numbers of unintended pregnancies and abortions would be nearly two-thirds higher than the current rates.<sup>87</sup> Low-income women's access to family planning measures needs to be improved through Title X and Medicaid. Approximately 17.5 million women are in need of publicly funded family planning services, yet publicly funded health centers currently meet only a little over half of that need.<sup>88</sup> While the 2010 fiscal year budget supports family planning services by allowing states to expand access to family planning services under Medicaid, increasing funding for the Title X Family Planning program is also needed to help millions of women prevent unintended pregnancies. With more than 60 percent of women who obtain care at a family planning center reporting that it is their usual source of medical care, policies that back family planning programs will also contribute to women's overall health.<sup>89</sup>

❖ **Protect a woman’s right to decide to have an abortion.**

Women should have access to the full range of reproductive health care options—including safe and legal abortions. Freedom of choice is essential to protecting every woman’s right to control her own decisions about childbearing without government interference. In Illinois women have difficulty exercising their freedom of choice because 34 percent of Illinois women live in counties without an abortion provider.<sup>90</sup> The Administration should rescind the Bush-era “provider conscience rule,” which bars people from obtaining health care by allowing doctors, nurses, pharmacies, health insurers, or any other health care provider to refuse to provide essential health information and services that they find morally objectionable.

❖ **Establish equal access to abortion services for all women.**

Low-income women are unfairly denied the right to safe and legal abortion services. While Medicaid pays for sterilizations, it does not cover abortions. The discriminatory Hyde Amendment, which denies abortion funding for women—disproportionately women of color—who rely on the federal government for their health insurance or health care, should be repealed. This unjust restriction prevents Medicaid recipients, federal employees, Peace Corps members, and others from accessing safe and legal abortion services. Unjustly jeopardizing the health of women, the Hyde Amendment, the Stupak-Pitts Amendment to the House health care reform bill, and the other “less harsh” provisions currently pending before Congress, are barriers to women’s reproductive rights and well-being.

❖ **Ensure that all women have access to affordable birth control.**

Affordable and accessible birth control is fundamental in realizing women’s rights to make their own decisions about family planning. The Prevention Through Affordable Access Act, which would restore affordable birth control for low-income women and women in college, and the Access to Birth Control Act, which would ensure women’s access to birth control at the pharmacy, should be enacted into law.

❖ **Make emergency contraception available.**

A form of backup birth control, emergency contraception helps prevent the risk of unintended pregnancy. Since emergency contraception is more effective the sooner it is taken, it must be widely available without a prescription. Hospitals receiving federal funds should be required to have emergency contraception available for rape survivors as well as unbiased and factual information about emergency contraception.

❖ **Increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) HIV/AIDS and STI (sexually transmitted infection) prevention programs.**

While one in four young women between 15 and 19 in the United States has an STI, this rate will continue to increase if action is not taken.<sup>91</sup> Since base STI program funding levels have been frozen for more than a decade, little has been done in recent years to prevent STIs. Funding for CDC prevention programs—including the Division of Adolescent and School Health—needs to be

increased so that states can work to reduce the prevalence of STIs and HIV/AIDS. The federal government must also take steps to decrease STI and HIV/AIDS disparities for African American communities. In Illinois black women have a new AIDS case rate of 36 per 100,000—a markedly higher rate than that faced by white Illinois women at 1.5 per 100,000.<sup>92</sup> This health disparity requires lawmakers to increase collaboration and coordination of partnerships among public and private agencies and community organizations in order to improve access to STI prevention and treatment services. The CDC must modify its surveillance systems to track not only the basic demographics of individuals with STIs but also more complex information such as the socioeconomic status of these individuals and their communities.

## Housing

Safe and affordable housing is essential to creating stability within families' lives and helping individuals escape poverty. However, low- and moderate-income Americans are finding it increasingly difficult to secure affordable housing. The housing crisis has forced many families to make difficult tradeoffs with their spending, often neglecting basic needs—food, health care, and education—to be able to make their rent or mortgage payments. Low- and moderate-income single working mothers are particularly affected by the lack of affordable housing: 85 percent of these women in Chicago spent 30 percent or more of their income in 2007 on housing expenses, classifying them as housing-burdened by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and 53 percent in Chicago spent 50 percent or more of their income on housing costs, making them housing-distressed.<sup>93</sup> In Illinois 70 percent of low-income children live in households that are housing-burdened.<sup>94</sup> In 2000 female-headed families accounted for 81 percent of Illinois households receiving any HUD program assistance, and 41 percent of all program-recipient families were female-headed families with children.<sup>95</sup> Housing stability is a core element in a family's economic situation because it is connected to being able to access a community of opportunity that encompasses quality education and employment. Promoting housing security requires policymakers to establish long-term solutions to the underlying factors that contribute to homelessness.

### ❖ **Provide more affordable and subsidized housing.**

As a society where two-fifths of the nation's children are being born to single mothers and 40 percent of marriages are predicted to end in divorce, housing and urban planning must go beyond the common two-parent, two-income housing blueprint and make accommodations for all the types of families in America.<sup>96</sup> The federal government should preserve publicly supported low-income housing by providing adequate capital and operating funding to housing authorities so that they can meet long put-off capital improvement needs. The federal government should aim, both as a measure to preserve affordable housing and as part of the Administration's commitment to green initiatives, to prevent unnecessary public housing demolition by supporting the proposed revisions of Section 18 of the U.S. Housing Act. The federal government should ramp up efforts to encourage private owners to remain in the federally subsidized housing programs by using the HUD Green Retrofit Program for Multifamily Housing (a program of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) to encourage long-term commitments from owners and improve energy efficiency in subsidized properties. Support is needed for the Mark-to-Market Extension Act from the previous legislative session; the Act aims to preserve at-risk privately owned, federally subsidized housing. The Section 8 Voucher Reform Act legislation would allow low-income voucher holders to have a real chance to live in areas of opportunity with low crime, quality schools, and access to employment. Public housing authorities must commit to housing mobility within the voucher program for it finally to become a priority.

### ❖ **Support the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program.**

With the national foreclosure rate continuing to climb, increased funding for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants is critical.

❖ **Create safe housing initiatives for victims of domestic and sexual violence.**

Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking force many women and their families into homelessness. About 20 percent of homeless women report domestic violence or abuse as a reason for their homelessness, and 28 percent of U. S. cities reported that domestic violence was a primary cause of homelessness.<sup>97</sup> The McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act must include provisions to help communities attend to the needs of victims and their families who are fleeing abuse. More federal funding is also needed for transitional housing programs that provide services for homeless families experiencing domestic or sexual violence. A national-level task force should be created to address and raise awareness about issues related to abused women who are homeless or are at risk of being homeless and their need for trauma-informed services.

In reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the housing provision protections should be expanded to include survivors of sexual assault and finally allocate the dollars originally committed in the 2005 reauthorization to assist housing authorities and local advocates in collaborative efforts to end violence against residents of publicly supported low-income housing. The following provisions should also be added to VAWA: allow survivors in public housing or project-based Section 8 housing to move on an emergency basis to other public or project-based Section 8 housing (known as transfers); recognize that survivors may have poor credit, employment, criminal, or rental histories due to the violence and should not be denied admission or threatened with termination or eviction on those grounds; deal with family breakups in such a way as to prioritize the housing subsidy to remain with the survivor; clarify the interplay between state and local landlord-tenant/forcible entry and detainer laws and VAWA; make clear that survivors are not liable for damage to a subsidized unit caused by an incident of violence; ensure that survivors being denied admission or threatened with a termination of assistance have a right to a grievance hearing; add specificity and protections to the nontermination “actual and imminent threat” exception; make clear that brief absences from a subsidized unit do not constitute abandonment; eliminate the one-year residency rules for porting (moving out of one housing authority’s jurisdiction and into another) if the voucher holder is leaving the jurisdiction because of violence; add contract provisions obligating private owners participating in the voucher program to allow survivors to end their leases early if they need to do so due to a credible imminent threat of future harm; require housing providers to accept HUD forms of certifications and to limit the number of times that they can ask for it; and require VAWA-specific language in all tenant notices, termination notices, and applications for housing.

❖ **Improve services targeted toward ending long-term homelessness.**

Increased federal funding within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is needed. Authorizing the Services to End Long-Term Homelessness Act, which would create a new program within SAMHSA to provide a System of Care for homeless populations living with mental illness, would help homeless individuals attain self-sufficiency. Creating supportive services that will help women veterans and all other women who experience trauma is key to promoting their mental health and economic self-sufficiency.

❖ **Ensure that the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) is implemented properly.**

As the NSP2 program gets under way, HUD should ensure that grantees fulfill their duties to further fair housing affirmatively, that grantees meet or exceed income targets and requirements for long-term housing affordability, and that transparency occurs during the allocation process and throughout the period in which grantees or subgrantees spend the funds. Any additional guidance by HUD regarding the requirements under NSP should emphasize transparency and should emphasize sustainable and affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income families.

❖ **Do not link eviction to work requirements.**

While programs that help individuals obtain employment or job training are important to their economic advancement, work requirement provisions tied to public or subsidized housing undermine housing as a safety net. Since many individuals face employment barriers that make them hard to employ, housing security should not hinge on employability.

## **Women in Rural Areas**

Women in rural areas face a significant risk of being poor due to their geographic isolation. Rural areas are losing population: between 2000 and 2006, population in nonmetropolitan areas increased by just 0.4 percent per year compared to an increase of 1.1 percent per year in metropolitan areas.<sup>98</sup> While outmigration continues to sap human capital from rural areas, these areas face increasing difficulties in their efforts to strengthen infrastructures and services to create a better quality of life. As people leave to look for employment in cities, rural areas continue to suffer higher poverty rates than urban areas. Limited access to transportation and essential services, including quality education and health care, limits rural communities in creating paths out of poverty.

### **❖ Improve access to education for women in rural areas.**

Education is crucial to helping rural women and their communities attain economic security. Rural counties with high educational levels have had more rapid income growth over the past two decades than counties with lower educational levels.<sup>99</sup> Quality education contributes to local economic development by producing a highly skilled local workforce that has the tools to create new methods of producing goods or providing services, thereby improving a community's chances of attracting new businesses. A step in improving women's career opportunities in rural areas is to encourage young women to pursue higher education in science and mathematics. With a strong educational system that attracts businesses looking to take advantage of skilled workers, rural communities will begin to curtail the flow of outmigration.

### **❖ Improve women's access to health care in rural areas.**

Women living in rural areas do not have adequate access to primary and specialty care, and they especially face challenges in obtaining obstetrics and gynecological services, prenatal care, family planning and abortion services, prescription and pharmacy services, and senior care.<sup>100</sup> Rural underserved areas need a better system of health care delivery to provide Medicaid and Medicare patients with quality and cost-effective services. Since women in remote areas have considerably fewer options for health care providers, women in such areas are especially vulnerable to the negative consequences that the Bush-era "provider conscience" rule has on women's health.

### **❖ Expand transportation and broadband in rural areas.**

Rural communities suffer from inadequate public transportation and technology infrastructures. Business, education, and health care opportunities will advance only when these resources are available. Increased access to transit and modern technology is imperative to promoting nonmetropolitan communities' quality of life and economic competitiveness.

### **❖ Support women's roles in rural economic development.**

Women's entrepreneurship and innovation are basic to rural communities' efforts to build their local economies. Yet women in nonmetropolitan areas confront significant challenges in securing access to credit. Enhancing rural women's access to capital promises to spur innovation and help nonmetropolitan families achieve financial stability. Investing in job training and microlending

initiatives for women and encouraging women's participation in the agricultural sector will greatly contribute to the development of rural economies.

## **Women in Prison**

Individuals with criminal records are often marginalized in many areas of civic and personal life—employment, housing, education, and family life. The barriers that affect postprison life deter people from creating a stable lifestyle and maintaining economic security. Since most women behind bars are mothers who are often the primary caretaker of their children, incarcerated women’s time in prison has devastating effects on their families and communities. Support services in prison and effective reentry initiatives are integral to helping incarcerated women rebuild their lives and achieve economic independence.

### **❖ Facilitate incarcerated women’s reentry into society.**

Imprisoned women encounter grave challenges once they return to their communities that put them at great risk of poverty. Realizing expungement rights for offenders is an essential component to helping low-income women with criminal records secure stable jobs and escape poverty. Reentry mentoring programs are especially effective in helping women navigate the transition from prison to community reentry. Restrictions in federal programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and public and subsidized housing need to be removed for successful reentry.

### **❖ Invest in education and job training for incarcerated women.**

By promoting positive personal change and preparing people for entry into the workforce, education in prison reduces recidivism and helps families work toward fiscal security. However, the limited availability of in-prison education programs—Adult Basic Education, general educational development certificate (GED) classes, and college courses—has hindered incarcerated women from developing skills that will help them develop economic independence. Discriminatory policies in college admissions and financial aid have also prevented women from pursuing further education and attaining better jobs after incarceration. A commitment from the federal government to provide education for all individuals, regardless of criminal justice history, is needed.

### **❖ Protect support services for women in prison.**

According to the Justice Department, mothers in state prison are two times more likely than fathers to report homelessness in the year before arrest, four times more likely to report past physical or sexual abuse, and almost one and a half times more likely to have either a current medical or mental health problem.<sup>101</sup> Because women in prison often bear a multitude of concerns, such as addiction and mental health issues, increased funding for counseling, peer-led programs, and better health care is essential to assisting them in meeting their immediate needs, making positive changes, and developing healthy lifestyles.

### **❖ Promote family unification for women prisoners and ex-offenders who are mothers.**

While the number of incarcerated fathers has increased by 77 percent since 1991, the number of incarcerated mothers has increased by 122 percent.<sup>102</sup> The challenges for families who are disrupted by the prison sentence of a parent have a disproportionate impact on African American

children and Latino children, who are, respectively, nearly nine times and three times more likely to have a parent in prison than white children.<sup>103</sup>

❖ **Support survivors of domestic or sexual violence who are incarcerated for defending themselves against their abusers.**

Survivors of domestic or sexual violence who are imprisoned for defending themselves against their abusers pose little threat to public safety. With very low rates of recidivism, and generally no criminal records or history of violence, these women should not receive unduly harsh sentences.<sup>104</sup>

## **Women with Disabilities**

Action is needed to ensure that women with disabilities receive full inclusion in all aspects of community life. Institutional barriers and societal attitudes subject women with disabilities to a twofold discrimination: as women and as persons with disabilities. By establishing equitable opportunities for women with disabilities, policymakers will help advance these women and their families toward economic stability. Realizing the rights of women with disabilities in health care, transportation, housing, education, and employment is at the core of recognizing their human rights.

### **❖ Ensure accessibility to health care, especially regular breast and cervical cancer screenings, for women with disabilities.**

Women with disabilities are less likely to perform breast self-examination and have regular mammograms and Pap tests than women without disabilities.<sup>105</sup> They are also less likely to receive information on contraceptive options or screening for sexually transmitted infections than nondisabled women.<sup>106</sup> Increasing access to preventive measures is imperative to the health of women with disabilities. Training medical staff to be sensitive to disability issues and coordinating transportation for women who have difficulty getting to the hospital, doctor's office, or clinic will help ensure that these women receive adequate care.

### **❖ Prevent abuse against women with disabilities.**

While women with disabilities report being abused at a rate similar to women without disabilities, they are more likely to be abused for longer periods of time and by a wider variety of people—including caretakers and strangers—than women without disabilities.<sup>107</sup> Most women with physical, visual, or hearing disabilities do not use battered women's shelters because shelters often do not offer accommodating services such as sign language interpreters or personal care attendants. Women with disabilities need access to resources to assist them in escaping violent relationships.

### **❖ Protect the housing rights of women with disabilities.**

The federal government must address the need for more accessible, affordable, integrated, and self-determined housing for women with disabilities. Better enforcement of Fair Housing Act regulations is key to ensuring that women with disabilities receive equitable treatment. Landlords, public housing authorities, and property managers should be required to receive training on the housing rights of people with disabilities.

### **❖ Promote fully inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities.**

Students with disabilities have the right to be educated in regular education settings to the maximum extent appropriate in light of their needs. In order to ensure that students with disabilities receive full access to general education curricula and are not unnecessarily isolated from their peers, schools must maintain appropriate supplementary aids and services such as speech and music therapy. High-quality public education, predicated on a shared vision of high expectation for all students, must be a priority.

❖ **Ensure that women with disabilities receive fair treatment in employment.**

More rigorous implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act is necessary to ensure that women with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in the workforce. Discrimination in hiring and in the workplace should be eliminated through better enforcement of laws and regulations.

## ***Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Issues***

Comprehensive antidiscrimination laws and equal protections are needed to ensure that LGBTQ individuals' civil rights are secure. LGBTQ people face a multitude of discriminatory policies ranging from family-law issues to matters of economic justice. Specific legal protections are necessary to safeguard the LGBTQ population from mistreatment and the harmful manifestations of intolerance that permeate all aspects of society.

### **❖ Remove barriers that deny LGBTQ individuals access to health care.**

The Administration should rescind the harmful Department of Health and Human Services “provider conscience” rule, which seriously jeopardizes LGBTQ individuals' access to basic health care. In addition to violating the rights of LGBTQ people, this regulation may hinder patient-physician communication and ultimately worsen an already tenuous public health situation.

### **❖ Authorize and appropriate federal funds for programs aiding LGBTQ youths.**

An estimated 2 million American youths experience at least one night of homelessness each year—with over 100,000 sleeping long-term on the streets.<sup>108</sup> Studies indicate that a conservative estimate of one in five homeless youths self-identify as LGBTQ, a rate that is twice as high as the prevalence of LGBTQ youths in the general population.<sup>109</sup> A study of unaccompanied homeless youths in Illinois found a statewide figure of 14.8 percent of homeless youths identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, or “something else,” and a 2005 study on homeless youths in Chicago found a lesbian, gay, and bisexual rate of 23.1 percent. Derailed in developmental trajectory, these youths are often turned out of their homes by their own families, often end up dropping out of school, and have higher rates of suicide than their heterosexual peers. Homelessness contributes to a number of negative consequences such as chronic mental health problems, substance abuse, and abusive relationships. Appropriations for the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs must be increased.

### **❖ Create and strengthen nondiscrimination protections.**

The status of LGBTQ individuals is unclear when it comes to enforcing provisions of nondiscrimination law. This lack of protection for LGBTQ individuals exacerbates poverty rates in the LGBTQ community: after adjusting for a range of characteristics that predict poverty—including gender, race, ethnicity, education level, and region—gay and lesbian coupled families are significantly more likely to be poor than their married heterosexual counterparts.<sup>110</sup> Equal protection of LGBTQ individuals' civil rights is integral to developing economic stability within the LGBTQ community. In order to prohibit workplace discrimination based on sexual identity and gender, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act should be enacted into law. Fully inclusive language that explicitly recognizes the rights of LGBTQ individuals and families in the Family and Medical Leave Act should be adopted.

### **❖ Support safe schools.**

All LGBTQ students and staff should have the opportunity to participate in a safe and welcoming

learning environment. However, LGBTQ individuals often face widespread harassment in the classroom, and this impedes personal and academic development. School districts should be required to create and implement inclusive nondiscrimination policies as well as complaint procedures that help facilitate equitable educational opportunities for LGBTQ youths. While such nondiscrimination provisions fall under Title IX, explicit protections for LGBTQ youths should be created to ensure that their rights are protected.

❖ **Create comprehensive federal hate crime law.**

In passing the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act to protect against crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Congress and the President have greatly advanced the protection of LGBTQ individuals' right to live a life free from the threat of violence. The federal government should continue to work to guarantee the rights of LGBTQ individuals by enacting the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

❖ **Recognize nontraditional families.**

Since states have not consistently acted to recognize and protect LGBTQ families, federal-level action is needed to ensure that LGBTQ families' rights are secured. The federal government should repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and should provide the same benefits and protections received by opposite-sex couples to married same-sex couples and nontraditional kinship systems outside the institution of marriage. The federal government should also recognize same-sex couples' right to adopt. Since aging LGBTQ individuals often do not have biological children, older LGBTQ people lack a traditional family support system, which often helps elderly individuals meet their caregiving needs. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS within the older LGBTQ population has made this absence of traditional caregivers an acute problem that requires action at the federal level.

❖ **Provide targeted services to help the LGBTQ community address poverty, homelessness, domestic and sexual violence, and HIV/AIDS.**

Outreach to the LGBTQ population is needed to help LGBTQ individuals obtain resources to escape poverty, homelessness, and domestic and sexual violence.<sup>111</sup> Efforts to address these social problems within communities need to implement an inclusive framework that recognizes the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTQ individuals, including their lack of legal protections and traditional support systems and kinship structures.

## **Immigrant Women**

Drawing strength from the diversity of its population as a nation of immigrants, the United States should enact policies that integrate immigrants into American society fairly and expeditiously. Immigration policy is intertwined with antipoverty initiatives: while undocumented immigrants and their children make up 5 percent of the U.S. population, they constitute 9.2 percent of the poor.<sup>112</sup> Family reunification, full labor protections, and legalization for hardworking undocumented immigrants are all vital to developing comprehensive immigration reform and ending poverty. Immigrant women are especially vulnerable to exploitation, harassment, and economic injustice. Many immigrant women face violence and harassment both inside and outside their homes but do not report these crimes to the police for fear of being deported. Policies supporting female immigrants' well-being must include universal health care coverage, better access to higher education, protections from abuse at home and in the workplace, and a legal and safe path to citizenship.

- ❖ **Promote education and workforce training programs for immigrants.**

Low levels of citizenship and limited English proficiency present serious barriers to immigrant women in their efforts to earn a decent living. In Chicago 44 percent of adult Latinas are not U.S. citizens.<sup>113</sup> Facing vulnerability to wage exploitation, poor working conditions, and violence, these women experience considerable challenges in working toward economic self-sufficiency. Non-U.S. citizen adult Latinas have higher unemployment rates, lower education levels, and lower average incomes than Latina U.S. citizens.<sup>114</sup> In order to increase the socioeconomic mobility of Latinas and women among the other immigrant populations, policymakers must build pathways to U.S. citizenship and improve immigrant women's access to education and workforce opportunities through improved English language proficiency initiatives, transitional job programs, and bridge programs that link job training with language instruction.

- ❖ **Eliminate all forms of human trafficking.**

Human trafficking manifests a complete disregard for basic human rights and encompasses all forms of forced labor and servitude, including prostitution, domestic labor, and sweatshop labor. Women and girls make up approximately 80 percent of transnational victims of trafficking, and more than half of transnational victims are females trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>115</sup> The federal government must work to prevent human trafficking by raising awareness within the American public, increasing coordination among U.S. agencies to improve responses, strengthening antitrafficking law enforcement measures, and improving efforts to identify and protect victims.

- ❖ **Increase access to higher education for undocumented children.**

Ineligible for federal financial aid for higher education and, in most states, in-state tuition at public universities, undocumented children do not have access to higher education. Legalization would increase these youths' future earning power by increasing their higher-education attainment rates and improving their employment prospects. The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act should be enacted into law to permit immigrant students who grow up in the

U.S. to obtain permanent status and become eligible for U.S. citizenship if they go to college or serve in the U.S. military. This legislation would also help youths access higher education by eliminating a federal rule that penalizes states that provide in-state tuition without considering immigration status.

❖ **Establish immigration policies that pave the way to citizenship justly.**

With undocumented immigrants being nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as native-born persons in the United States, antipoverty measures must address the particular needs and circumstances of immigrants.<sup>116</sup> Paths to legalization for undocumented immigrants should focus on family unification—current deportation policies all too often force immigrant women to take on the strenuous, dual role of caretaker and sole household income-earner. The federal government must also prioritize the safety of immigrant survivors of domestic and sexual violence by streamlining the Violence Against Women Act self-petitioning process.

❖ **Promote cultural and linguistic competency in health care, education, social work, and law enforcement.**

Both sensitivity toward and respect for the linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant populations are important for fighting cultural stereotypes and ensuring equity for immigrants. Cultural and linguistic competency among service providers is a key factor in eliminating health and educational disparities that disproportionately affect immigrant groups. For example, the competing pressures of conforming to mainstream culture and preserving family traditions faced by young Asian American women may negatively affect their emotional and mental health. But many avoid seeking mental health services and suffer low self-esteem and even commit suicide. The federal government should lead the way to get the public health and psychological communities to implement culturally sensitive initiatives that prioritize targeted outreach to immigrant communities.<sup>117</sup> Also, better coordination is needed among local law enforcement to promote better cooperation and compliance regarding the U Visa and other immigrant documentation. The overarching goal of all efforts to promote cultural competency in our communities should be to advance inclusive policies and eliminate practices that stigmatize immigrant populations.

❖ **Ensure that immigrant women and children receive adequate health care.**

The current provision that denies documented immigrants Medicaid coverage during their first five years of citizenship must be eliminated. The burdensome citizenship documentation requirement for Medicaid coverage should be streamlined and modified so that undocumented immigrants are not denied vital reproductive health care services under Medicaid.

## Older Women

In 2008, the poverty rate for women 65 and older was 11.9 percent, 78 percent higher than the poverty rate for men 65 and older (6.7 percent).<sup>118</sup> The reasons for this disparity stem from the ongoing problems that begin to affect women as soon as they enter the workforce. On average, women spend twelve years out of the workforce to fulfill caregiving responsibilities.<sup>119</sup> Most women do not have income from pensions because the types of employment that allow them to take on a caregiver role provide a flexible schedule with low wages and few benefits. As women grow older, the wage gap widens: when women begin their careers, the pay gap with male peers is 4 percent, whereas women 45 to 64 experience a 30 percent gap.<sup>120</sup> With today's high cost of living continuing to rise, low-income elderly women need access to comprehensive and stable government programs that will help them when their income is not enough to meet the basic costs of living.

### ❖ **Ensure retirement security.**

Social Security must be strengthened in meeting the income needs of elders and their families. With women constituting 57 percent of Social Security beneficiaries 62 and older and approximately 69 percent of beneficiaries 85 and older, preserving Social Security as a universal, age-based entitlement is crucial to women's economic security.<sup>121</sup> Social Security must be protected as a powerful tool for the most vulnerable in fighting poverty: 47 percent of all elderly unmarried women receiving Social Security benefits in 2007 relied on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income.<sup>122</sup> In Illinois approximately one out of five residents 65 or older relied entirely on Social Security as the only source of income in 2000, and nearly one-half of Illinois elders would have lived below the poverty line in 2000 through 2002 if they had not received Social Security.<sup>123</sup> In order to encourage individuals to save for retirement, the Administration should establish that savings are not counted toward assets when determining eligibility for public benefits.

### ❖ **Overtune recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions that unjustly jeopardize the economic security of older Americans.**

Action is needed to counteract the effects of pregnancy discrimination stemming from the Supreme Court's decision in *At&T Corp. v. Hulteen* preventing women employees who took pregnancy leaves before the 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act from accruing as much pension credit as their coworkers who took leave for other reasons. Action is also needed to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling in *Gross v. F.B.L. Financial Services* making it more difficult for employees to win claims of age discrimination because they must now meet the full burden of proof by demonstrating that age is the deciding factor in an adverse employment decision. To clarify the appropriate standard of proof for age discrimination claims, the Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act, which will restore Congress' original intent regarding the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, should be enacted.

### ❖ **Support affordable housing for elders.**

In Illinois, where only 59 percent of seniors have paid off mortgages and 20 percent of seniors rent rather than own, housing is a determining factor in an older person's ability to achieve economic

security.<sup>124</sup> Steps should be taken to improve the Department of Housing and Urban Development's initiatives to provide direct and indirect housing subsidies for seniors, including the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, and the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program. By improving seniors' access to resources from the Housing Trust Fund and allocating more funds from the Capital Budget Campaign to construct or rehabilitate housing for the elderly, the Administration would promote elderly individuals' financial stability. Long-term support services should be developed so that elders are able to stay in their own homes and communities and not be forced to move into nursing homes.

❖ **Improve health care coverage for the elderly.**

For low-income seniors who need to fill gaps in medical care but do not qualify for Medicaid, the federal government must take action to subsidize the costs of Medigap policies or mandate lower premiums and cost sharing. The Community Care Program's sliding scale copayment formula should be modified to use a more realistic cost of living than the federal poverty level standard. The Medicare Part D prescription drug plan should be overhauled to make it easier to navigate and less costly.

❖ **Increase income supports.**

In Illinois the average Social Security payment for a retired elderly couple in 2007 met only 78 percent of what the average elderly couple needed to cover their basic expenses.<sup>125</sup> Supplemental income supports—including Supplemental Security Income, Low-Income Subsidy, food stamps, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and housing assistance—should be strengthened to help elders meet their basic needs.

❖ **Promote cultural competency measures within services that address the needs of older women of color.**

Older women of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be poor: 22.5 percent of black women 65 and older, 21.3 percent of Hispanic women 65 and older, and 12 percent of Asian American women 65 and older have incomes below the federal poverty level, in contrast to only 9.1 percent of white women 65 and older.<sup>126</sup> Racial and ethnic minority elders also have health indicators that lag behind those of their white counterparts.<sup>127</sup> In order to address the concentrated poverty and health needs of older women of color, benefit programs must overcome access barriers stemming from linguistic and cultural differences.

## ***Human Rights***

The United States should take a leading role in fighting for human rights by ratifying all international human rights treaties. As a first step to demonstrate the United States' commitment to the rights and welfare of women in this country and throughout the world, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its protocol should be ratified without any limiting reservations, declarations, or understandings. As the only country in the Western Hemisphere and the only industrialized democracy that has not ratified CEDAW, the United States remains in the company of countries such as Iran and the Sudan, where women's rights are in a deplorable state. The federal government should protect the rights and welfare of all women by ratifying CEDAW.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Detailed Tables (22.13 million U.S. women and girls of all ages live below 100 percent of the federal poverty line and make up 55.57 percent of all people in poverty).

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (9.5 million U.S. women and girls of all ages live below 50 percent of the federal poverty line and make up 55.67 percent of all people in extreme poverty).

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Detailed Tables.

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup>See Legal Momentum, *Women: Now Learning More, But Still Earning Less* (2007), <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/lmgenderpaygapreportfinal.pdf>; *id.*, *Young Men Are Still Economically Better Off than Young Women* (2008), <http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/youngwomenbetterthanmen.pdf>. This holds true regardless of race or ethnicity.

<sup>6</sup>See *Illinois Task Force on Re-enrolling Students Who Dropped out of School: Final Report* iii (2008), <http://www.asnchicago.org/PDFs/2008/Re-enrolledStudentsFinalReportSept2008.pdf> (in Illinois one out of six black students, one out of seven Hispanic students, and one out of twenty white students drop out of high school and face a statewide unemployment rate of 47 percent); Andrew Sum et al., *An Assessment of the Labor Market, Income, Health, Social, and Fiscal Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Findings for Illinois Adults in the 21st Century* 19 (2007) (special report prepared for Chicago Alternative Schools Network by the Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies), [http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/An\\_Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_Consequences\\_of\\_Dropping\\_Out\\_of\\_High\\_School\\_in\\_Illinois.pdf](http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/An_Assessment_of_the_Consequences_of_Dropping_Out_of_High_School_in_Illinois.pdf) (in Illinois women without a high school diploma or general educational development certificate (GED) have average lifetime earnings of \$398,000, compared to their male peers' average lifetime earnings of \$1,007,000).

<sup>7</sup>See Mildred Warner, *The Economic Importance of Early Care and Education* (PowerPoint presentation, Institute for Women's Policy Research Conference (April 9, 2009)), <http://www.iwpr.org/Conferences/powerpoints/Warner.pdf> (for every new dollar invested in early child care and education, the statewide economic benefit amounts to two dollars, and for every new job created in these programs, the statewide economic impact is 1.5 jobs).

<sup>8</sup>National Women's Law Center, *How to Promote Gender Equity in Career and Technical Education: A Primer for Schools* 1 (Oct. 2007), <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/Final%20CTE%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup>Signe-Mary McKernan and Caroline Ratcliffe, *The Urban Institute, Events that Trigger Poverty Entries and Exits* 18 (2002), [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410636\\_PovertyEntries.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410636_PovertyEntries.pdf).

<sup>10</sup>National Women's Law Center, *When Girls Don't Graduate We All Fail: A Call to Improve High School Graduation Rates for Girls* 6 (2007), <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/DropoutReport.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup>*Id.*

<sup>12</sup>Sum et al., *supra* note 6, at 15; National Women's Law Center, *supra* note 10, at 8–9 (an Illinois male high school dropout will earn an average of \$21,421 per year for the rest of his life; female high school dropouts nationwide earn about \$9,100 less annually than their male counterparts).

<sup>13</sup>National Women's Law Center, *supra* note 10, at 8.

<sup>14</sup>See *Illinois Task Force on Re-enrolling Students Who Dropped out of School: Final Report* 9 (2008), <http://www.asnchicago.org/PDFs/2008/Re-enrolledStudentsFinalReportSept2008.pdf>.

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<sup>15</sup>John M. Bridgeland et al., Civic Enterprises, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* 6 (2006), <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup>*Id.*

<sup>17</sup>Illinois Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), cited in Mariame Kaba et al., Women & Girls Collective Action Network, *Status of Girls in Illinois* (2009), [http://www.girlsinthegame.org/uploads/files/SOG\\_Report2009.pdf](http://www.girlsinthegame.org/uploads/files/SOG_Report2009.pdf).

<sup>18</sup>Angie Kennedy, *Urban Adolescent Mothers Exposed to Community, Family, and Partner Violence: Prevalence, Outcomes, and Welfare Policy Implications*, 76 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 44 (2006).

<sup>19</sup>Sally Leiderman & Cari Almo, Center for Assessment and Policy Development & National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting, and Prevention, *Interpersonal Violence and Adolescent Pregnancy: Prevalence and Implications for Practice and Policy* (2001), [http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_PR&SEC={2AE1D600-4FC6-4B4D-8822-F1D5F072ED7B}&DE={7E3779AE-DOF1-44C0-B5ED-8A5CA85EE7DB}](http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B_PR&SEC={2AE1D600-4FC6-4B4D-8822-F1D5F072ED7B}&DE={7E3779AE-DOF1-44C0-B5ED-8A5CA85EE7DB}).

<sup>20</sup>Kennedy, *supra* note 18, at 50.

<sup>21</sup>Leslie Landis, Director of the Division on Domestic Violence in the Chicago Department of Family Support Services, Assessment of the Current Response to Domestic Violence in Chicago (Presentation to City of Chicago Domestic Violence Summit Series, Oct. 8, 2009).

<sup>22</sup>Kennedy, *supra* note 18, 44.

<sup>23</sup>*Id.*

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Kosciw et al., Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, *From Teasing to Torment: A Report on School Climate in Illinois* 10, 12 (2006), [http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/000/700-1.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/000/700-1.pdf).

<sup>25</sup>*Id.* at 10.

<sup>26</sup>See Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, *Standards and Policies: Student SEL Learning Standards*, <http://www.casel.org/standards/learning.php#L>.

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