

March 25th, 2021

Dear Senators and Members of Congress,

We are a [careforce](#) of working parents, business and nonprofit leaders, caregivers, economists, researchers, and gender equity advocates, and we are reaching out to express our strong support for the inclusion and full funding of the complete care agenda in President Biden's Build Back Better and continued COVID Recovery efforts. *Care infrastructure is key to our recovery and just as essential to a large share of the workforce as roads and bridges.*

We want to thank you and your conference for your leadership and for the work you've already done to cut child poverty through the Child Tax Credit, and for stabilizing the childcare sector. We also want to emphasize the transformational opportunity you have through further investment in the care economy to lift tens of millions more people, in particular women of color, out of poverty, or prevent them from falling into it in the first place.

The **critical** economic infrastructure policies of paid family and medical leave, affordable high-quality childcare for all, and fully-funded care infrastructure across the board, including better wages and benefits for care workers who provide these services, are essential to an [equitable economic recovery](#). This powerful combination of policies would ensure financial stability for women and families, create millions of jobs and spur job growth in other sectors.

Pre-pandemic, the broad economic trends were looking up for women. Women held the majority of all jobs ([50.04%](#)) and had earned their place as the [most educated](#) cohort in the labor force. Yet, unaddressed and devastating vulnerabilities were hiding under the surface, especially for women of color; it took a global pandemic to expose them. At the time COVID-19 hit, women already made up [62%](#) of all minimum wage workers and held a shocking [70%](#) of our nation's lowest-paid jobs.

These cracks of inequity impact not only women, but they also impact the 28 million U.S. children who rely on a breadwinner mom for their well-being. In fact, [research](#) spearheaded by gender economist Katica Roy found that breadwinner moms have the largest gender pay gap of any cohort in the workforce: they earn just 66 cents on the

breadwinner dad's dollar. And Black breadwinner moms have the largest gender pay gap of any cohort of women in the workforce: 44 cents on the breadwinner dad's dollar.

More disgracefully, even before the pandemic, women and children made up 70% of our nation's poor, and women were [twice as likely](#) to live in poverty in retirement as men, and that was before the pandemic wreaked havoc on working parents -- including the 5.4 million women who have lost jobs in the past year, many due to childcare demands, and the more than 2 million who have left the workforce entirely. It is essential to [note](#) that Native women, Black women, and Latinas experience the highest rates of poverty of any race or gender. *We must get women back to work, and do it equitably.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly laid bare the economic, gender, and racial injustices in our country. Our collective failure to invest in policies that support caregivers, ensure working people can both care for themselves and their loved ones, and guarantee women are at long last paid equitably at work, has unraveled decades of progress in the labor market and threatens to hold back the economy for decades to come.

We urge you in the strongest possible terms to prioritize full funding and robust implementation of the following policies while the political will still exists:

1. **Emergency and Permanent Paid Family and Medical Leave:** One of the most cost-effective solutions we have for our public health and economic crisis. We should not be forcing workers - especially women, who are most likely to be caregivers to children and sick loved ones - to choose between their families and their paychecks and we should ensure that every new parent, every worker with a serious personal or family health issue and every military family who needs it has access to paid family & medical leave through the creation of an affordable, sustainable, comprehensive and inclusive national program.
2. **Establishing High-Quality, Affordable Childcare for All:** Quality childcare is the whole game for working families. We need to invest in a system that goes beyond stabilization - to ensure that families can access high-quality affordable care in the recovery and beyond, and those working in the sector can count on fair compensation and good jobs and providers can sustain their programs. These goals are inextricably intertwined.
3. **Invest in broader care workforce [infrastructure](#) to support the care workers and family caregivers who are caring for older people, people with disabilities, and others needing long-term care, and do so with dignity and respect:** Congress must make it possible for older adults and people with disabilities to live, thrive, and receive care in their homes and communities while also supporting the care workforce and family caregivers doing that work. We need a new, holistic system of long-term care, expanding

on Medicaid and Medicare and filling in gaps in those programs to provide sustainable supports and services and guarantee the respect, dignity, and recognition that care workers and personal attendants deserve. This must center investments in home and community-based services (HCBS) to right-size the current bias toward institutional care in Medicaid and support the family caregivers supporting their loved ones.

These are important measures to mitigate poverty, keep people employed and create necessary and good-paying jobs now and for the future.

We also know that women's labor participation needs to be valued and that women deserve to be paid fairly and equally. We encourage Congress to support and pass policies of equal pay and increased minimum wage. This relief is desperately needed and will pay dividends for years to come.

Prior to the pandemic, lack of affordable childcare and adequate paid family and medical leave meant \$31.9 billion in lost wages to families. And without implementation of those policies, an estimated \$64.5 billion in lost wages and economic activity is at stake from the reduction in mothers' work hours and labor force participation due to COVID-19. Furthermore, according to [a report from the Time's Up Foundation](#) on the fiscal impact of investing in care policies, investing \$77.5 billion annually in the care economy would:

- ✓ Support over **2 million new jobs** at an average cost of **\$34,496** per supported job;
- ✓ Create **22.5 million new jobs** over 10 years;
- ✓ Translate into **\$220 billion** in new economic activity annually; and
- ✓ Create or support over **81,000 jobs** in food services and **45,000** in retail -- industries predominantly made up of women of color and low-paid workers who lost over **500,000 jobs** in December 2020.

And if that isn't convincing enough, a shocking 90% of registered voters agree that providing support and services for people with children and aging, ill, or disabled family members will provide economic stability for millions of people, and eight in 10 voters say unsupported caregiving is a huge burden for families, according to [this recent poll](#) commissioned by TIME'S UP Foundation, Caring Across Generations, and Paid Leave for All Action.

It's critical that the forthcoming **Build Back Better** and recovery efforts are centered in a gender equity framework that creates financial stability for the disproportionate number of women hit hardest by this crisis. Lifting women will lift families and communities and the

children and others they care for. Ignoring these policies will be detrimental to our economy, our labor market, and our workforce for decades to come.

We urge you to meet this moment with everything it deserves.

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