

We Demand More



February 10, 2021

Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth H.O.B
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader of the Senate Charles E. Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer:

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of American life. Our families, our health, our economy, our health care system, our schools, and our work have all been devastated by the pandemic and the need to adjust to an evolving public health reality. But the impacts of the pandemic have not been felt equally. Indeed, the pandemic has both exacerbated and revealed deep-seated racial and gender inequalities in our country that, for too long, have been allowed to metastasize.

The simple truth is that women, especially Black women, Latina women, Asian American and Pacific Islander women, and Indigenous women, have suffered the worst impacts of the pandemic, and they need to be lifted up in the solutions and relief you draft and ultimately pass in Congress.¹

If we are to truly build back better, we must **build an economy that works for women**. The injustices that have driven the pandemic's cruel impacts on marginalized communities cannot be swept under the rug in the name of political expediency. There can be no real and lasting economic and social relief without real and lasting political and economic transformation that centers women, especially Black women, Indigenous women, and other women of color.

We need Congress to act with the focus and urgency this crisis demands. **Black women, Indigenous women, Latina women, and other women of color across the country risked their health and safety to overcome increasing and intentional obstacles to vote, and they built the collective power that put the Biden-Harris administration in the White House and handed the keys of Congress to Democrats.²** This work was not done out of the

¹ [How COVID-19 Sent Women's Workforce Progress Backward](#), Center for American Progress, October 30, 2020

² [How Stacey Abrams, LaTosha Brown and other Black women changed the course of the 2020 election](#), CNBC, November 6, 2020

kindness of our hearts but out of the fierceness of the need to ensure better policies for our families and our communities.

As you work to draft the details of the long-overdue COVID-19 relief bill, we write to remind and demand that you fulfill the promises made to women on the campaign trail, because we need relief now more than ever. Our communities do not have patience for political games, like attempts by antiabortion politicians to use the urgent need for relief to further restrict abortion access. ***There is no time to waste; you must enact bold, inclusive relief. There can be no compromises or watering down when our lives and health are on the line.***

Congress should prioritize and keep in the final bill the following:

Child care and early education: Child care was already a crisis point before the pandemic, but now it is a true make-or-break situation. Child care workers, nearly all women and disproportionately women of color, are essential workers, and must not be shortchanged or ignored in relief and recovery legislation.

The \$10 billion in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was a critical down payment. But after months of insufficient aid, it's crucial to prioritize a minimum of \$40 billion in additional, dedicated funding to stabilize the child care industry. Such funding would ensure that programs don't close their doors permanently and can eventually reopen and meet all new safety regulations; that programs currently open can operate safely; and that parents, particularly moms, aren't pushed out of the workforce because of child care breakdowns.

As our country's most at-risk families aim to recover from the economic aftershock of COVID-19, it is of paramount importance that Head Start is fully operationalized to support their needs, including being able to meet additional staffing, sanitation supplies, and personal protective equipment needs. As it stands, Head Start has not been adequately resourced to do this work. \$1.45 billion in stark, one-time funding needs remain unmet.

Paid leave: The United States continues to lag woefully behind most of the world in providing robust and comprehensive paid leave. Over 30 million Americans did not have access to sick days in 2020.³ Currently, only 20% of workers have access to paid family leave. Without robust paid leave, millions of women workers are forced to choose between taking care of their health or their families' health and putting food on the table. This especially impacts women of color, who make up the majority of low-wage and gig economy workers, which are jobs that tend to lack access to paid leave versus more stable, higher-income jobs.⁴

³ [As coronavirus spreads, which U.S. workers have paid sick leave – and which don't?](#), Pew Research Center, March 12, 2020

⁴ [The real face of low-wage work in America is female](#), Oxfam, November 29, 2016

At the beginning of the pandemic, the emergency paid leave provisions passed by Congress opened up paid leave to millions more workers.⁵ But with those provisions now expired, many more people may be forced to work when they are sick, making slowing the spread of COVID-19 exceedingly difficult, and putting everyone at risk.

The lack of paid leave can also have long-term economic effects because it takes women out of the workforce, which leads to a cascade of long-term economic impacts for women and families. Compared to before the pandemic, 5.3 million fewer women are working now, and the ripple effect of those job losses will take years to work out.⁶

Permanent and job-protected paid leave must be a central part of pandemic recovery and should be a top legislative priority to protect all workers, but especially women.

A \$15 starting minimum wage: The pandemic has shown whose labor truly powers our country. Women of color drive these industries: They are the farm laborers and meat plant workers ensuring there's food for our families, grocery store workers keeping necessities stocked, servers keeping the restaurant industry afloat, and health care workers providing quality care in our overburdened health care system. Essential work--and all work--should provide a livable wage that allows workers to support themselves and their families. A \$15 federal minimum wage, and the elimination of subminimum wages for tipped workers, youth, and people with disabilities, would be a productive start for ensuring economic equality through wage justice.

\$1,400 "survival" checks: The pandemic has pushed many women and families to the breaking point financially, and Americans desperately need help to cover basic needs or to shore up savings as their income losses continue. The Democrats won the Senate on the promise of sending survival checks to Americans quickly. That is why members of Congress must stand by their promises to the women who put them in power and make sure that every woman and every family receives the cash assistance they are owed, including those in mixed-status families.

Women have suffered nearly all of the job losses in the pandemic. Women are shouldering the majority of the care burden during the pandemic, whether as health care workers or as parents and family caregivers. As our communities continued to be ravaged by the coronavirus, we elected you to push action to improve our lives and right the racial and gender injustices that allowed the pandemic to take away so much from our communities, and that hampered our nation's ability to flatten the curve and turn the tide of the pandemic.

⁵ [SENATOR GILLIBRAND: PAID FAMILY LEAVE IS A CRITICAL PART OF COVID RECOVERY](#), Data for Progress, January 22, 2021

⁶ [The pandemic has derailed women's careers and livelihoods. Is America giving up on them?](#), Fortune, January 29, 2021

We need you, our representatives in Congress, to keep the promises you made and fight for those of us most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

About *We Demand More*

We Demand More is a coalition of organizations using our collective power to fight for the courageous women workers and caretakers, especially women of color, who are on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis and who are particularly impacted. Their lives, livelihoods, and families depend on lawmakers and business leaders doing more — and we need everyone to *demand* more. We've formed the We Demand More coalition to fight for five demands from Congress and corporate leaders:

1. Prioritize our health and safety ahead of corporations.
2. Get life-sustaining relief to us NOW.
3. Make state governments strong; they are our lifeline.
4. Stop the attacks on our reproductive health care, including abortion access.
5. Protect our safety and our right to vote in 2020.

More information on the We Demand More coalition can be found on its website at www.WeDemandMore.org and its letter to Congress can be found here. Below is a full list of the We Demand More coalition's members:

Abortion Access Force
Advocates for Youth
All Women's Progress
All* Above All Action Fund
African American Ministers In Action
American Association of University Women Action Fund
Birth In Color RVA
Black Women's Roundtable
California National Organization for Women
Catholics for Choice
Center for American Progress Fund
Chicago Foundation for Women
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Daily Kos
DemCast USA
End Rape on Campus
Equal Pay Today
Equal Rights Advocates

Feminist Majority
Feminist Women's Health Center
Free Speech For People
Global Justice Center
The Greenlining Institute
Hollaback!
Hopewell Fund
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Mass NOW
Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable
MomsRising Together
NARAL Pro-Choice America
NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland
National Birth Equity Collaborative
National Black Justice Coalition
National Organization for Women
National Organization for Women - Connecticut chapter
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
New American Leaders Action Fund
New Century Trust
New Voices for Reproductive Justice
One Fair Wage
Paid Leave for All Action
PathWays PA
Period Equity
Public Citizen
Resilience
ServeUSA
Sisters Lead Sisters Vote
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Supermajority
Ultraviolet
United State of Women
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
TIME'S UP
#VOTEPROCHOICE
Voto Latino
Women Employed
Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Women's March