

YWCA ADVOCACY: DRIVING AN INCLUSIVE AGENDA FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH, SAFETY, EQUITY & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The 2018 election made clear that women are the difference makers. From historic firsts and record numbers of women running for—and winning—elected office, to our consistent presence at the ballot box on election day, to the steady and powerful leadership of women of color, women are driving an agenda for change. Our voices, concerns, and priorities reflect growing awareness that progress for women *must* be inclusive of and in alliance with communities of color, LGBTQ+ communities, immigrant communities, people living with disabilities, and others whose safety and well-being are targeted, threatened, and harmed in this current moment. We expect our elected leaders to govern with respect for the interconnectedness and intersectionality of our lives.

This movement for inclusivity, equity, and opportunity is deeply influenced by a constellation of factors that have converged in this moment, including the #MeToo movement's stark revelations about the depth of gender-based harassment and violence in our homes, workplaces, and communities; the humanitarian crisis that has erupted along the southern U.S. border and other migration pathways as women, children, and families are dehumanized and denied access to refuge and safety; the on-going, strident efforts to eliminate access to reproductive health care, fair workplaces, and safety for women, LGBTQ+ communities, and other marginalized groups; the rise of white nationalism and acts of extremist violence in Pittsburgh, Charlottesville, and beyond; the daily reality of gun violence across communities and in the lives of women and girls experiencing domestic and sexual violence; and so much more.

At this pivotal moment, YWCA is poised to advance policies and legislation that are central to women's health, safety, and economic opportunity, and that address the underlying gender equity and racial justice tensions that are so deeply embedded in our nation. Central to this moment is the broad support among women—across perceived differences of race, class, education, and political party affiliation—for the issues and priorities within YWCA's advocacy agenda.

YWCA's Advocacy Agenda & Goals

Informed by our rich 160-year history of advocacy on issues that impact women, people of color, and other marginalized communities; by the needs and interests expressed by local YWCAs through the 2018 policy priorities survey and the ongoing strategic business planning process; and by *What Women Want 2018* (YWCA's recent national survey of women's top concerns and Congressional priorities), YWCA will continue to advocate for policy change across a broad range of economic,

health, safety, and equity issues. YWCA's advocacy agenda is rooted in addressing the systemic and structural barriers to equity, opportunity, and safety for women, girls, people of color, and other marginalized communities.

In advancing our advocacy agenda, YWCA's goals are to:

- **Eliminate policies and practices that criminalize people of color**
- **Protect the rights and safety of marginalized communities**
- **Ensure that women, children, and families seeking safety and opportunity in the U.S. can arrive and live without fear, harm, or discrimination**
- **Remove barriers to and expand opportunities for women's successful workplace participation**
- **Prevent gender-based violence and protect survivors**
- **Ensure that women, girls, and marginalized people have access to quality, affordable, comprehensive, culturally competent health care, including the full range of reproductive health services**
- **Strengthen the health and vitality of the YWCA network**

Many of the specific issues on which we advocate crosscut on our goals. For example, protecting the rights and safety of marginalized groups is relevant across our advocacy in the broad category of racial justice, civil rights, health, safety, and economic opportunity. Accordingly, we will continue to center the needs, concerns, and priorities of women and girls of color; immigrant, LGBTQ+, gender non-conforming (GNC), Latinx, native, and poor communities; individuals living with disabilities, and other marginalized people in our advocacy.

Below are the issue areas YWCA USA intends to work on in 2019-2020. These issue areas include several illustrative examples of the topics that fall within these issue areas, but we will work to engage in many topics that fall within these larger categorizations.

Racial Justice

Goal: End the criminalization of people of color

Issues include:

Racial profiling
School Discipline / School to Prison Pipeline
Mass incarceration

Gender Based Violence

Goal: Prevent gender-based violence and protect survivors

Issues include:

Reauthorization of VAWA, FVPSA & VOCA
Domestic Violence Gun Homicide
SAFE Leave Trafficking

Civil Rights

Goal: Protect the rights and safety of marginalized communities

Issues include:

Voting Rights
Census

Health & Safety

Goal: Ensure that women, girls, and marginalized communities have access to quality, affordable, comprehensive, culturally competent health care

Issues include:

ACA Defense Trauma-Informed Care
Maternal Health Health Disparities
Reproductive Rights Gun Safety

Immigration

Goal: Ensure those seeking safety and opportunity in the US can arrive and live without fear, harm or discrimination

Issues include:

Family Separation
DREAM Act
Asylum for Survivors of Violence
Child Care Housing

Economic Opportunity, Equal Pay & Workplace Fairness

Goal: Remove barriers to and expand opportunities for women's successful workplace participation

Equal Pay
Workplace Harassment & Discrimination
Paid Sick, Family, and Safe Leave
Workforce Development STEM Opportunities
Child Care Housing

Strength of the YWCA Network

Goal: Strengthen the health and vitality of the YWCA Network

Issues include:

Johnson Amendment Charitable Giving Federal Appropriations
Emerging Issues (e.g., impact of climate change on vulnerable populations and non-profit sector)

Advocacy Tactics & Activities

In each of these issue areas, YWCA will utilize a range of advocacy tactics and activities to raise awareness and advance policy solutions.

The intensity and level of our engagement on any single issue, as well as the strategies and tactics we employ, will vary based on the strategic opportunities and needs that emerge in the policy arena. We recognize that many issues we cannot at this moment anticipate will rise to great importance in the public sphere, and we will give ourselves the space to engage in these issues to fulfill our broad goals listed above. We also know that many issue areas of vital importance to the communities we serve will not rise to the level of federal legislative action, but we will work to engage on these issues through a range of advocacy and engagement tactics. By way of example, the range of advocacy tactics and activities that we undertake may include:

Federal Advocacy:

Legislation
Administrative Proposals
Briefings & Fly-Ins
Capitol Hill Day & In-District Advocacy Day

State & Local Advocacy

Legislation
Issue Education
Town Halls
Council Testimony

Civic Engagement

Community Forums
Voter Registration
GOTV
Issue Education

Field Organizing

Marches & Rallies
Fly-Ins
Action Alerts
Field Hearings / Briefings

Advocacy Training & Capacity Building

Webinars
Toolkits
Fact Sheets
Technical Assistance
Issue Work Groups
Advocacy Affinity Group

Thought Leadership

Policy Briefs
Women's Advocacy
Community Convenings
Partnerships, Coalitions & Work Groups

We encourage local YWCA's to engage at local, state, and national levels on those issues that are most critical in your communities. We also encourage local YWCA's to recognize the value and effectiveness of speaking out and advocating by putting the needs, concerns, and priorities and of our sister communities and local associations -- and the voices and experiences of those most impacted by the issues -- at the forefront of our advocacy.

While many YWCA's are most comfortable advocating on issues that directly relate to the programs and services they offer, we encourage all YWCA's to also weigh in on the issues that impact the individuals and families that benefit from those services. For example, for a YWCA that offers child care, we encourage engagement on gender-based violence issues like domestic violence, recognizing that such issues likely affect the children and parents with whom they are regularly interacting.

Key Legislative Priorities in the 116th Congress

As part of our advocacy efforts, YWCA will work to advance specific legislative priorities that are ripe for Congressional action in the 116th Congress and that are responsive to the needs and expressed interests of the YWCA network. YWCA's *What Women Want 2018* poll and report make clear that there is broad and deep support among women -- across racial and ethnic groups, education level, socio-economic status, and party affiliation -- for legislation that is central to achieving YWCA's mission and advocacy goals.

YWCA's top legislative priorities will be to *lead* and *drive* efforts to:

- **Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention & Services Act (FVPSA)**
 - *Women share broad and deep concerns about sexual and domestic violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Three quarters of women (75%) strongly agree and almost nine in ten women (89%) agree with the reauthorization of VAWA. Over a quarter of Black women (28%), Latinas (28%), and Asian/Pacific Islander women (30%) also report being very worried about sexual harassment at work, an issue which VAWA directly addresses.¹*
 - More than half of local YWCAs provide gender-based violence programming and services, and many rely on federal funding to support this work.
 - Preventing and responding to gender-based violence was ranked 1st among the health and safety priorities by local associations overall, and 1st by all geonetworks.

¹ Italicized language in this and the following section reflects the results of YWCA's "[What Women Want 2018](#)" Report.

- YWCA USA has extensive knowledge of this issue, strong relationships with coalitions and partners in this area, firmly established policy positions, and a strong history of working in this arena.
- **Pass the Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act and advance other opportunities to support the economic security of survivors of gender-based violence**
 - *More than one-in-five women (23%) are very worried about having access to “safe leave” – job-protected leave to access legal, medical, or other needs after experiencing sexual or domestic violence.*
 - Removing barriers to women’s workplace participation was ranked first overall by local associations and ranked highly across all geonetworks. Access to paid leave was also ranked very highly among all local associations across geonetworks.
 - There is significant opportunity to provide leadership on state and federal efforts to secure job-protected safe leave for survivors of gender-based violence, and to continue to support paid sick and family leave efforts.
 - YWCA USA has extensive content knowledge of these issues, strong relationships with coalitions and partners in this area, and firmly established policy positions.
- **Pass the End Racial (and Religious) Profiling Act (ERRPA) and advance other opportunities to end the criminalization of people of color**
 - *There is very strong support among women for Congress to pass legislation to end racial profiling (68% strongly support).*
 - Eliminating racial profiling was ranked 1st among the racial justice/civil rights priorities by local associations and is the current focus of the North Carolina State Advocacy Cohort. Additionally, local associations heavily favored addressing disproportionate discipline in schools, mass incarceration, and police violence as other possible options for racial justice / civil rights priorities. Disproportionate discipline in schools is also the focus of the Michigan State Advocacy Cohort.
 - Local associations continue to offer significant programming in this policy area, including restorative justice models in schools and re-entry models and service programs for incarcerated individuals, which could be supported and shared across the network. Moreover, many YWCAs support community discussions and forums, as well as run workshops about racial justice.
 - YWCA USA staff have deep content knowledge in this area due to prior advocacy work, and as a result of the 2015 Stand Against Racism campaign, 2015/2016 legislative priorities, and 2017/2018 priorities. In addition, there are strong existing relationships with the network of coalition and organizational partners.

- **Pass the Trauma-Informed Care for Children and Families Act and advance other opportunities to provide trauma-informed care to survivors of violence**
 - *There is very strong support among women for Congress to pass legislation to meet the physical and mental health needs of women and girls, including the Trauma-Informed Care for Children (62% strongly support).*
 - Significant opportunity exists for YWCA to expand on the 2016 Stand Against Racism work by taking a leadership role in issue education about girls of color, trauma, and societal responses. Working in collaboration with other national civil rights and health organizations, YWCA can continue to advance policy proposals to address the broader health, education and justice crises posed by high levels of exposure among children to trauma and violence. Also significant opportunity exists to expand the national conversation around trauma-informed care to include adult survivors of trauma, such as the impact of domestic violence on opioid use and abuse.
 - This priority also aligns with local associations' high prioritization of eliminating racial health disparities, access to mental and physical health care, and supporting survivors of gender-based violence.
 - YWCA USA has strong content knowledge and coalition engagement to support this work.
- **Secure federal funding to support the workforce development, gender-based violence, STEM, child care, and housing work of YWCAs**
 - YWCA USA has brought on an appropriations lobbyist to work directly with us to generate potential funding opportunities on the Hill and with the Administration.

In addition, YWCA will remain engaged in other federal legislative work that advances our mission and advocacy goals. YWCA will partner with allies and coalitions to support legislation that advances our broader advocacy agenda, including:

- **Equal Pay**

Women overwhelmingly support strengthening equal pay laws (79% strongly support), and share significant concerns about meeting medical, housing, and other family expenses.

 - Equal Pay Act / Paycheck Fairness Act
 - Minimum/Living wage

- **Strengthening Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Protections**

Two-in-five women report experiencing discrimination because they are women (a 9% increase from 2012), and Black, Latina, and Asian-Pacific Islander women experience racial discrimination at even higher rates. Over a quarter of Black women (28%), Latinas (28%), and Asian/Pacific Islander women (30%) report being very worried about sexual harassment at work. And half of millennials (50%) and women ages 30-39 (52%) say they have experienced gender discrimination

- EMPOWER Act (to curb workplace harassment and silencing of victims)
- New “#MeToo” Sexual Harassment legislation (to remove barriers that limit and prevent employees from reporting workplace harassment)
- Pregnant workers fairness legislation (to end discrimination and promote economic security of pregnant employees)

- **Breaking down barriers to full workplace participation**

Caregiving is among women’s top concerns. Women overwhelmingly support Congress taking action to pass paid family and medical leave legislation (65% strongly support), and to expand access to affordable, high quality child care (69% strongly support).

- Child Care for Working Families Act
- FAMILY Act (to ensure family and medical leave for employees addressing their own serious illnesses or that of a close relative)
- Healthy Families Act (to provide a minimum of seven sick days, including recovery and/or assistance after experiencing gender-based violence)
- Fair work schedule protections

- **Gun Violence**

Keeping themselves and their families safe from gun violence is a top concern for all women (44% are very worried), and is a notable concern among millennial women (46% are very worried).

- Fix NICS Act (to fix a loophole so criminal convictions are recorded in the background check system)
- Domestic Violence Gun Homicide Prevention Act

- **Expanding access to affordable healthcare that meets the physical and mental health needs of women and girls**

Women share deep concerns about medical expenses (42% very worried) and having affordable and secure health insurance (41% very worried). There is broad and deep support for protecting the Affordable Care Act (75% of women strongly agree). Keeping families safe

from opioid and other substance addictions (26% very worried) and access to mental health services (23% very worried) are also on women's list of concerns. 81% of women support Congress passing legislation to meet the physical and mental health needs of women and girls.

- Defending and enhancing the Affordable Care Act (ACA)
- Maternal health disparities, such as the Maternal Care Access and Reducing Emergencies (CARE) Act, the Maternal Health Accountability Act, and the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act

- **Protecting access to the full range of reproductive health care, including contraception**
Women are also concerned about having access to the full range of reproductive health care, including contraception and abortion care (26% very worried). Women across race and age cohorts strongly agree that Congress should protect Roe v. Wade (63% strongly agree).

- **Immigration**
A majority of women support legislation to end family separation (58% strongly support), to end family detention (52% strongly support), to pass the DREAM Act (56% strongly support), and to pass comprehensive immigration reform (55% strongly agree).
 - Clean Dream Act
 - Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Program (TPS) Program (permits individuals who are unable to return to their home countries due to safety concerns to live and work in the U.S. Currently, the U.S. will allow 300,000 people annually from ten countries to be eligible for TPS.)

- **Ending the Criminalization of People of Color**
There is very strong support among women for Congress to pass legislation to end racial profiling (68% strongly support).
 - Comprehensive School Climate Bill – *new legislation being developed to address school discipline disparities*

- **Strengthening the Non Profit Sector and the YWCA Network**
 - IRA Legacy Bill
 - Protecting the Johnson Amendment

YWCA's Approach to Advocacy

Program-Informed Policy: YWCA takes a “program-informed policy” approach to our advocacy, drawing on the expertise and day-to-day work of local YWCAs across 46 states and the District of Columbia to advocate for practical solutions that meet the needs of women, girls and marginalized communities. Our voice is strongest when we lift up the expertise of the YWCA network.

Centering Women and Girls of Color: YWCA advocates for legislation and policies that are important for all women, but that are specifically and particularly important for women and girls of color. We center women and girls of color in our advocacy by highlighting their needs, concerns, and voices in policy discussions. We recognize that improving outcomes and enhancing opportunity for the most marginalized and vulnerable women and girls in our communities will benefit *all* women and girls.

Inclusive and Intersectional: YWCA takes an inclusive and intersectional approach to our advocacy, recognizing that equity and opportunity for girls and women are directly impacted by the compounding impact of race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic factors on their lived experiences. We are also cognizant that progress for women and girls must be in alliance with LGBTQ+, immigrant, gender non-conforming (GNC), Latinx, native, and poor communities; individuals living with disabilities, and other marginalized communities.

Engaging Our Network: With a physical presence across 46 states and the District of Columbia, YWCA engages our local leaders and program experts to advocate with elected officials for policy solutions. YWCA expands this reach by working with local YWCAs to build our base of advocates among their staff, volunteers, clients/constituents, and local partners.

Partnerships and Coalitions: YWCA draws on our extensive partnerships across the women's advocacy and civil rights communities to maximize our reach and effectiveness in advancing our multi-issue agenda. We lead where strategically advantageous and support our allies where their leadership is already established and effective. We both share our expertise and draw on the expertise of others to inform and shape policy.

Building State and Local Advocacy Capacity: Advocacy at state and local levels is critical to the health and vitality of the YWCA network, and lays a strong foundation for progress at the federal level. YWCA supports advocacy at state and local levels through targeted campaigns and advocacy capacity building/skills development across our YWCA network.