



# IT'S MY VOTE

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*I WILL BE HEARD*

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AAUW ACTION FUND

2022 Voter Issue Guide

When Women Vote, We Change the Conversation

# AAUW Action Fund

## Voter Issue Guide

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Since 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been the nation’s leading voice promoting equity for women and girls. AAUW and the AAUW Action Fund encourage voters to get involved in the political process, and to better understand the impact that legislative action—or lack thereof—can have on women’s economic security, education and leadership opportunities.

Throughout the 2020 election, we fought for a safe and just election during an unprecedented health crisis that exacerbated persistent and underlying inequities. Voting access and election practices were as inconsistent as pandemic response policies, leaving much of the burden for clarifying “how to vote” to organizations like AAUW. Ultimately, the past two years have shifted how Americans exercise the right to vote in many ways.

From our paychecks to paid leave, access to reproductive health care to access to education, there is so much at stake every time women head to the polls. Politicians and policy makers at all levels of government routinely make decisions about issues that directly affect us and our families. But more often than not, those conversations lack women’s voices. As we enter this season of political punditry and campaign promises, we must identify those who would best represent our values and those who would roll back our rights. To create real change, women must be part of the conversation, and the most powerful way for us to have a say is at the polls.

It’s as simple as this: When women vote, we change the conversation.

Between now and Election Day, let’s start conversations about the issues that affect our families and communities. We need to ask tough questions, jump-start the discussion, and determine where our candidates stand.

This Voter Issue Guide provides nonpartisan information about the policy concerns that are critical to women and their families. Use it to prompt conversations with neighbors, family, friends and fellow voters about what’s at stake in this election. Take it to virtual town halls and candidate forums to follow along with the debate. Consult it to develop questions for your candidates and elected officials about the issues that matter most, and make sure to get their answers on the record.

As the 2022 Election Day approaches, we ask you to consider candidates through the lens of these seven key gender equity issues:

1. **Voting Access.**
2. **Pay Equity.**
3. **Paid Leave and Care Infrastructure.**
4. **Workplace Harassment and Discrimination.**
5. **Health Care Access and Reproductive Rights.**
6. **College Affordability.**
7. **Campus Sexual Harassment and Violence.**

Above all, make your voice heard on Election Day—and beyond.

## **VOTING ACCESS**

Voting is a fundamental right, yet the increase in anti-voter laws and restrictions throughout the country threaten access to it. These barriers have a disproportionate impact on people of color, women and voters with disabilities, and both young and old voters.

In the 1960s, voter suppression came in many forms: literacy and citizenship tests, identification cards, poll taxes. Today, persistent and renewed restrictions—especially in the wake of the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that rescinded key protections in the Voting Rights Act—come in the form of voter identification laws, closure of polling places in predominantly Black counties, registration record purges, and lack of access and flexibility in voting.<sup>1</sup> Increased attention on unsubstantiated claims of “voter fraud” also saps resources from real barriers to voting.

AAUW believes in open and fair elections and nonpartisan voter-education efforts that will promote equitable political participation and representation in appointed and elected office. We need vigorous enforcement of and full access to civil and constitutional rights, including voting rights. To ensure every voter can exercise their right to vote in a safe, accessible and secure way, election processes must evolve. AAUW therefore advocates for expanding election practices through online registration and voting, early voting, voting by mail, and in-person voting with public health protections in all polling places.

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<sup>1</sup>Brad Bennett, “55 years after ‘Bloody Sunday,’ voting rights are still under attack,” Southern Poverty Law Center (February 29, 2020), <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/02/29/weekend-read-55-years-after-bloody-sunday-voting-rights-are-still-under-attack>.

### **Listen for these terms:**

- Voter registration.
- Voter suppression/restrictions.
- Polling place modifications/health safety.
- Voting Rights Act.
- *Shelby County v. Holder*.
- Get Out the Vote (GOTV).
- Vote by mail.
- Early voting.
- Online registration/voting.
- Voter fraud.

### **Ask your candidates:**

- Voting is one of the most fundamental rights in a democratic society, but restrictions enacted in the past decade—especially the past two years—have made it harder to exercise that right. If you are elected, how do you plan to expand and enforce voting access for all?
- The Voting Rights Act has protected the right to vote against suppression tactics since 1965, but it has rapidly eroded over the past 10 years. If elected, what will you do to rectify the oppression of disenfranchised voters?

## **PAY EQUITY**

The gender pay gap is the difference between men’s and women’s median earnings. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, on average, women working full-time take home about 84 cents for every dollar earned by men working full-time. This year, in coalition with other organizations, AAUW also did a pay gap calculation that compared all workers—including part-time and seasonal workers—to better capture those who had to leave the workforce for any reason during the pandemic. Using that calculation, the pay gap widened: Women were paid only 77 cents for every dollar men make.<sup>2</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many women, especially women of color, into part-time or seasonal work, or out of the workforce all together. When we take into account this broader cross-section of workers, women of color fare even worse. Despite advances in women’s educational and economic contributions, the pay gap remains a real and lasting problem that impacts the economic security of women and their families. It affects women from all backgrounds, at all ages, and at all levels of educational achievement.

AAUW believes pay equity is not just a matter of fairness, but the key to allowing families to make ends meet. Because the gender pay gap has many causes, it must be addressed on multiple fronts as well. We need policies to change entrenched

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<sup>2</sup>“The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap: Fall 2019 Update,” American Association of University Women (2019), <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/>.

structures that perpetuate the pay gap, provide women with the tools to challenge discrimination, and supply employers with the resources and tools to understand and comply with the law. AAUW advocates for strong pay equity legislation, targeted executive actions, clear regulations, and strong enforcement to protect employees and assist employers as they strive to follow the law.

**Listen for these terms:**

- Equal pay for equal work.
- Wage gap.
- Pay discrimination.
- Equal Pay Act.
- Pay gap.
- Fair pay.
- Comparable worth.
- Salary history.
- Pay transparency.
- Paycheck Fairness Act.

**Ask your candidates:**

- The gender pay gap persists across all racial and ethnic groups, at different levels of education, and in every state and virtually every occupation. Would you support legislation to strengthen the effectiveness of existing civil rights laws aimed at closing the pay gap between men and women? How would you specifically address the pay gap for women of color, many of whom suffer the largest pay gaps?
- Several cities and states have passed legislation or are considering legislation that prohibits employers from relying on a potential employee’s salary history to determine future pay. This practice can introduce bias into the hiring process because it carries forward previous pay discrimination into the next job, thus perpetuating gender and racial pay gaps. Federal legislation is also pending in Congress. Would you support the passage of a salary history ban? What additional provisions do you believe are crucial to closing the gender pay gap?

## **WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION**

Workplace harassment is a pervasive problem that often impacts an employee’s pay, advancement and well-being. This is particularly true for those who are the most vulnerable to harassment at work—women, people of color and those working in low-paid jobs. Sex-based discrimination and harassment can come in many forms, including derogatory language based on gender identity or expression, discrimination against pregnant workers, and sexual harassment or assault.<sup>3</sup> AAUW’s research found that women of all ages, races and ethnicities face sexual harassment at work, which can have long-term repercussions on their health, economic security and access to leadership positions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Gender Discrimination at Work,” Equal Rights Advocates (2019), <https://www.equalrights.org/issue/economic-workplace-equality/discrimination-at-work/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Limiting Our Livelihoods: The Cumulative Impact of Sexual Harassment on Women’s Careers,” American Association of University Women (November 2019), <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/limiting-our-livelihoods/>.

AAUW advocates for workplaces free from discrimination, including harassment and sexual violence. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) must have the tools to enforce our federal civil rights laws prohibiting workplace discrimination, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We also advocate for employers to take proactive steps such as creating well-defined anti-harassment policies and complaint procedures, regularly training employees and supervisors on workplace policies, and conducting anonymous climate surveys to ascertain workplace culture and identify potential areas for growth for the employer. Finally, AAUW urges Congress to pass legislation that provides new protections against harassment and discrimination for workers, makes it easier and safer for people to speak out when they experience workplace harassment, and holds employers accountable for ignoring or mishandling the issue.

**Listen for these terms:**

- **Workplace health and safety.**
- **Title VII.**
- **Pregnant workers / Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA).**
- **Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1968.**
- **Sexual harassment.**
- **BE HEARD Act.**
- **EMPOWER Act.**
- **Employer retaliation.**
- **EEOC.**

**Ask your candidates:**

- With so many people struggling to recover from the pandemic and economic crises, workers need protection now more than ever. What policies would you support to end workplace harassment and discrimination?
  
- The far-reaching effects of workplace harassment cannot be overstated, as this pervasive problem often impacts an employee’s pay, advancement and well-being. Would you support policies that would require companies to report harassment settlements and implement prevention practices?

**PAID LEAVE AND CARE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Unlike most developed countries worldwide, the United States does not guarantee paid time off for illness, family care or parental leave. While the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on this important issue, our protections are still wholly inadequate. When a loved one has a health crisis, or when a child is born or adopted, far too many workers are forced to take unpaid leave, risk their jobs, or even exit the workforce altogether. Over half of mothers who left their jobs during the pandemic reportedly did so because their child’s school or daycare closed, and other workers had to go to work sick since they have no options for time off. This hurts everyone.

AAUW advocates for increased access to affordable child care and a high standard of benefits and comprehensive policies, including paid family and medical leave, paid

parental leave and paid sick days. While passage of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) nearly 30 years ago was an important first step, significant coverage gaps mean about 40% of the workforce is not eligible for leave under the FMLA.<sup>5</sup> Many more cannot afford to take unpaid leave without undermining their families' economic security. AAUW believes our policies must enable workers to perform well—which also benefits employers and the economy.

**Listen for these terms:**

- Paid sick days.
- Parental or maternity leave.
- Work-life policies.
- FAMILY Act.
- Pregnancy discrimination.
- Affordable child care.
- Paid time off or personal time off (PTO).
- Healthy Families Act.
- Earned leave.
- Workplace flexibility.
- FMLA.

**Ask your candidates:**

- As the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare, forcing people to choose between their jobs and caring for their loved ones hurts our families, our communities and our economy. What policies would you support to provide parental and medical leave for employees?
- Most Americans live in areas without child care options. For those who have access to center-based child care, the average cost is nearly \$12,000 per year. Moreover, most child care workers receive low wages and limited training. If elected, how would you support both working parents and child care workers to create a care economy that works for everyone?

## **HEALTH CARE ACCESS AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

AAUW believes everyone is entitled to high-quality, affordable and accessible health care, including a full range of reproductive health and family-planning options. Robust access enhances an individual's reproductive choices—which leads to improvements in women's health care and economic security. The ability to control whether and when to start a family has been linked to significant increases in women's wages and increased likelihood of educational attainment. Family planning fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventive health care, and teaches people how to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). With many schools exclusively providing abstinence-only sex education and

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<sup>5</sup>Jacob Alex Klerman, Kelly Daley, and Alyssa Pozniak, "Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Executive Summary" Abt Associates Inc. (September 12, 2013), [https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Family\\_Medical\\_Leave\\_Act\\_Survey/EXECUTIVE\\_SUMMARY\\_family\\_medical\\_leave\\_act\\_survey.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Family_Medical_Leave_Act_Survey/EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY_family_medical_leave_act_survey.pdf).

contraceptive care that is expensive to access, Americans' reproductive health has suffered. For instance, half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, and the U.S. continues to have one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the industrialized world.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as lawmakers at both the state and federal levels, are increasingly attacking reproductive rights. On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. Without the protections provided by *Roe*, the wave of anti-abortion legislation continues in state legislatures. In the first half of 2022 alone, 43 abortion restrictions were enacted in 12 states. Over the past decade, the Supreme Court and state legislatures have also created roadblocks to contraception access, allowing ambiguity or outright denial of contraceptive coverage by insurance companies, employers and pharmacies. Some state governments have rejected the health care reforms in the Affordable Care Act, and Congress enacted barriers like the Hyde and Helms Amendments, which block federal funding from family-planning services. These actions limit the fundamental rights of vulnerable communities to control their own reproductive lives.<sup>6</sup> For health care to be more than just an abstract right, all people must have real access to a full range of affordable options.

AAUW supports choice in the determination of one's reproductive life and increased access to health care and family-planning services. We also support medically accurate and age appropriate comprehensive sexual education. AAUW trusts that every woman has the ability to make her own informed choices regarding her reproductive life within the dictates of her own moral and religious beliefs. Further, AAUW believes that these deeply personal decisions should be made without government interference.

**Listen for these terms:**

- Health care reform.
- Health care is a human right.
- Freedom to choose/decide.
- Reproductive health.
- Pro-choice.
- Right to life.
- Maternal health.
- Women's Health Protection Act.
- Comprehensive sexual education.
- Title X.
- Affordable Care Act.
- Abortion.
- *Roe v. Wade*.
- Hyde and Helms Amendments.

**Ask your candidates:**

- Reproductive freedom is tied to women's economic security. As an elected official, would you support legislation that protects individuals' access to affordable quality

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<sup>6</sup> "In Real Life: Federal Restrictions on Abortion Coverage and the Women They Impact," Guttmacher Institute, January 2017, <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2017/01/real-life-federal-restrictions-abortion-coverage-and-women-they-impact>.



reproductive health care, including abortion care?

■ Family planning fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventive health care, and teaches people how to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections—but many schools continue to teach abstinence-only education. If elected, what would you do to ensure young people have access to medically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive sexual education?

## **COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY**

For many jobs, higher education is no longer optional—it's a necessity. In May 2016, jobs that required some form of postsecondary education accounted for nearly 37% of employment.<sup>7</sup> As the education requirement for employment grows, so has the cost: The price tag of a college education has more than doubled over the past generation, while household income has risen by only 14%.

AAUW research has found that women take on higher amounts of student debt while enrolled in college, and Black women graduate with the most debt of any group. The gender pay gap contributes to women needing two years more than men to repay those loans. As a result, women hold almost two-thirds of the country's \$1.7 trillion student debt. This isn't just a student problem; it's a gender inequity problem, and it impacts us all.<sup>8</sup>

AAUW believes that higher education must be accessible to everyone—and that students should not have to mortgage their futures in the process. In the face of rising tuition and decreasing state investment, meaningful grant aid such as the federal Pell grant program is particularly important. Further, as rising tuition rates have prompted two-thirds of all graduates to borrow money to attend college, loan repayment and cancellation programs must be made more accessible to all borrowers.

### **Listen for these terms:**

- Student debt.
- Tuition repayment.
- Student loans.
- Pell grants.
- Loan/debt cancellation.
- Income-based repayment.
- College affordability.

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<sup>7</sup> "The Economics Daily: 37 Percent of May 2016 Employment in Occupations Typically Requiring Postsecondary Education," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (June 28, 2017), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/37-percent-of-may-2016-employment-in-occupations-typically-requiring-postsecondary-education.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> "Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans" American Association of University Women (May 2019), <https://www.aauw.org/research/deeper-in-debt/>.

### **Ask your candidates:**

■ Student loan debt is a \$1.7-trillion problem in the United States. AAUW advocates for increased funding for college affordability programs, income-driven repayment programs, student loan forgiveness programs, and expanded Pell grants. At a time when state funding cuts to public colleges and universities are at a historic high, while tuition rates rise and acceptance rates decline, what policies would you as an elected official support to make college more affordable and loan payments more manageable for borrowers?

■ On average, women in the U.S. carry more student loan debt, and take longer to pay it off, than men. Black women and Latinas especially struggle financially while repaying college loans. What changes would you make to our student debt system to reduce the burden on women?

## **CAMPUS SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE**

When college campuses are hostile because of sexual harassment and violence, students aren't safe. When students don't feel safe, they cannot learn. AAUW's research revealed that two-thirds of college students and nearly half of students in grades 7-12 experienced sexual harassment.<sup>9</sup> Research also shows that incidents of sexual assault are shockingly prevalent on college campuses nationwide.<sup>10</sup> In addition, more than 1 in 5 college women experiences physical abuse, sexual abuse or threats of physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner.<sup>11</sup>

AAUW advocates for school climates free from discrimination, including harassment, bullying and sexual violence. The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice must enforce our federal civil rights laws prohibiting sex and race-based discrimination in education and not roll back protections for students. We also advocate for schools to take proactive steps, such as conducting climate surveys and providing prevention programming to educate students, faculty, staff and Title IX coordinators. In additions, we stress the importance of training appropriate administrators on the relevant laws and how to respond effectively. Finally, AAUW urges Congress to pass legislation that requires states and schools to develop

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<sup>9</sup>"Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus" Association of University Women Educational Foundation (December 2005), <https://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/drawing-the-line-sexual-harassment-on-campus.pdf>

; "Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School" American Association of University Women (November 2011), <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/crossing-the-line-sexual-harassment-at-school/>.

<sup>10</sup> Tyler Kingsdale, "Sexual Assault Statistics Can Be Confusing, But They're Not The Point," The Huffington Post (December 15, 2014), [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/15/sexual-assault-statistics\\_n\\_6316802.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/15/sexual-assault-statistics_n_6316802.html).

<sup>11</sup>"College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll," Break the Cycle (2014), <http://www.breakthecycle.org/dating-violence-research/college-dating-violence-and-abuse-poll>.

policies for K–12 schools that prevent bullying, sexual harassment and violence and that implement procedures to effectively respond to such behavior.

**Listen for these terms:**

- Campus/school safety.
- VAWA.
- Campus sexual assault.
- Clery Act.
- Title IX.
- Violence against women.
- Campus climate.
- Bullying.
- Survivors.

**Ask your candidates:**

- In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education rescinded guidance on Title IX that provided many protections for students and in 2020 released a new rule that significantly harmed students' civil rights and federal enforcement of Title IX. AAUW stands with survivors, and we remain committed to protecting and defending Title IX and to pursuing its vigorous enforcement. Would you support efforts by the current administration to expand civil rights laws and strengthen Title IX?
- Achieving full and equal educational opportunities for all students requires that student survivors have strong protections under the law. What should colleges and universities do to better address the issue of college sexual harassment and assault?



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