

## **National Update**

Washington Update is on hiatus for the summer. It will be back after Labor Day. Action Alerts (Two Minute Activist) will continue.

- Paycheck Fairness Act: untimely failure is very disappointing; Democrats moved forward with a cloture vote, which was filibustered and failed on party lines; AAUW drafted a letter to the White House on behalf of the coalition, meeting with Sen. Schumer's office this summer, and other behind the scenes actions to push it to still move in this Congress.
- Title IX: continuing to work on rolling back the harmful regulations and guidance from the previous administration; working in meetings and coalition to keep this moving; Gender Equity in Education Act (GEEA) being reintroduced is positive as well.
- Pregnant Workers Fairness Act: passed House with huge bipartisan support, and is bipartisan in Senate too; looking positive
- Crisis Recovery: thorough resources and robust action toolkit available and will continue to be developed (<https://www.aauw.org/resources/policy/crisis-recovery-toolkit/>)
- Freedom to Vote: AAUW joined a coalition for action on voter rights with Rock the Vote and many leaders; failure

of the For the People Act was a hit, but AAUW is not giving up.

- AAUW signed onto an amicus brief by the Women's Law Project to appeal the ruling in support of the U.S women's soccer team in their pay equity case

## **Economic Security**

### Changing the Conversation

We all began 2020 with great hopes for celebrating the 100th year of women having the right to vote.

Then, a small wrinkle made its way into everyone's plans throughout the world. That little wrinkle that grew to be a crushing monster is, of course, COVID-19.

It caused those of us working on public policy to change direction, reevaluate our methods and reimagine how to continue advocating for our priorities in spite of lock downs and uncertainty. One thing became apparent, and that was that the way for women to proceed was in coalition and through coordinated goals. Women, and particularly women of color, were being negatively impacted much more than their male counterparts. Women make up the majority of front-line workers, health professionals, teachers, childcare providers, retail employees, and restaurant and hospitality workers.

A new term – *sheroes* – was coined as people vowed, they would remember how much we all relied on these brave, self-sacrificing women. Fast forward to present day 2021 and these same sheroes are now the largest number suffering

economically in what is being called the *shecession*, because women are the largest group having lost their jobs alongside a multitude of obstacles prohibiting them from returning to work. Not the least of these obstacles being lack of childcare.

### **Why Change the Conversation?**

- **Legislation never moves**  
AAUW's bills, Bi-partisan bills such as the Family Care Act or even bills with huge bi-partisan and public support like LACRA
- **COVID impact**  
We won't know the full impact for a while, but it could be felt for years to come. While the economy is recovering, it is not recovering equally for all. We are anxious to get back to normal – but normal even before Covid was inequitable.
- **2022 election** offers challenges and opportunities. Pennsylvania will be electing a Governor, U.S. Senator and all Representatives in the U.S. House and PA state house as well as some state senators. This is an opportunity to focus on AAUW issues. Candidates may be willing to sign onto some bills in order to appeal to the women's vote. It is an opportunity to discover where candidates stand on our issues? We will need to take all of this into consideration when casting our vote.

### **New education campaign**

- The talking points we use have been based on fairness, need and the right thing to do which does not move some to support our bills.
- Need to find out what is important to them?
- What are the issues they care about?
- How do we tie our issues to what they support?

### **Livable Wage**

The pandemic of 2020 did not create the problems women face of unequal pay, lack of women in leadership positions, inadequate safe, affordable childcare and senior care, paid leave, and healthcare choices- but it did shine a spotlight on them. It revealed how our economy depends on women. In a recent webinar, Donna Cooper, the Executive Director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth, stated: "Other countries have safety net programs, we have women."

Low wage workers unable to make a living wage are no longer keeping quiet about the poor conditions under which they have been working. Until very recently, women were expected to tolerate harassment as "it's just the way things are". Although public sentiment has changed, far too many women must still labor under this - especially those who must rely on tips. One ironic thing is that as low wage workers are being cast as not returning to work because they are lazy and would rather collect unemployment, many of them were making so little that they didn't even qualify for unemployment. If someone in a restaurant makes the PA tipped minimum wage of \$2.83/hr it comes to \$113.20/wk. Once they have paid into Social Security and other deductions, their take home pay is around \$60.

A Newsweek article from April 2021 reporting on efforts to raise the federal minimum wage quoted The National Restaurant Association as saying that if the Raise the Wage Act were passed, "The restaurant industry and our workforce will suffer from a fast-tracked wage increase and elimination of the tip credit." The following day the CFO of Denny's, Robert Versatel, told investors: "...California has outperformed the system for six consecutive years of positive traffic and sales as the minimum wage grew." In 2021 all California

businesses must pay at least \$13 an hour and has eliminated the tipped minimum wage.

The federal government has given states billions to help them provide funding necessary for getting the state economies up and running. Instead of using this to subsidize things like childcare facilities, improvements to education, and grants and low-interest loans to small businesses, legislators have too often chosen to put the money aside so they can use it in future years for their pet projects.

Again, this limits options for women wanting to return to work. State policies need to reflect the reality of what is needed. In a recent webinar by Equal Pay MA, restaurant owner, Rebecca Roth Gullo stated:” Once you support families you support commerce.” Other small business women commented that the majority of clients supporting small, local businesses are the people you see when you walk down the streets. It’s this local foot traffic that keeps things going. When women are not included in leadership roles and policy making, things like equal pay, paid family medical leave are brushed aside.

It isn’t just a women’s problem. If women continue to be paid at lower rates than men, it means that everyone - men, women and children suffer from lack of income and benefits. Researchers report the negative impacts on physical and mental health are the result of consistent stress brought on by unstable work schedules and weekly pay, lack of healthcare and leave benefits, and unnecessarily cruel policies like non-compete clauses. Legislative policies must be intentional and not just check-the-box. If those in charge of seeing that policies are fairly carried out are not invested in the importance of these policies then the policies are not enforced and abuses continue. Barriers for women

to return to work need to be removed. In order to accomplish this, voters need to become better informed about what those obstacles really are.

The Washington Post conducted a survey in June 2021 of restaurants and retail businesses throughout the U.S. on how wages were impacting their ability to reopen. One Pittsburgh establishment, Klavon’s Ice Cream Parlor was offering the \$7.25 PA minimum and had not received a single response. They raised it to \$15/hr and were flooded with over 1000 applications. Some of the small business owners in the survey stated it was simply good business to raise wages as well as provide working conditions where employees felt valued so they could attract more and better candidates, providing them with an edge against their competitors. Having reliable, satisfied workers was seen as especially important in “customer-facing businesses” such as retail. One restaurant owner admitted to raising wages after his establishment was “shredded with negative reviews online”.

As already stated, women’s issues are everyone’s issues and keeping women from fully participating in the economic recovery means we will continue to face obstacles to that recovery that cannot be overcome without addressing the needs of women. Part of our job is going to be to persuade men to give a damn about their daughters, wives, mothers, neighbors, co-workers and their own well-being.

### **Pay Equity**

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence received a grant from the CDC to look at risk factors for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). They have just published a report <https://www.pcadv.org/resources/pay-equity-report-fact-sheet/> that found that pay inequity impacts these risk factors which increases the likelihood that violence can

and will occur among individuals or within relationships, communities, and society. They reached out to us to see how we could work together to raise awareness of the issue.

**Pay inequity worsens the discrimination people of color face** due to the additional burden of racism. People of color who are getting unequal pay and opportunities are further disadvantaged by pay inequity.

**Poverty** - Pay inequity increases **poverty**. Research shows that equal pay would reduce the poverty rate for all working women by half. The 28 percent poverty rate for working single mothers would also be reduced by nearly half.

**Unequal Power** - Money is a resource and is seen as equivalent to **power**, thus pay inequity may portray women as weak and dependent. Since IPV leads to power and control exercised over others, people who experience pay inequity are also at higher risk of experiencing IPV.

**Economic Instability** - Pay inequity affects the opportunities women get, which impacts their **social status** as a group.

**Weak Social Networks** - Poor neighborhoods, which are often a byproduct of pay inequity, are socially isolated and often have **weak community sanctions against IPV**. Studies show that when communities are not willing to act for the common good, IPV rates increase.

**Housing Insecurity** - Pay inequity may lead to increased **stress in the household**, because it may become difficult to pay rent and provide for basic necessities. Stress in the family may increase the likelihood of violence.

**Harmful Gender Norms** - Norms about **gender roles** for men and women and

whose work is of greater value is perpetuated by pay inequity, which allows men to use the lower financial status of women to exert power over and oppress women. The idea of men as more valuable than women normalizes oppressive behavior, which can take the form of IPV.

This is just one way to look at the issue of pay inequity. We may be able to identify legislators for whom IPV is an issue who then may be willing to sign onto our bills.

**Education** - From Susan Spicka of Education Voters PA.

We've all been following the Pennsylvania school funding lawsuit for years. The lawsuit is finally going before the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court - the lawyers have done their part and the trial will begin in Harrisburg on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Now, public education advocates have an important role to play. We need to turn up the heat on the school funding problem in our communities and demonstrate public support for legal action and remedy.

**How can you help?**

**Passing a resolution in support of Pennsylvania's school funding lawsuit is one tool people have to expand awareness and demonstrate support for the lawsuit.**

[Click HERE for a copy of the resolution and additional information.](#)

This resolution is geared to local groups. Branches may feel free to pass a resolution in support of the education funding lawsuit since this is an issue AAUW PA has supported for some time. If you have questions, please email [sspicka@educationvoterspa.org](mailto:sspicka@educationvoterspa.org).

**Improving the Operation and Transparency of Government**

**Redistricting** – from our friends at Fair Districts

## Should this be a partisan process?

Since both House and Senate committees will need to work together, it's troubling that they are not holding joint hearings, and that the House comment page makes no reference to the Senate role in the process. Even more troubling is the fact that both are housed on partisan caucus websites, both difficult, or impossible, to find from the General Assembly site. While we know this is always a partisan process, there is no reason to signal it so clearly by using caucus websites in this way. Consider contacting both Senator Argall ([dargall@pase.gov](mailto:dargall@pase.gov)) and Representative Grove ([sgrove@pahousegop.com](mailto:sgrove@pahousegop.com)) to express concern and ask why there is not one easy-to-find joint, **non-partisan** site for agenda, sign-ups, and other information.

**The Legislative Reapportionment Commission** (LRC, responsible for PA house and senate maps) is housing information on a non-partisan website. That commission held three hearings this week, with testimony from organizations leaders (including me), mapping experts, and concerned citizens. You can participate by submitting written comment [here](#).

## Hang in There



EXCELSIOR!  
SEPPHORIS. "IT'S NO GOOD TALKING TO ME ABOUT SISYPHUS; HE WAS ONLY A MAN!"

This may represent how some of you feel about the inability to move legislation. Jacqui and I readily admit to frustration. However, as she says, It's no good talking to me about Sisyphus. He was only a man.

As we continue to work on public policy this year, may we also recommend

## Lessons From the Geese

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the bird following. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% more flying range than if each bird flew alone.

***Lesson: Advocacy is quicker and easier when it is done in a community that supports each other.***

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the "lifting power" of the bird immediately in front.

***Lesson: If we have as much sense as a goose, we will join with those who are headed where we want to go.***

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies at the point position.

***Lesson: It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership.***

The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

***Lesson: We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging - not something less helpful.***

When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow their fellow member down to help provide protection. They stay with this member of the flock until he or she is either able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out on their own, with another formation, or catch up with their own flock.

***Lesson: stand by each other.***

Lessons from the Geese, was written in 1972 by Dr. Robert McNeish of Baltimore.



As we push that boulder up the hill let's remember the geese and what Margaret Mead said - *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Your public policy team is here to answer your questions and are only an email away. Hopefully this finds you all well and staying safe.

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A little levity about all the proposed changes to voting laws across the country.

