



US WOMEN'S CAUCUS

CSW 70 Justice for Women Briefs

Advancing Justice for Women and Girls in the United States

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has called on nations and civil society to provide input at its 70th session (CSW 70) on ensuring and strengthening access to justice for women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers. To address those concerns, the US Women's Caucus has composed a series of briefs on justice for women and girls in the United States. Here are highlights, and the full series is available on our website (<https://www.uswomenscaucus.org/un-csw/csw-70-2026/>).

SEX TRAFFICKING

Between **15,000 to 50,000 women and children are forced into sexual slavery in the United States every year.**¹

Victims may be forced to commit crimes and may experience trauma bonding with their traffickers, leading to emotional attachment and reluctance to cooperate with authorities.² Survivors face victim-blaming and legal frameworks that place the burden of proof on them rather than on traffickers.

- **Establish federal victim protection protocols** including comprehensive victim-centered, trauma-informed services to support victims in rebuilding their lives and enabling them to recall and recount their experiences.³
- **Strengthen the Trafficking Victims Protection Act** to explicitly prevent the prosecution of trafficking victims for crimes that they were forced to commit during victimization, including citizens and noncitizens.

CRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Since the 2022 Supreme Court decision overturning constitutional protections for abortion, many US states have criminalized abortion care with legal barriers such as fetal personhood laws and targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) laws. **Mothers living in states that banned abortion are nearly two times as likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or soon after giving birth, compared to mothers living in states with legal abortion.** For instance, women's risk of maternal death in Texas was 155% higher than in California.⁴

- **Decriminalize abortion and prohibit the prosecution of self-managed abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth.**
- **Thwart prohibitions on dispensing or mailing mifepristone/misoprostol** and other FDA-approved drugs.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (TFGBV)

One in four adult women in the U.S. have experienced online abuse such as cyberstalking, sexual harassment, doxing, and trolling.⁵ **Women constitute 99% of victims of sexually explicit digital forgery ('deepfakes').**⁶ Black women are 84% more likely to be targeted in harmful online posts.⁷ Girls and young women are disproportionately affected due to their high engagement with social media.

- **Develop and codify a federal definition for TFGBV** to ensure legal clarity and improve law enforcement.
- **Establish a standardized national data collection system** and create a coordinated multi-agency TFGBV taxonomy aligned with legal definitions and uniform codes for law enforcement and researchers.

EDUCATION JUSTICE

Schools should be spaces of learning, not pipelines to incarceration. **Punitive truancy laws have exacted harsh punishment on girls who miss school for gender-based reasons.** Girls are 50% more likely than boys to take on household or caregiving duties, often leading to missed school days.⁸ Girls are harassed or bullied on the basis of sex at a much higher rate than boys.⁹ Nearly a quarter of female students struggle to afford access to menstrual hygiene products, and 65% do not want to be at school during their periods.¹⁰ Black girls receive more frequent and severe discipline in school and are suspended at rates five times higher than white girls for similar behaviors.¹¹

- **Repeal punitive truancy laws** and replace them with family-supportive, community-based interventions.
- **Require federal reporting on school discipline** disaggregated by race, gender identity, and disability.

LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSES TO CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

A number of barriers impede effective law enforcement response to crimes against women. While big cities often have specialized units to handle domestic violence cases, smaller or rural departments usually rely on general officers or regional task forces.¹² **Sexual misconduct by officers is the second most prevalent form of police crime**, and victims—especially Black, Indigenous, and Latina women—are often reluctant to report due to fear and mistrust.¹³ The scarcity of female officers is another factor; in 2023, only 13.8% of full-time law enforcement officers were female, while 86.2% were male.¹⁴

- **Promote the hiring of more female law enforcement officers** to increase victim and public trust in police departments and increase the effectiveness of units specializing in violence against women.
- **Create a state-funded gender violence observatory** capable of monitoring and evaluating law enforcement responses at a national scale. Such an observatory would ensure systematic oversight, accountability, and transparency, particularly in cases involving police misconduct, neglect, or bias.

BARRIERS TO JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS

Murder rates of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) women and girls are almost three times as high as non-Hispanic white women,¹⁵ and **in some localities, murder rates are 10 times higher than the national average.**¹⁶ For AI/AN girls and women ages 15-24, homicide is the third leading cause of death.¹⁷ Over their lifetime, 97% of Native female victims of violence have experienced attacks by a perpetrator of a different race, while 35% have also been victimized by a Native perpetrator.¹⁸ Federal efforts to expand the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, allowing Tribal governments to have Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction over Non-Indians,¹⁹ is only a first step to achieving justice and equality.

- **Strengthen and coordinate Tribal, state, and federal data collection** to track murder rates effectively.
- **Create a UN-backed global Tribal database** to analyze data on violence against Indigenous women.

RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

Immigrant women in the US frequently encounter significant barriers to accessing legal and essential services. **Women victims of domestic violence may fear calling police or accessing shelters** due to their immigration status. Immigrant women in detention have faced mistreatment while pregnant including denial of prenatal care, unsupervised miscarriages, and incidents of physical and sexual abuse.²⁰ Between 2015 and 2021, more than 300 complaints of sexual assault or abuse were filed in ICE facilities, with over half implicating staff.²¹

- **Expedite visa access for victims of crime (U visas) and trafficking (T visas)** and require all immigration officers to receive trauma-informed, culturally competent training with strict accountability measures.
- **Fund universal legal representation in immigration proceedings**, including for unaccompanied and under-aged children, and require interpreter access at every stage. Protect community trust by prohibiting immigration enforcement from using court appearances or victim services to target survivors.

LGBTQ+ YOUTH IN THE K-12 SYSTEM

About 3.2 million US youth ages 8 to 18 identify as LGBTQ, 61% of whom are girls and 39% are boys.²² Nationally, 59% of LGBTQ+ youth experience discriminatory school policies or practices.²³ **19 states have passed laws to remove LGBTQ+ history and people from school curriculum**, including “Don’t Say Gay” laws and parental opt-outs of LGBTQ-related curricula.²⁴ A White House Executive Order (January 2025) directed federal agencies to deny funding to K-12 schools that permit transgender students to access restrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity.²⁵ As of October 2025, 20 states had passed some form of bathroom ban in K-12 schools.²⁶

- **Promote the creation of safe spaces**, such as LGBTQ+ specific clubs and support groups, and use of LGBTQ+ safe-space signifiers in classrooms such as stickers, signs, and flags. Ensure access to gender-neutral equivalents for traditionally gendered spaces such as bathrooms.
- **Incorporate diverse perspectives in school curriculum**, ensuring that LGBTQ+ voices are included.

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE AND JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

The scarcity of childcare resources has a particularly profound effect on women as it hinders their ability to participate in the labor force and maintain economic independence. US women undertake approximately 65% of unpaid caregiving responsibilities in the home,²⁷ and the average annual **cost of center-based care per child was \$13,128 in 2024**,²⁸ about 10% of a married couple's median household income. Costs were 35% of household income for single-parent households, far above the standard benchmark of 7% affordability.²⁹

- **Build a national childcare infrastructure** and expand access in underserved areas, educational institutions, and other places to help support parents.
- **Ensure affordability for families** by capping childcare costs at 7% of income and expand subsidies and tax credits to ease financial strain on low- and middle-income households.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND BENEFITS IN THE US

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed by Congress in 1993, provides up to 12 weeks of *unpaid* job-protected leave for childbirth, serious illness, or caregiving at companies with at least 50 workers, but it excludes nearly 44% of workers.³⁰ FMLA requires 1,250 hours per year with the same employer—a standard many part-time workers don't meet. **Only 13 US states and the District of Columbia mandate paid family leave**, including medical and parental leave.³¹ Immigrant women, often working in informal sectors (e.g., caregiving, agriculture), are excluded from the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and lack access to paid leave and health insurance.³²

- **Establish federal paid parental leave of 12 weeks** with progressive wage replacement, such as the proposed FAMILY Act.³³
- **Expand FMLA eligibility** to include smaller employers with financial subsidies.
- **Redress gaps for low-income groups** and marginalized communities with targeted interventions.

CEDAW: A FRAMEWORK GUARANTEEING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The CEDAW Convention is underutilized in the United States as a means to advance justice for women and girls due to failure by the US government to join the treaty. US civil society has created an alternate path with the **Cities for CEDAW** movement, embedding CEDAW into many municipalities and gaining the endorsement of the US Conference of Mayors. 80 million Americans are covered by a local CEDAW resolution or ordinance and **over 70 US cities have adopted CEDAW legislation.**³⁴

- **Ratify CEDAW** to solidify the commitment of the United States to human rights for women globally.³⁵
- **Enact specific laws** under the treaty umbrella such as a **federal minimum age of marriage at 18 years**, a federal system of **mandatory paid parental leave**, a system of affordable and **accessible childcare services**; and protect women's access to the **full spectrum of reproductive health services**.

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US feminists collaborating to advance human rights and gender equity for women and girls worldwide

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