

A black and white photograph of two young girls. The girl on the left is smiling and looking towards the camera. The girl on the right is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. They are both wearing light-colored clothing. The background is slightly out of focus, showing some foliage.

**DRAFT  
REPORT**

# **CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S AGENDA**

*Girl Child Report 2015*

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# INTRODUCTION

Following the UN4WCW Platform, the CAWA Task Force on the Girl Child (Girls and Young Women of California) agrees discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life, and must therefore be addressed from then onwards. The girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow. Her skills, ideas and energy are vital to full attainment of goals of equality, sustainable development and peace. For girls to develop their full potential, they need to be nurtured in an environment where their needs are met, and their equal rights safeguarded.

The Platform respects and ensures the rights of each child, irrespective of his or her parents' or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status."

## **About this report**

Twenty years following the historic Beijing conference, California Women's Agenda is working to address the wide variety of issues impacting the girl child of tomorrow: In our report, we will be focusing on three areas: 1) Defining the issue 2) Discussing effective and ineffective strategies and 3) Offering recommendations.

## **California**

California has sound policies that protect the majority of our girls from the discriminatory and downright dangerous practices, experience in other states and internationally. However, California can of course do better to eliminate inequities experienced by girls as well as facilitate the development, health and leadership of girls into women. California is home to about 12% of the nation's population, which is just about 19 million women and girls. A little over 60% of this population are females of color. One out of 4 Californian females (or 25%) are under the age of 18.

# ISSUE AREAS

**Criminal Justice System**  
**Food Security**  
**Education**  
**Environmental Toxins**  
**Health**  
**Poverty**  
**Violence**

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The majority of youth who are arrested are put on probation, however there still about 6000 juveniles (10-17) that are serving time behind bars in California. Boys overwhelming make up the population of juveniles behind bars but the rates of girls are rapidly increasing. Youth of color, foster care youth and youth that experience some type of trauma are more likely to end up behind bars, highlighting that the most vulnerable of California's children are ending up behind bars.

## **Policy Recommendations /Strategic Objectives**

- Look into alternative sentencing/programs
- Create and fund more afterschool programs specifically for at risk girls



# FOOD SECURITY

Overall, females in California often have below recommended intakes of vital vitamins such as calcium, iron and folate. However in low income families these dietary deficiencies are exasperated. Children of these families have below average vitamin a b10 and c intake as well as access to nutrition found in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Over 8 out of 10, 15 -19 years old report eating the recommended amount of vegetables and fruit per day.

## **Policy Recommendations /Strategic Objectives**

- Expand food assistance programs for low-income families back to pre-budget cut levels
- Create funded food assistance programs for the summer and weekends that provided children that come from low income families meals, through the school programs.
- Create incentive programs to bring fresh, affordable vegetables into food desert neighborhoods.

# EDUCATION

The ability for girls to have full education lives, have a direct correlation with her success as a woman. Two thirds of California women who live in poverty have a high school education are less. In the 2012-13 school year, 6.2 million students were enrolled in California public K-12 schools. Of that 6.2 million, 49% were girls. Seventy five percent of K-12 students are students of color. While there is an overall increase of girls graduating across social and economic status, they are still disparities within the graduation rates. Asian American girls have the high percentage of graduation at 93%, Black and Native American girls have the lowest rates at 73% and 78% respectively.

When girls start their education, they are equally excited about STEM ( science, technology, engineering and math) subjects as boys, however their interest and achievement in these classes dramatically decrease over time. Even though females have a tendency of taking AP test in STEM subjects more than males, they are less likely to continue into STEM careers. Girls of color have even less representation in STEM classes. Overall women make up 24% of the STEM workforce, however only 3% are represented by Latinas.

## **Strategic Objective/Policy Recommendations:**

Increase diversity in faculty that teach STEM classes in middle and high school.

Create programs and fellowships with private corporations and nonprofit entities that support girls learning both inside and outside of the classroom

Create safety net or “wrap around” programs that address cultural, social and economic needs of families in underserved communities through local schools.



# ENVIRONMENTAL TOXINS

Now more than ever girls are exposed to all types of environmental toxins through air, water, food and even beauty and cleaning products. Chemicals found in everyday products such as lipstick and shampoo have harsh and toxic chemicals linked to a variety of health issues including, reproductive and neurological disorders, cancers, respiratory issues and development disorders. Endocrine disrupting chemicals like bisphenol - a are found in water bottles, formula cans and various plastics. A recent study has shown girls have starting signs of puberty younger and younger over the years, with environmental exposures named as one of likely targets causing this effect.

Now a days children spend between 80% to 90% of their time indoors, making indoor environment toxins a larger health concern. A growing number of youth are affected by asthma, with approximately 1.7 million (17.7) children being diagnosed with this disease in California. Almost 8 out of ten of the asthma cases could be linked to allergic triggers including, mold, pets, rats, cockroaches and dust mites. Indoor environmental toxins have been linked to asthma, lead poisoning, cancer and developmental disabilities.

Strategic Objective/Policy Recommendations:

Reform the Toxic Substance Control Act as well as other chemical policy to have stronger regulations protecting fence-line communities while also protecting states to further regulate chemicals of concerns.

# HEALTH

What is essential to every child's development is the ability to live a full and healthy life free from illness and injury. The areas below are important health issues to address:

**Access to Health Care** - California girls in rural and in urban areas suffer from lack of access of services due to either location and or cost. With both the implementation of the affordable care act and recent state legislation to improving access, California is on track to remedy some of the health access issues that plague California girls. Women of color; and particularly Latinas are less likely to be insured. Up until last 2013, many young females living in rural California had to travel hundreds of miles in order to access an abortion clinic, with many still needing to make that travel until California's Early Abortion takes effect.

**Sexually Transmitted Infection** have a direct impact on both a person's physical and mental health. STI's can cause variety of reproductive complications as well as, in some cases, cause deep resentments and depression within those who acquire incurable diseases. STI's are especially important to girls of California, since Los Angeles County has the highest number of Chlamydia and gonorrhea cases in country. Chlamydia rates increased slightly between 2000 -2009 among youth ages 15 to 19. The vast majority of chlamydia cases occur in the 15 to 24 year old age group (65% of chlamydia cases among all age groups), the target group for recommended annual screening, however in California the target age group for education and testing starts as young as 12 years of age. The chlamydia rate for 15-19 year old African American females is 8 times higher than their white counterparts; these differences may be partially caused by higher levels of screening, sexual networks with higher prevalence, or differential care by public sector providers who tend to comply with reporting regulations.

**Physical Health** - California girls are underrepresented within youth athletics and teams. Almost two thirds (67%) of adolescents participate in vigorous activity 3 times a week, however girls alone that percentage drops to 59%. Girls are 16% less likely to engage in physical activity than boys. Although maternal mortality is something that doesn't affect girls 0-18 directly the impacts of maternal mortality in girls lives are very real. Currently, the maternal mortality ratio for Black mothers in California 33.8 out of 100,000 with Los Angeles County being significantly higher at 59 out of 100,000. There is a very real effect on children's emotional, physical and financial well being when there is a lost of a mother. In addition, given how many girls of color are in the California's foster care system, the rates of maternal mortality should absolutely be explored when looking at how to improve the status of young girls within the state.

**Obesity** - Almost 1/3 of California girls are classified as overweight or obese. Obesity not only has impact on girls as they develop, it can has lifelong consequences with various health illness linked to obesity. Over half of African American girls and about 30% of Native/Alaskan Native girls are considered overweight or obese. It is worth noting, that they are some flaws in the body mass index system in what we use to determine healthy weight/height correlation.

## **Policy Recommendations:**

Expand access to healthcare especially for low income girls, by creating a universal healthcare system for all children under the age of 18.

Diversify afterschool programs to ensure that young girls have equal opportunity to engage in sports and other vigorous physical activities of interest.

Create more local clinic, school collaboration health centers to increase access in rural areas as well as expand access in urban cities.





# POVERTY

Poverty is one of the strongest indicators of health. The strongest indicator if a girl will live in poverty, is if her parents live in poverty. Overall California has recovered pretty soundly from the economic downturn experience at the end of 2008, however the recovery has not been equal. Currently California has one of the highest numbers of child poverty in the Nation. According to the Center of The Next Generation report, released in 2013 almost 1 in 5 California children are in poverty. In addition, children of color are more likely to be living in poverty. Almost 40% of Black children age 0-6 are in poverty and over 1 in 3 Latino children are in poverty. Children that live in more rural parts of California are more likely to experience poverty than those of children living in urban parts of the state. One third of California girls are in poverty with 9 percent under the age of 5. Almost 1/3rd of families in poverty are headed by single women. Of the women who are in poverty, majority of them have a high school diploma are less (61%). Showing the direct correlation between education level and poverty.

## **Policy Recommendations /Strategic Objectives**

Repeal maximum family grant rule.

Create job training programs, fellowships and paid internships for specifically aimed at low-income and girls of color.



# VIOLENCE



Violence is always a prevailing issues in our society, and is a particular issues that plagues girls in California. Race and class is an indicator for young girls likelihood to be victimized by violence in her lifetime. One of the top reasons for young black girls death (15-24) is homicide, very often at the hand of a partner. Nationally 1 in 10 female black infant death are due to homicide. 1 in 4 black female teenage death is due to homicide. In a 2010 survey, approximately 40% of California adult females reported experiencing IPV during their lifetime, which is higher than the 24% of women in the United States who have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner. Dating violence (mainly hitting and slapping) among California teenagers was reported by almost 10% of students in 7th grade, 5% in 9th grade and 11% in 11th grade.

Human trafficking is something that the United States has long ignored but is creeping up in the dark corners of this country, especially in California. Human trafficking is close to eclipsing drug trafficking, with an estimated \$32 billion a year industry. California, is now one of the Nation's top four destinations for trafficked human beings. Girl both domestically, and internationally are being forced into a life of force labored and or sexual assault. Some studies estimated somewhere between 50-80% of trafficked children were involved with the child welfare system at one point.

## **Policy Recommendations /Strategic Objectives**

Develop and institute comprehensive sexual health education that is culturally and age appropriate and includes healthy relationship component

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Eliminate the injustice and obstacles in relation to inheritance faced by the girl child so that all children may enjoy their rights without discrimination, by, inter alia, enacting, as appropriate, and enforcing legislation that guarantees equal right to succession and ensures equal right to inherit, regardless of the sex of the child
- Deaggregate research and data for especially for Asian and Pacific Islanders and Latina communities.
- Provide accessible, safe and culturally sensitive opportunities and spaces for girls to participate in physical activity and leadership opportunities.
- Eliminate cyberbullying by engaging with policymakers, educators and private/technology sector.
- Make education and information regarding the identification and anonymous reporting of, and intervention resources for, sex trafficking available to girls both in and out of school.
- Ensure the disaggregation by sex and age of all data related to children in the health, education and other sectors in order to include a gender perspective in planning, implementation and monitoring of such programmes. Including:
  - Requiring workforce demographics including demographics on gender, ethnicity, ability to be available to the public.
- Increase formal leadership opportunities and mentorship for girls, especially for girls that come from disadvantaged or low income families. Including but not limited funding for more local and state government fellowships, afterschool programs and private sector incentives.
- Increase access to full affordable comprehensive health care through instating a public option within the Affordable Care Act open to all residents of California.

## **Endnotes/ Sources**

California Teen Health Report Card

<http://www.californiateenhealth.org/data/california-adolescent-health-report-cards>

Mount Saint Mary Report on Women and Girls in California <http://www.msmc.la.edu/PDFFiles/status-of-women/2014/report-state.pdf>

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<http://www.californiateenhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/AdolNutritionPhysic.pdf>

Youth Law

[http://www.youthlaw.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2013/child\\_sex\\_traffickers\\_target\\_california\\_foster\\_children/](http://www.youthlaw.org/press_room/press_releases/2013/child_sex_traffickers_target_california_foster_children/)

CASE Act

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