

**NATIONAL
COALITION ON
WOMEN, JOBS AND
JOB TRAINING**

December 9, 2011

To Senators and Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

As you consider issues pertaining to jobs and economic recovery in the coming days, we the undersigned organizations urge you to support legislation of particular importance to women of all ages and the economic security of their families. Today women are key breadwinners in two-thirds of American families, bringing home all or the greatest share of their families' income.

Although the unemployment rate dipped to 8.6% in November, the Bureau of Labor Statistics Friday reported the unemployment rate for women who maintain families was 12.1 %, up slightly from 12.0% in July. In total, among women age 20 or over, 5.1 million were officially unemployed and another 2.8 million were not in the labor force but wanted work.

Underlining the need for emergency unemployment benefits, the nation's average duration of unemployment reached a record high in November. For women age 20 and over the average was 42.1 weeks. For women age 55 or over, it was 54.8 weeks.

Whether unemployed or working, many women today want education and skill training to improve their job opportunities. According to the BLS, 48% of women worked in services, sales and low-level administrative positions in 2010.

We were very disappointed when Congress failed to pass legislation that would have put 275,000 teachers and assistants, a majority of them women, back in American classrooms. Now, in the waning days of 2011, we urge you to take action on the following measures to create employment and training opportunities for women while also improving the physical condition of our schools:

Emergency Unemployment Insurance. Congress should pass the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Extension Act recently introduced in the House and Senate by Representatives Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) and Sander Levin (D-MI) and Senator Jack Reed (D-RI). In addition, Congress should ensure that survivors of sexual and domestic violence and stalking, regardless of where they live, are eligible for unemployment insurance as they are currently in 40 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The emergency legislation would continue the current law through 2012 by extending the Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) program and by allowing states to continue receiving full federal funding for the Extended Benefits (EB) program. Together, the federal EUC and EB programs provide 34 to 73 weeks of assistance after state unemployment programs (typically up to 26 weeks) have been exhausted. Under current law, the federal EUC and EB programs expire December 31, 2011. If these benefits are not extended, as many as six million unemployed workers will exhaust available UI benefits before they are able to find new jobs, leaving them and their families without critical income support during periods of extended unemployment. Such a cliff will also have a significant effect on consumer demand and threaten the fragile recovery.

Pathways Back to Work. Congress should support the Pathways Back to Work Act (S. 1861 and H.R. 3425) recently introduced by Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Representative George Miller (D-

CA). The bill would provide funding for subsidized employment programs patterned on the successful Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Contingency Fund that created 260,000 work opportunities for low-income parents and youth in 2009 and 2010. It also supports summer and year-round employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth and competitive grants for sector-based training, on-the-job training and other promising workforce strategies. The Pathways Back to Work Act would provide much needed work and learning opportunities at a time of elevated unemployment rates for single mothers, black women and Hispanic women.

Pell Grants. Congress should maintain the Pell grant's current eligibility structure as well as the maximum grant level. The House Majority FY2012 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill would make several *permanent* program eligibility cuts that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for women caring for children or dependents to balance family, full-time work, and the pursuit of a college education in order to improve their employment prospects. The House proposal would eliminate eligibility for less-than-half-time students, which would reduce their chances of persisting toward completion. It would also eliminate eligibility for students without a high school diploma or GED, even if they can prove their "ability to benefit" from college. The draft House bill would also lower lifetime eligibility from 18 to 12 semesters and lower income protection levels by several thousand dollars to between 45 percent and 134 percent of the poverty level (depending on family size and number in college), which is well below common income levels for other programs for low-income families. It would sharply reduce the maximum value of the grant or completely eliminate grants for over half a million students next year, including many low-income working moms. In addition to single working parents, this proposal would negatively affect dislocated workers and women trying to gain the education and technical skills they need to get new or better jobs.

Workforce Development Programs. Congress should adopt the Senate committee funding levels in the FY2012 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill to maintain the integrity of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs. In contrast, the House Majority proposal would eliminate \$2.2 billion for WIA programs under the guise of shifting funding from a Program Year to a Fiscal Year cycle, a change amounting to a program reduction of approximately 75%. Workforce development programs benefit low-income women, displaced workers, and those preparing to enter high-demand occupations with better pay than most occupations traditionally filled by women. WIA experienced a 248 percent increase in demand for services over the past two years and served over nine million people. The proposed Senate FY2012 bill provides better protection and assistance for vulnerable women and men seeking new employment.

In the long run the House appropriations proposals for both Pell grants and workforce training will hurt the long-term growth of the economy as well as the economic security of women and their families.

School Modernization. Congress should pass S. 1597, the Fix America's Schools Today (FAST) Act, sponsored by Sen. Sherrod Brown. The FAST Act will invest resources to repair, renovate and modernize public elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, and private facilities used for nonsectarian purposes. A portion of the funds would be allocated to states and local educational agencies based on the number of children living in poverty. The investment will create an estimated 300,000 jobs, some in technical and in building trades where women can gain new skills and occupational opportunities.

For the sake of our economy and families, we urge your action on these matters before adjourning for the holidays. For additional information, please contact Susan Rees srees@wowonline.org.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women

AAUW

Center for Women Policy Studies

Center for Law and Social Policy

Coalition of Labor Union Women

Coalition on Human Needs

Community Action Partnership

CT Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

Direct Care Alliance

Fem2.0

Feminist Majority

Legal Momentum

Media Equity Collaborative

MomsRising

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity

National Coalition of Women of Color in Construction, Inc

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of Women's Organizations

National Employment Law Project

National Transitional Jobs Network

National Skills Coalition

The National Women's Conference Committee

National Women's Law Center

National Women's Political Caucus

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

OWL

Public Justice Center

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

Turning Anger into Change

Women Donors Network

Women's Foundation of California

Women's Law Project

Washington Office of Public Policy, United Methodist Women

Wider Opportunities for Women

YWCA USA