
ADVANCING EQUITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR

The White House Council on Women and Girls



November 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Core Objectives.....	2
1. Fostering School Success and Reducing Unnecessary Exclusionary School Discipline...3	
2. Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable and Striving Youth.....5	
3. Inclusive STEM Education.....7	
4. Sustaining Reduced Rates of Teen Pregnancy and Building on Success.....9	
5. Economic Prosperity11	
Research to Lead the Way	15
Summary.....	15

INTRODUCTION

As President Obama noted in his speech to the Congressional Black Caucus in September 2015, women and girls of color have made real progress in recent years. The growth in the number of businesses owned by Black women outpaces that of all women-owned firms, and Latina-owned businesses accounted for more than \$71 billion in receipts in 2014. Teen birth rates are down, and high school graduation and four-year college enrollment rates are up.

However, persistent opportunity gaps and structural barriers remain. Girls from marginalized communities are suspended from school at disproportionate rates—and suspended students risk falling behind or dropping out, and are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. Although the U.S. teen birth rate has declined to a record low, Black and Latina teen girls, for example, remain more than twice as likely as white girls to become pregnant. Women and girls of color are underrepresented throughout the STEM ecosystem but over-represented in the foster care, juvenile and criminal justice systems, which for some may include a pathway that often begins with girls experiencing sexual abuse and trauma. Overall, women from marginalized communities experience higher levels of unemployment, are more concentrated in low-wage sectors and consistently earn less for doing the same work, undermining long-term economic stability. Overt and subtle forms of bias can affect girls and women over their lifetimes—from hiring and promotion, to quality health care.

In November 2014, the Council on Women and Girls released a report titled “[Women and Girls of Color: Addressing Challenges and Expanding Opportunities](#)” to identify barriers and disparities facing women and girls of color.¹ This report addressed work done over the first six years of the Administration to improve the lives of women and girls of color. It discussed important issues such as educational attainment, economic security, health and safety, violence against women, and criminal and juvenile justice. It also included a call to action and the establishment of a Federal interagency working group to develop opportunities for advancement, which commenced in March of 2015.

This issue brief supplements the earlier report by highlighting some of the initial steps taken by the Administration to address issues faced by women and girls of color over the past year. The Council on Women and Girls has identified five data-driven issue areas where interventions can promote opportunities for success at school, work, and in the community. Continuing research in these areas and exploration of new efforts can help advance equality for women and girls of color:

1. **Fostering school success and reducing unnecessary exclusionary school discipline** by implementing supportive school discipline strategies and policies, including through public awareness of the impact on girls of color;
2. **Meeting the needs of vulnerable and striving youth** by recognizing and responding appropriately to the finding that many girls enter intervening public systems through a route that begins with sexual abuse and trauma;
3. Increasing access to **inclusive STEM education** to meet 21st Century workforce demands and reducing opportunity gaps that affect women broadly in STEM education and fields, but often affect women and girls of color the most;

4. **Sustaining reduced rates of teen pregnancy and building on success** through expanded access to knowledge about birth control and preventive health services;
5. Expanding pathways to **economic prosperity** through opportunities for job mobility and investments in fair, equitable workplace policies.

Research suggests that progress in each of these areas will significantly reduce disparities for women and girls of color, impacting their ability to succeed at school, at work, and in the community. Preventing teen pregnancy, for example, makes it more likely that girls will receive their high school diplomas on time. When schools provide safe and supportive learning environments, they foster success for all students, including girls of color. By addressing stereotypes about women and unrepresented minorities in STEM careers, ensuring access to STEM education and encouraging STEM careers and non-traditional work, we develop the diverse talent pool needed for our economy. When we are mindful that many girls experience violence and bias that can lead to their involvement in the juvenile justice system, we work to make meaningful second chances possible. By making systematic improvements on compensation, paid family and paid sick leave, and job mobility, opportunity is increased for all Americans, including for women of color who are concentrated in low-wage sectors.

The Administration is taking important steps forward by announcing actions which open the doors of opportunity for all Americans, including women and girls of color. Equally important, the White House is also highlighting continuing efforts that sustain and build upon the successes achieved in improved life outcomes for women and girls of color and their peers.

#1: FOSTERING SCHOOL SUCCESS AND REDUCING UNNECESSARY EXCLUSIONARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

When used appropriately, school discipline policies contribute to safe, well-functioning classrooms and productive learning environments. However, far too many schools have harsh, zero tolerance discipline policies that are disproportionately applied, particularly in low-income and urban communities.

Boys of color, especially Black boys, experience the highest rates of exclusionary school discipline. However, girls of color also experience disproportionately high rates of school suspensions. Black girls are suspended at higher rates (12 percent) than girls of any other race or ethnicity and at higher rates than white boys (6 percent) and white girls (2 percent). American Indian/Alaska Native girls are also suspended at rates that exceed those of white students.²

The disparate treatment of students of color can affect their life trajectories. Suspended students are at risk of falling behind or dropping out and are also disproportionately funneled through the juvenile justice system.³ Pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls. At the same time, disproportionate rates of exclusionary school discipline can lead to school disengagement, which is also a risk factor for unplanned pregnancy.⁴

We also know that school completion helps to increase a student's future income. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the median income of Americans ages 18 through 67 in 2012 who completed their education with at least a high school credential (including the

General Educational Development or GED credential) was approximately \$46,000 as compared to \$25,000 for those who didn't complete high school or obtain a GED. Over the course of a career, this translates to a loss of approximately \$670,000 in total income.⁵

Tools exist to help schools create a supportive school climate, including [policy guidance](#) and resources for educators and school leaders to facilitate new practices. By encouraging supportive school discipline practices, schools foster success for all students and create conditions that improve the likelihood that students will stay engaged and in school. The Administration has taken the following steps to facilitate supportive school discipline policies by:

➤ **Supporting school discipline practices that promote safe, inclusive and positive learning environments.**

In order to create a positive learning environment, the Administration has provided clear steps for school districts to follow in order to better support its students:

- In follow-up to the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Justice's (DOJ) school discipline guidance package from 2014,⁶ DOJ and ED hosted teams of superintendents, principals, and teachers from across the country for "Rethink Discipline," a daylong conference at the White House in July 2015. At the conference, ED released new resources to assist school leaders in reducing rates of exclusionary discipline, including: [Addressing the Root Causes of Disciplinary Disparities: An Educator's Action Planning Guide](#)⁷ and [Rethink School Discipline: Resource Guide for Superintendent Action](#).⁸ Included in the guide are links to federal guidance and resources, as well as postcard templates that districts may use to support parent and family engagement in school discipline reform efforts. These resources provide accessible tools and best practices to facilitate implementation, including some in Spanish language versions.
- To ensure that all communities have access to information about supportive school discipline, ED has announced that it will translate FAQs from the [Dear Colleague](#)⁹ letter in the 2014 school discipline guidance package into Khmer and Lao, as well as subtitle Secretary Duncan's videotaped remarks on school discipline in Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese, and Hmong. These languages were selected in response to findings that Cambodian and Laotian girls face increased difficulty with exclusionary discipline in school.
- In July 2015, DOJ also launched the [National Resource Center for School Justice Partnerships](#).¹⁰ This training and technical assistance portal is designed to assist juvenile courts, schools, law enforcement agencies, and others to support school discipline reform efforts at the local level and address disparities in discipline among students.

➤ **Enhancing public awareness about exclusionary school discipline, including how it disproportionately affects girls of color.**

Until recently, scholarly research and public data on girls of color and school discipline was limited or difficult to access. The Administration has been committed to making information generated by the Federal Government, including information about school discipline, accessible to the public. In the past year, ED has designed new data portals that make it easier for communities to learn about school discipline rates. Public awareness of disproportionate rates of school discipline combined with access to data,

especially data that is disaggregated by race, gender, and other demographic variables, enables communities to identify challenges and engage collaboratively with relevant stakeholders to identify root causes and implement solutions. Realizing the importance of such data:

- In July 2015, ED launched a public awareness campaign, #RethinkDiscipline. This campaign included [story maps](#) on “The Hidden Cost of Suspension.”¹¹ These maps disaggregate school discipline data by race, gender, and disability status. The story maps permit users to explore out-of-school suspension rates in individual school districts across the United States. The goal of this campaign is to make school discipline data comprehensible and easily accessible for decision makers and for the public.
- In addition to releasing interactive maps with school discipline rates disaggregated by race, gender, and disability status, ED has funded a \$1 million data initiative, to be completed in the spring of 2016, that disaggregates K-12 data on school discipline, teacher equity, gifted and talented programs, and other metrics, broken down by gender and ethnicity/race.

#2: MEETING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE AND STRIVING YOUTH

Girls and young women represent a growing share of juvenile arrests, delinquency petitions, detentions, and post-adjudication placements. For example, 20 percent of all juvenile arrests were for girls in 1992, compared with nearly 30 percent today, and girls of color are particularly affected by this trend. Although African-American girls represent about 14 percent of the United States population, they constitute 32 percent of girls who are detained and committed. Native American girls are only one percent of the general population but constitute 3.5 percent of girls who are detained and committed.¹²

Research indicates that girls are arrested and detained at rates that exceed their participation in criminal activity. Current evidence suggests one cause is more aggressive enforcement of non-serious misdemeanors, outstanding warrants, technical violations, and “status” offenses, which only apply to a certain class of people and would not be crimes if committed by an adult (e.g. running away, truancy, curfew violations, and being ungovernable).¹³

While the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act prohibits detaining youth for status offenses, a Valid Court Order Exception (VCO) allows judges to detain adjudicated youth if they violate a court order such as “attend school regularly.” Girls are disproportionately affected and are more likely to be arrested for status offenses and outstanding warrants, and are also more likely to receive more severe punishment than boys.¹⁴

The most common offenses for which girls are arrested include running away and truancy. These behaviors are also the most common symptoms or outcomes of trauma and abuse. Once in the system, girls may be treated as offenders rather than girls in need of support, perpetuating a vicious cycle that is increasingly known as the “sexual abuse to prison pipeline.”¹⁵

Household dysfunction and exposure to chronic aversive stress during childhood are risk factors for childhood trauma and have long-term impacts on health.¹⁶ In turn, childhood trauma is a risk factor for domestic sexual trafficking, as are poverty, homelessness, and a history of engagement

with child welfare services and/or foster care. African-American children make up 59 percent of all arrests for prostitution for those under the age of 18¹⁷, which is more than any other racial group.¹⁸ Studies suggest that African-American girls are trafficked at younger ages than their racial counterparts. They also witness and experience multiple forms of violence at higher rates than white peers. Girls and young women engaged with intervening public systems have experienced greater rates of violence than their peers.

The Administration has taken the following actions to make improvements for all youth, including girls and young women of color, in intervening public systems:

➤ **Enhancing programmatic responses by integrating evidence-based trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive perspectives into youth serving systems and organizations.**

Addressing the root causes of pathways into those systems with sensitivity enables opportunities for meaningful second chances. To identify the issues and facilitate the development of new frameworks:

- In October 2015, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) proposed a rule to clarify protections for victims of harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status, or disability under the Fair Housing Act. The proposed rule would provide for uniform treatment of quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment harassment claims under the Fair Housing Act.¹⁹
- In October 2015, DOJ's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released [new guidance](#) on "Girls and the Juvenile Justice System."²⁰ Recognizing that many girls experience violence and/or bias leading to their involvement with the juvenile justice system, the guidance calls for a developmentally informed approach that acknowledges intersectional disparities (the specific challenges that occur when race, gender, and other demographic variables intersect) and calls for the reduction or elimination of arrest and detention for status offenses, technical violations of probation, simple assault, family-based offenses, running away, and prostitution-related charges. The guidance also recommends that the use of Valid Court Orders should be phased out and that the inclusion of trauma-informed services should be implemented in youth-serving settings. The guidance also advocates that juvenile justice stakeholders identify and address the needs of young people who have – or have had – contact with both the child welfare and the juvenile justice systems.

➤ **Expand disaggregated data initiatives.**

Rates of system involvement for girls have been increasing relative to boys, especially for status offenses, technical parole violations, and assaultive behavior. In 2013, Black females were nearly three times as likely as white peers to be referred to juvenile court for a delinquency offense and 20 percent more likely to be detained.²¹ American Indian/Alaska Native girls were 40 percent more likely to be referred to juvenile court for delinquency and 50 percent more likely to be detained.²² Girls and young women in the juvenile justice system have experienced far greater rates of violence than their peers, and these experiences continue into adulthood. Interventions that address the needs of girls and young women, particularly those who have experienced trauma, require a better

understanding of the population of those affected through research and the release of data disaggregated by race, gender, and other variables.

- In October 2015, the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) released Juvenile Court Statistics 2013, a report that describes delinquency cases and petitioned status offense cases processed by courts with juvenile jurisdiction in 2013.²³ The “Juveniles in Court” section includes an interactive tool that describes how specific types of delinquency cases typically flow through the juvenile justice system. Annual summaries are available from 1985 to present for more than 25 offense categories and include separate presentations by gender, age, and race.

#3: INCLUSIVE STEM EDUCATION

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) skills play an increasingly important role in the 21st Century economy. As reported by the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), according to workforce projections, the United States will need one million additional STEM college graduates than will be produced at current rates.²⁴ And currently, there are half a million job openings in the United States in the information technology field with thousands more requiring some type of training in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics.²⁵

Significant opportunity gaps exist in STEM education and careers for women, especially for women and girls of color. Although more women graduate from college and participate in graduate programs than men, women’s participation in science and engineering significantly differs by field of study at both the undergraduate and graduate level.²⁶ In 2012, for example, underrepresented minority women received only 11.2 percent of bachelor’s degrees in science and engineering, 8.2 percent of master’s degrees in science and engineering, and 4.1 percent of doctorate degrees in science and engineering.²⁷

Early on, girls and boys demonstrate similar rates of interest in science, but STEM achievement and participation gaps, both between girls and boys and among ethnic groups, widens in middle school and beyond in some areas of STEM.²⁸ The College Board reports that, of the 30,000 students who took the computer science AP exam in 2013, less than 20 percent were female, about 3 percent were African-American, and 8 percent were Hispanic. The same report indicates that no female students took the test in Mississippi and Montana. No African-American students took the test in 11 states and no Hispanic student took it in eight states, despite making up 3 percent and 8 percent of all test takers, respectively.²⁹

The Administration recognizes the importance of changing the way we teach STEM to be more engaging and inclusive, increasing access to STEM learning and role models for more students and addressing implicit biases and stereotypes that may play a prominent, if still often unrecognized, role in STEM and other disparities.³⁰ The Administration has therefore committed to the following actions:

- **Enhance pathways that engage underrepresented women in quality STEM education, including career and technical education.**

STEM jobs are expected to outpace non-STEM jobs over the next ten years. Engaging underrepresented girls and young women in STEM opens additional economic opportunity. Career and technical training opens access to high skilled, high demand careers, which provide a route to the middle-class. Engaging Americans, including underrepresented girls and young women, in STEM opens economic opportunity and meets growing workplace demands. Expanding early outreach to connect girls with STEM allows students to approach science in an inquiry-based manner, including by applying STEM as a means to solve real-world problems in communities. Common outcomes of this strategy include increased confidence in math skills, improved attitudes toward and engagement in math, and increased plans to attend or enroll in college. Evidence-based changes to the way colleges and universities teach STEM (e.g. active learning techniques and early learning opportunities) increase STEM engagement for women, including women of color.

- In January 2015, at a White House convening on bringing marginalized girls into STEM and CTE careers, the National Girls Collaborative announced a new STEM/CTE portal that centralizes resources on expanding girls' access to STEM and CTE, including curriculum, research, and promising practices.³¹ The portal will include EmpowerHer³²—a new interactive map that will make it easier to locate STEM enrichment activities in underserved areas. Additionally, Time Warner Cable and local partners have committed \$100,000 towards an independent small grants competition to link community STEM mentors and girls, which will launch in December 2015.
- In September 2015, The Center for Gender Equity in Science and Technology (CGEST) at Arizona State University announced the National Academic STEM Collaborative at a White House roundtable.³³ This collaborative is a network of 10 academic partners and nine organizational partners who are identifying and scaling effective, evidence-based strategies to improve STEM diversity in the nation's colleges and universities, with a focus on women and girls from under-represented communities. Building on the finding that women are more likely to enter into STEM careers if exposed to entrepreneurial activity, the Collaborative will co-host a "Women of Color and STEM Entrepreneurship Conference" in the spring of 2016 in partnership with Arizona State University and the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University.

➤ **Encouraging STEM participation by highlighting accomplishments of girls and women from diverse communities and by encouraging private sector efforts to recruit and retain diverse talent in STEM fields.**

Many young people consider nontraditional careers when they observe role models with whom they can relate enjoying success. Research indicates that diverse teams and organizations outperform those that are less diverse on a number of financial metrics. Diversity makes good economic sense for America.³⁴ The Administration has been able to demonstrate opportunities for women and girls in STEM in the following ways:

- In August 2015, President Obama hosted the first-ever White House Demo Day, where entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds, including women of color, showcased innovations.³⁵ The President also issued a call to action to advance inclusive entrepreneurship and highlighted independent actions to advance opportunities for

women and underrepresented minorities, including by Sabiola, who established a Women of Color Fellowship Fund that will give at least 100 women access to a 12-week coding bootcamp, job-interview prep, and ongoing professional development after completion of the program, and IBM, who expanded Girls Who Code to introduce the next generation of women software developers to cloud computing innovation.³⁶

- In March 2015, the White House Science Fair had a specific focus on diversity and included students from underrepresented backgrounds who are excelling in STEM.³⁷ This year's participants included a record number of girls and young women, including those from diverse communities.
- During the 2015 Hispanic Heritage Month, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, housed at the Department of Education, released the "Fulfilling America's Future: Latinas in the U.S., 2015" Report, which highlights the condition of Hispanic girls and women in the country and their participation in areas such as: education, including STEM; health; labor; housing; and politics.³⁸ The report can inform key programmatic, policy, and advocacy efforts at the local, state, and national levels seeking to better increase the educational attainment and life outcomes of all people, including Latinas. In addition, the Administration released the "Bright Spots in Hispanic Education" national online catalog, which features over 230 programs, models, organizations, and initiatives that are investing in the educational attainment of young people, from cradle-to-career, including programs that are supporting STEM education for Hispanic girls and women. Lastly, the President announced 150 Commitments to Action with a collective investment of over \$335 million which will build on and accelerate federal, state, and local investments in high-quality education, from cradle-to-career, for students across the country, including girls and women of color in STEM.
- To help address the lack of visible role models in STEM, the White House launched a website that highlights some of the [Untold History of Women in Science and Technology](#). The website uses the voices of prominent women to tell the stories of some of their female scientific heroes who have changed history.³⁹

#4: SUSTAINING REDUCED RATES OF TEEN PREGNANCY AND BUILDING ON SUCCESS

The number of U.S. teen births has steadily declined over the past two decades and is at a record low.⁴⁰ Two factors account for this decline; research indicates that fewer teens are sexually active and sexually active teens are more likely to use birth control.⁴¹

Despite declining teen birth rates among all girls, minority communities continue to have disproportionately high rates. Black and Latina girls remain [more than twice as likely](#) as white girls to become pregnant during adolescence. American Indian/Alaska Native teen birth rates are one and a half times higher than the white teen birth rate.⁴² Approximately 20 percent of adolescent births are repeat births among older parenting teens. Girls of color are overrepresented in foster care and adolescent girls in [foster care](#) are more than twice as likely to become pregnant as those not in foster care.⁴³

Most teen pregnancies are unintended and most occur when teens do not use birth control or use it inconsistently or incorrectly.⁴⁴ Research shows that maintenance-free contraceptive methods

(e.g. long acting reversible contraceptives) may be particularly useful in preventing teen pregnancy. For example, teen birth rates dropped by 48 percent during the first 4 years of Colorado’s family planning initiative, which enabled Title X family planning centers to make IUDS and hormonal implants available.⁴⁵

Opportunity shrinks for teen parents and their children.⁴⁶ Only half of all teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22 and, in the aggregate, the children of teen mothers are less likely to complete school and are more likely to have higher rates of health problems and unemployment.⁴⁷ They are also more likely to become teen parents themselves.⁴⁸

Research by the Brookings Institution shows that, when teens delay birth, the average family income of their offspring increases—and the longer a teen birth is delayed, the larger the average family income of the offspring.⁴⁹ The combination of delaying births and increasing education creates the most significant gains in children’s own income.⁵⁰ The Administration has implemented the following strategies to work to end unplanned teen pregnancy and thus increase both educational and economic opportunity:

➤ **Ensuring that evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs reach communities with the greatest need.**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) administers the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program, an evidence-based teen pregnancy program that enables grantees to replicate evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs in communities with the greatest need. This increases capacity in communities to serve vulnerable youth, including homeless youth, parenting youth, and those in juvenile detention and foster care. Additionally, through careful evaluation of outcomes, grantees expand knowledge of what works to prevent teen pregnancy and test new approaches to reduce teen pregnancy.

- In July 2015, OAH awarded 81 new grants, totaling more than \$86 million to programs across the country.⁵¹ The grants are focused on reaching young people in communities where high teen pregnancy rates persist.

Programs grants were awarded in four categories:

1. Community Capacity Building to Support Replication of Evidence-Based TPP Programs

OAH awarded a total of \$5,774,252 to eight grantees to help communities build capacity to implement and evaluate programs for populations with teen birth rates well above the national average and with organizations serving youth in juvenile detention and foster care or who are homeless or young parents.

2. Scaling Evidence-Based TPP Programs in Communities with the Greatest Need

OAH awarded a total of \$59,563,930 to 50 grantees in 31 states and the Republic of the Marshall Islands to replicate evidence-based TPP programs in communities where teen birth rates are significantly higher than the national average. The programs focus on reaching especially vulnerable youth including youth in foster care, youth in

juvenile detention, expectant and parenting teens, older youth, and those living in rural areas.

3. Supporting Early Innovation to Advance Adolescent Health and Prevent Teen Pregnancy

OAH awarded a total of \$2,999,988 to fund two grantees, one focused on technology-based innovations and one focused on program innovations. Each grantee will hold a national competition to select between 5 and 15 innovators who will receive funding to develop, test, and refine innovations to advance adolescent health and prevent teen pregnancy.

4. Evaluation of New or Innovative Approaches to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

OAH awarded a total of \$18,158,473 to 21 grantees to increase the number of evidence-based TPP interventions available by rigorously evaluating new approaches for preventing teen pregnancy and related risk behaviors. Grantees will evaluate new technologies, including clinic-based and technology-based interventions for youth.

➤ **Ensuring that developmentally appropriate information about pregnancy prevention reaches all teens, including in high-need communities.**

The Administration recognizes that if information is provided to communities it must be effective for the intended audience. [Research](#) indicates that teens are more responsive to health care outreach that takes into account their preferences, including for digital engagement.⁵²

- In September 2015, HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Reproductive Health committed \$9.757 million to support three organizations in enhancing the capacity of publicly funded health centers to provide youth-appropriate sexual and reproductive health services: Sexual Health Initiative for Teens North Carolina (Durham, North Carolina), Mississippi First, Inc. (Coahoma, Quitman, and Tunica counties, Mississippi), and the Georgia Association for Primary Health Care (Chatham County, GA). Funded grantees work with youth-serving systems to refer and link vulnerable young people to care, including those in foster care, juvenile justice and probation, or housing developments.⁵³
- Recognizing the importance of technology and digital media to teens, HHS and the CDC have funded a \$1 million innovation contract to finalize the development of a mobile app that supports pregnancy prevention. [Crush](#) is a smart phone mobile app that contains medically accurate and comprehensive sexual health information for the prevention of teen pregnancy. The app includes interactive features and is available in a Spanish language version. Crush is designed to increase awareness and educate young women so they can make more informed decisions.

#5: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

According to the Department of Labor's (DOL) Women's Bureau, 57 percent of women in the United States participate in the labor force.⁵⁴ Of these 73 million women, 24.8 million are

women of color.⁵⁵ As national demographic trends shift, women of color will become a majority among all women and by 2044 will represent the majority of the female workforce.

Despite driving growth, women of color face persistent challenges to full participation in the economy. Black women have consistently had the highest rate of unemployment as compared with Latina, Asian, and White women, with Black and Asian women experiencing longer periods of unemployment. Although women in general face a continuing pay gap compared to their male counterparts, the gap is even larger for women of color. For example, Hispanic women make 55 cents for every dollar paid to non-Hispanic white men, and African-American women make 61 cents for every dollars paid to non-Hispanic white men.⁵⁶

Working women of color tend to be concentrated in lower-wage sectors including clerical, retail, food service, and home health care. Women make up nearly two-thirds of all workers who are paid federal minimum wage or less and have low rates of wealth accumulation. Increasing the economic opportunity of women of color will also give more opportunity to their children and continue to increase opportunity for generations to come.⁵⁷ The Administration has been working to increase opportunities for economic prosperity in the following ways:

➤ **Lifting Families Out of Poverty by Making Permanent Key Provisions of Tax Credits for Working Americans.**

The Administration has supported tax credits that encourage work, boost incomes, and reduce poverty, thus helping working families make ends meet and improve opportunity for their children.

- The President continues to push to make permanent key provisions to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC), which are scheduled to expire after 2017. These tax credit provisions boost incomes for 16 million families with 29 million children each year,⁵⁸ including about 2 million African American families and about 5 million Latino families.⁵⁹ The provisions allow more low-income working parents to access the CTC and provide a larger EITC for families with three or more children and married families. They reduce the extent or severity of poverty for more than 16 million people—including about 8 million children.⁶⁰ A growing body of research shows that helping low-wage working families through the EITC and CTC not only boosts parents' employment rates and reduce poverty but also has positive immediate and long-term effects on children, including improved health and educational outcomes.⁶¹
- The President's Budget proposes expanding the EITC for "childless" workers and non-custodial parents, who currently receive only a very small EITC and, as a result, are the only group the Federal tax code taxes into – or deeper into – poverty. The President's proposal would benefit more than 13 million low-income workers, including 2 million African American workers and 3.3 million Latino workers.⁶²
- The President's Budget proposes to triple the maximum Child and Dependent Tax Credit (CDCTC) for families with children under the age of five and makes the full CDCTC available to families with incomes up to \$120,000, benefitting families with young children, older children, and dependents who are elderly or have disabilities.⁶³ The childcare tax reforms would benefit 6.2 million families.⁶⁴

➤ **Encouraging outside stakeholders to commit to working in their communities to create opportunities for women and girls of color.**

The Administration appreciates that communities often know their own needs and can build on assets to design innovations that can best deliver results.

- Today, The Ms. Foundation and Prosperity Together, a consortium of 20 women's foundations are announcing a \$100 million, 5-year-funding commitment to improve economic prosperity for low-income women. Prosperity Together partners will use their respective experience and knowledge to fund programs that are proven effective in their communities and states, including job training programs that are customized to (1) address the cultural and educational needs of low-income women in order to secure a higher-wage job in a stable work environment and (2) enhance access for low-income women to culturally appropriate, affordable, high-quality childcare.

➤ **Investing in improvements to compensation, paid family leave, and paid sick leave and other policies, which support working families.**

Approximately 40 percent of private sector employees work at a company that does not offer sick pay for their own illnesses or injury. Low- and middle-income workers are much less likely to have access to paid sick leave than other workers. The Administration believes working to improve baseline rates of compensation and expanded access to leave will increase economic opportunity for women and families.⁶⁵

- Since President Obama called on cities and states to raise their minimum wages in 2013, 17 states and the District of Columbia have raised their minimum wage, resulting in higher wages for an estimated 360,000 Black women, 1.2 million Hispanic women, and 320,000 Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and American Indian/Alaska Native women.
- In January 2015, DOL extended minimum wage and overtime protections to most of those who provide home care assistance. Nearly two million direct care workers, such as home health aides, personal care aides, and certified nursing assistants who provide home and personal care services – nearly 50 percent of whom are women of color – will have minimum wage and overtime protections to ensure they are paid fairly for their work.⁶⁶
- In July 2015, DOL proposed a **rule** that would extend overtime protections to nearly 5 million workers within the first year of its implementation.⁶⁷ The rule would update the regulations that exempt bona fide executive, administrative, and professional employees. Currently, salaried workers who make more than \$23,660 a year, or \$455 a week, are exempt from over-time if their job duties primarily involved executive, administrative, or professional responsibilities. Because of this exception, for example, a convenience store manager, fast food assistant manager, or some office workers may be expected to work 50 or 60 hours a week or more, making less than the poverty level for a family of four and not receiving any overtime pay. The proposed rule would change the salary threshold for the exception to an estimated \$50,400, or \$970 a week, in 2016, and the salary threshold would be automatically updated annually based on either wage growth or inflation. The rule would clarify overtime eligibility for workers in lower-wage jobs, including many women of color, ensuring they earn extra pay when they work overtime and promoting more predictable work hours and work-life balance.⁶⁸

- In January of 2015, President Obama issued a [memorandum](#) directing agencies to permit federal workers to take six weeks of advanced paid sick leave to care for a new child or ill family members.⁶⁹ In September, President Obama signed an [Executive Order](#) providing for employees on covered federal contracts to receive up to seven days of paid sick leave each year.⁷⁰ The Administration’s “[Lead on Leave Initiative](#)” has brought attention to the importance of implementing paid family leave and paid sick day policies for working families and has spurred many states, cities, and firms to expand their leave policies and benefits.
 - In too many workplaces around the country, women and people of color don’t know what their counterparts are earning for the same work. A culture of secrecy prevents them from finding out if they are being discriminated against in time to act on it. In keeping with this, the DOL issued a [final rule](#) supporting pay transparency and prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating against employees and applicants who choose to discuss their compensation.⁷¹
- **Increasing access to federal contracting opportunities, including for minority women-owned businesses.**
- Women and minority businesses that contract with the U.S. government are more likely than their non-contracting colleagues to exceed \$1 million in revenue and more likely to own larger firms than their non-contracting peers. Policies that link women of color-owned businesses to government contracts support entrepreneurs and enhance their capacity to expand employment within the communities in which they operate.
- In September 2015, the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced a [new rule](#) that authorizes federal agencies to award sole source contracts to women-owned small businesses eligible for the Woman-Owned Small Business Federal Grant Program or the Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Businesses.⁷² The new rule builds on SBA’s 2011 rule, which was aimed at expanding federal contracting opportunities for women-owned small businesses (WOSBs). The WOSB Federal Contract program authorizes contracting officers to set aside certain federal contracts for eligible WOSBs or economically disadvantaged women-owned small businesses (EDWOSBs).
- **Increasing diverse participation in career and technical training, especially in areas of high growth demand.**
- Currently, most apprenticeships are in the building and construction trades. However, [fewer than seven percent of apprentices are women](#)—and even fewer are women of color.
- In September 2015, President Obama announced that DOL’s [American Apprenticeship Grant Program](#) awarded \$175 million in grants to 46 awardees.⁷³ The American Apprenticeship grants increase opportunity by investing in innovations and strategies to scale apprenticeships—including by marketing to women and other Americans who have been underrepresented. The winning grantees pledged to train and hire more than 34,000 new apprentices in industries as diverse as healthcare, IT, and advanced manufacturing over the next five years.
 - DOL will also open grant solicitations to fund programs that address childcare barriers that low skilled and unemployed workers face when accessing training opportunities for

well-paying, high growth jobs in industries like healthcare, financial services, and other in demand sectors.

RESEARCH TO LEAD THE WAY

Knowing what is necessary to create pathways for women and girls of color and their peers to achieve success is only strengthened when the proper research and data is available about specific communities and is relevant to their experiences. We are encouraged that academic institutions are not only creating a space for people of all backgrounds to learn but also studying and writing about these critical issues. In November 2015, the Collaborative to Advance Equity through Research – an affiliation of American colleges, universities, research organizations, publishers, and public interest institutions led by Wake Forest University – announced an independent funding commitment to support existing and new research efforts about women and girls of color.

Community-based organizations also play a critical role in the research process. For example, organizers and practitioners can identify the key issues at the grass roots level, which over time become the basis for research done in universities and in think tanks. Government grants or foundations enable communities to bring evidence-based programming to scale and test new innovations.

Creating opportunities for young women of color is also necessary to generate curiosity in the next generation of women. The [Smithsonian Institution](#) – the world’s largest museum and research complex – includes 19 museums and galleries and the National Zoological Park. In March, The Smithsonian Institution will theme its March 12, 2016 “Museum Day Live!” to “inspire women and girls of color.” Museum Day Live! sponsored by the Smithsonian includes 1,300 museums and attracts 250,000 visitors to museums and cultural centers across the United States. The National Endowment for the Humanities will fund a small grants competition to facilitate museums and other cultural centers to develop programming to create new bridges between communities and cultural institutions as centers of informal learning.

SUMMARY

The five objectives outlined here – ending teen pregnancy, fostering school success, inclusive STEM education, expanding pathways to economic prosperity, and meeting the needs of vulnerable and striving girls – make up a framework that can strengthen the voices and capacities of women and girls of color and their peers.

The CDC has called teen pregnancy a “winnable battle.” Ending teen unplanned pregnancy exists in a larger context that shapes life opportunities. The racial and ethnic disparities surrounding teen pregnancy are stubborn. They are both a cause and a consequence of poverty, as well as a result of the interplay of complex societal factors. For example, pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to high school dropout rates among girls, even as disproportionate rates of exclusionary school discipline and school disengagement put teens at risk for unplanned pregnancy.

Supportive school discipline can help to foster girls' success at school. With access to user-friendly data about disproportionate rates of school disciplines, communities have the tools to design interventions, including those that address root causes. Mindful of the unique pathways by which many girls and others enter into intervening public systems, we can improve programmatic responses. Innovations moving forward may include responsibly sharing information across systems to better coordinate care; creating service innovations based on research made possible by the release of disaggregated data sets; integrating evidence-based trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive perspectives into child welfare; and developing diversionary methods in juvenile justice engagement to interrupt violence and make meaningful second chances possible.

Poverty and a lack of economic mobility function as a constraint for too many people in our country. By broadening access to STEM education and building awareness about job mobility pathways – including those in the STEM ecosystem and those that are possible through apprenticeships and career and technical training – new opportunities for advancement are within reach of many. The Administration's investment in workplace supports – including increasing the minimum wage, equitable pay for hours worked, pay transparency, and family-friendly leave policies – creates a trajectory to improve economic well-being for all Americans, including women of color.

As President Obama has emphasized, America cannot afford to leave anyone out or behind if we are to maintain our competitive advantage globally. Our success in the years to come will depend in large part on ensuring that all our children, students, and workers have the chance to reach their full potential. The Council on Women and Girls will continue to work to ensure that government policies appropriately consider these kinds of challenges and persistent opportunity gaps faced by too many disadvantaged, marginalized, or underrepresented girls – and inspire the private sector to do the same – to ensure that everyone who aspires to get ahead has a chance to succeed.

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