February 2024

Zonta USA Caucus Advocacy Bulletin

ZONTA INTERNATIONAL USA CAUCUS
EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SERVICE & ADVOCACY

The USA Caucus is a place for clubs and districts in the US to align on key issues and provides a platform for coordinated advocacy actions within the US.

Ending Child Marriage

On January 23, more than 20 survivors, allies and legislators stood silently on the rotunda steps in the Washington state capitol, dressed in bridal gowns and chains to ask Washington legislators to pass HB1455 and end child marriage in WA. Such marriages impacted 5,048 children as young as 13 in the state between 2000 and 2021, mostly girls wed to adult men, in some cases before the girls were old enough to consent to sex. Legislative champions Rep. Monica Stonier, Sen. Derek Stanford and Sen. Manka Dhingra, and child and forced marriage survivors, joined allies from the Washington Coalition to End Child Marriage, including several Zonta members at the chain-in. Anyone living in Washington is encouraged to contact their senators and urge them to support this bill.

On January 31, Caucus Convener, Bobbee Cardillo, joined representatives from VA NOW, Tahirih and Equality Now and child marriage survivors at the House of Delegates Courts of Justice subcommittee considering a bill to end child marriage in VA. Other groups, like Unchained at Last, Ultraviolet and AHA Foundation supported the effort with a petition and written statements. The sub-committee voted the bill out to the full committee, with whom the group also met to lay the ground-work for their vote.. Hopefully the bill will ultimately go to the full Senate.

See photos of the Olympia chain-in, which include Caucus member, Katherine Cleland, ,and the Virginia testimony with Bobbee Cardillo (center) in the next column.

Health

New research indicates that menstrual blood could be a diagnostic tool for health issues from diabetes to endometriosis. Learn more about this and Europe's first menstrual blood bank **HERE.**

Read an interesting **article** about the ways that the stigma around menstruation has resulted in inadequate testing of period products and the implications that lack has for women's health.

According to the CDC, in 2012, women's syphilis infection rates and congenital syphilis cases, in-utero infections with high disability and death rates, rose dramatically around the US.. **Learn** why poor access to maternal health care has led to these infections increasing faster in Native Americans than in any other racial or ethnic group, especially during the pandemic.

UN CSW

The 2024 Commission on the Status of Women **(CSW68)** will take place March 11-22 in NY City as well as virtually. **Registration** is open for the virtual NGO CSW68 Forum. The priority theme is: accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by **addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing** with a gender perspective. CSW will include orientation sessions, daily briefings, in-person and virtual events, regional caucuses and conversation forums. Read ZI's **Statement for CSW68.** And watch a **presentation** from the Dec 2023 meeting of the Zonta Says NOW Intercontinental Think Tank from Pamela Morgan, ZI's representative at the UN in NY and the co-convenor of NGO CSW 68. She describes the roles of CSW and NGO CSW and encourages Zontians to be more involved by **registering** fo NGO CSW meetings the third Tuesday of each month.

Some CSW sessions you may want to attend:

Zonta Says NOW Intercontinental Working Group, in conjunction with the Zonta USA Caucus Climate Committee

"How Gender-Equal Climate Action Works to End Poverty; The Zonta Story" (Virtual)
Sunday, March 17 at 6:30--8:00 p.m. EDT

Climate change is a threat multiplier – making bad situations worse for vulnerable people. For example, climate change-induced poverty increases the risk of girls being sold into child marriage, and climate-related extreme weather events cause millions of people to lose their homes and livelihoods. Due to ongoing systemic gender inequality, women have fewer opportunities and resources than men to recover, often forcing them into poverty. This presentation will explore the links between climate change, poverty, and gender inequality and will show how Zonta Says NOW to gender-equal climate action is mobilizing members to build a better world for women and girls.

The US Women's Caucus (of which the Zonta USA Caucus is a member)

"Strengthening Ties Between the US and the UN CSW" (In-Person)
Friday, March 15 4:30 - 6:00 pm EDT
Church Center for the U.N. (CCUN) 8th Floor
777 UN Plaza, NY , NY 10017

The US Women's Caucus will introduce itself and discuss the relationship of the US to the CSW process of Agreed Conclusions, negotiations and global norms. A member of the US CSW68 negotiating team will be in attendance to discuss the process.

"Who's Minding the Kids? US Childcare as Vital Infrastructure" (Virtual)
Tuesday, March 19 2:30- 4:00 p.m. EDT
Virtual - Via Zoom

Women lose years out of the workforce for unpaid childcare and eldercare, contributing to their lower lifetime earnings and retirement savings compared to men. In this session, three experts from government, academia and grassroots organizations will discuss the status of childcare in the US and give practical policy recommendations.

Unchained at Last

True Crime: Forced Marriage in the U.S."(Virtual and In-person)
Thursday, March 14, 2024 12:30 p.m. EDT
In person:
Church Center for the U.N. (CCUN)
777 United Nations Plaza, NYC
Virtually: Via Zoom

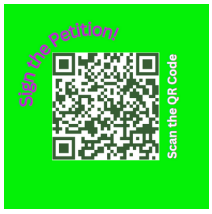
Unchained at Last and Ashley Flowers of Crime Junkie talk with American forced and child marriage survivors about how they escaped their nightmare and why they are now working to make sure the U.S. keeps its promise under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate forced and child marriage by year 2030 and help achieve gender equality. Register **HERE.**

Equal Rights Amendment

It has been four years since the Equal Rights Amendment, which is crucial for safeguarding fundamental rights against sex-based discrimination, was officially ratified with Virginia as the 38th ratifying state. It is time to publish the ERA. No more obstacles, no more delays.

The Zonta USA Caucus has been asked to use our strength in numbers to make a major push to obtain signatures on the SIGN-4-ERA Petition, a national petition campaign led by Hunter College students supporting the ERA. The petition calls on Congress to recognize the fact that the Equal Rights Amendment has already been ratified by the necessary 38 states and should be recognized as the 28th Amendment to the Constitution. The petition has nearly 100,000 signatures so far with a goal of well over a million.

The Campaign is an easy way to get members, friends and colleagues involved in getting the ERA across the finish line. Sign the petition **HERE** or use the QR code below, and use this **toolkit** to share the petition with others. The Caucus asks all US Zonta clubs to share the petition with members, friends and like-minded organizations and encourage them to sign and share it themselves. Although you may have signed other petitions for the ERA, this petition is different, as it involves a huge effort to have advocates' signatures all in one place. **PLEASE SIGN AND SHARE!**



A related effort, **Mayors for the ERA,** was conceived by former NY Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and her students at Hunter College to engage mayors to sign the petition. Determine if your clubs and members have relationships with a mayor, and ask them to approach their own mayor (and/or other mayors they know) about taking a photo with them as the mayor signs the electronic petition. If the photo is submitted to **team@sign4era.org**, they will write a press release and get it out to local news entities, if the mayor agrees.

Want to promote the ERA and women's rights in a fun way? Plan a watch party for your club to view **"What the Constitution Means to Me"** on Amazon Prime, described as follows: "Fifteen-year-old Heidi Schreck earned her college tuition by winning Constitutional debate competitions across the United States. In this hilarious, hopeful, and achingly human show, Heidi resurrects her teenage self in order to trace the profound relationship between four generations of women and the founding document that shaped their lives." Talk about the ERA, ask attendees to sign the SIGN-4-ERA Petition and brainstorm on other ways you can promote the petition.

H.J. Res. 25/S.J. Res.4 affirms ratification of the ERA and removes time limit for passage. Congresswomen Ayanna Pressley has filed a discharge petition to bring HJ Res 25 to the House floor for a vote. The Discharge Petition has 204 signatures from House members and needs 218 to move to the floor for a vote. If it gets to the floor, it has a good chance of passing and moving back to the Senate for a vote there. **Ask your representatives** to sign the discharge petition if they have not done so particularly these **Democrats** and **Republicans.**

H.J. Res. 82/S.J. Res 39 states that the ERA has already been validly ratified and is enforceable as the 28th Amendment and calls on the Archivist to certify and publish it without delay. Contact representatives on the **Outreach list** and ask them to sign.

Check out the Caucus website for an ERA **toolkit** and **additional information** on the initiatives to get the ERA passed.

Violence Against Women

Ask your representative to support the bipartisan IMPACTT Human Trafficking Act which was unanimously passed by the Senate and is now in the House and will enhance the Dept. of Homeland Security's ability to combat human trafficking.

The new Polaris report, **"Human Trafficking During the COVID and Post-COVID Era,"** examines data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline for Jan 2020 to Aug 2022. It highlights pandemic-related trends and confirms previous knowledge about how trafficking happens and who is most vulnerable.

According to the CDC, as many as one in four women suffer physical violence from an intimate partner, but according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics only about half of all domestic violence cases are reported to the police. . Cosmetologists and barbers work in an environment that often acts as a "safe space" for survivors. The bipartisan Supporting the Abused by Learning Options to Navigate Survivor (SALONS) Stories Act (S. 3540) would amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to increase grants to implement domestic violence prevention training in the cosmetologist and barber licensing process. **Urge your representative and senators** to co-sponsor and support this bill.

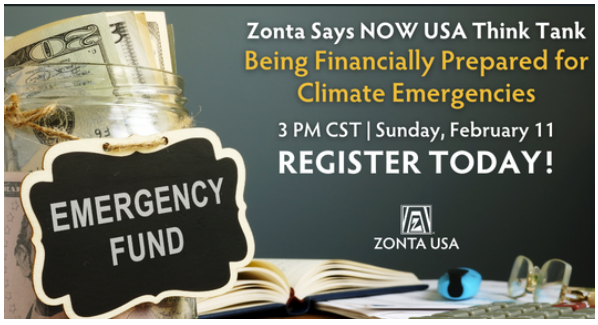
A new **article** in the JAMA medical journal, found that 64,565 pregnancies occurred as a result of rape in 14 U.S. states with near-total abortion bans since Roe v. Wade was overturned in June 2022. Nine of the 14 states the study looked at have a total abortion ban with no exception for rape.

A report from the Representation Project, **"Ten Rape Myths in Media,"** found that top 2022 criminal justice TV shows and movies "mostly perpetuate rape myths, promote misinformation about the criminal justice system, and uphold rape culture in the US."

Climate Action

Are you confused about Zonta Think Tanks? Let's set the record straight. A Zonta Says NOW Think Tank is a group of Zontians from different clubs who meet online to share ideas about gender-equal climate action, learn from each other, be inspired, and have fun!

The Zonta **Intercontinental** Think Tank started in 2022 in order to facilitate communication between Zontians in different countries. Members learn from a range of speakers how, globally, behaviour in one part of the world has a negative impact on other parts of the world, and discuss issues in break-out rooms.

The Think Tank meets on the third Sunday of each month at varying times to facilitate participation by members in different time zones. The next Intercontinental Think Tank will be held on Sunday, Feb 18 but will take place at 4:00 am Central time. If you are an early bird you can register **HERE** and if not, you can watch a **recording** of the event as well as other Think Tanks.

The Zonta USA Caucus established the first **national** Zonta Says NOW Think Tank, and has held Think Tanks for approximately the last year. Be sure to **register** for the next Caucus Climate Think Tank on February 11 at 4pm ET on financial preparedness for natural disasters. Join us before the Super Bowl to learn and share knowledge about this important topic. And watch for information on the 10 Days of Climate Activism to be held in April with daily posts for social media on climate issues.