

December, 2023/January 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

In October, Unchained at Last co-wrote a joint submission for the UN Human Rights Committee's periodic review of adherence by the US to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The submission addressed a number of failings by the US related to the welfare of women. The Committee's report included several of Unchained's concerns including their concern that child marriage is still legally permitted in 40 U.S. states and calls upon the U.S. government to prohibit marriage under the age of 18 in all U.S. states.

Zonta is working to help organize state coalitions to end child marriage in [California](#) and [Washington](#). If you have contacts with organizations in these states that might be interested in being involved, contact [Katherine Cleland](#).

Zonta will participate in Unchained at Last's Chain-In on the North Steps of the Washington State Capitol, 416 Sid Snyder Ave. SW, in Olympia, WA to urge legislators to pass SB5695/HB1455, the simple, commonsense bill that would end child marriage in Washington. Participants will wear bridal gowns and chains and listen to multiple speakers. Register and read Frequently Asked Questions [HERE](#).

Read Unchained founder, Fraily Reiss's heartbreaking [essay](#) in the Huffington Post regarding her own experience with forced marriage, and share it widely.

UN CSW

The 2024 Commission on the Status of Women ([CSW68](#)) will take place March 11-22 in New York City as well as virtually. [Registration](#) is open until January 26, 2024 for virtual and in-person attendance. Late registration is not allowed, so register now!

The priority theme for CSW 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. The review theme is **social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure** for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. CSW will include orientation sessions, daily briefings, in-person and virtual events, regional caucuses and conversation forums. Read ZI's [Statement for CSW68](#).

[UN Resolution 1325](#) on Women, Peace and Security was originally adopted by the General Assembly on October 31, 2000. On October, 31, 2023 the U.S. Government released the 2023 [U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security \(WPS\)](#) to prioritize gender equity and equality in building sustainable peace around the world and promote women's participation in conflict and crisis response and recovery. In connection with Res 1325, both [ZI](#) and the [US Women's Caucus](#) have issued statements regarding the impact of the current violence in the Middle East on women and children.

Equal Rights Amendment

The ERA coalition continues to move toward a greater emphasis on focused sub-groups, presenting new opportunities for ad hoc participants in the Zonta USA Caucus to be involved, especially at the state and local level. If you or someone in your district is interested, contact [Bobbee Cardillo](#) or [Katherine Cleland](#).

The primary current focus of the Caucus with regard to the ERA is on the SIGN-4-ERA Petition, a national petition campaign led by Hunter College students supporting the ERA, calling on Congress to recognize the fact that the Equal Rights Amendment has already been ratified by the necessary 38 states. 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 more involved in getting the ERA across the finish line. Sign the petition [HERE](#) or use the QR code below. You can also use this [toolkit](#) to share the petition with others. The Caucus is asking all clubs to work to have members and friends sign this petition.



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. Consider approaching your mayor, taking a photo with them as they are signing the electronic petition and submitting it to team@sign4era.org. They will write a press release and get it out to local news entities to give your mayor props. Learn more [HERE](#).

ERA champions [commemorated](#) the 100th anniversary of the first introduction of the ERA in Congress in December by marching from the White House to the Department of Justice, to the National Archives, and ending with a press conference and reception with Members of Congress at the Capitol.

In December, the Zonta USA Caucus voted to sign on to the ERA Coalition's Letter to President Biden urging him to direct the Archivist to Publish the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the US Constitution.

["What the Constitution Means to Me"](#) on Amazon Prime is 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." Consider holding an ERA information meeting around the screening of this movie as a fun advocacy event.

Additional ERA initiatives:

H.J. Res. 25/S.J. Res.4 affirms ratification of the ERA and removes time limit for passage. It has 208 votes in favor after Rep. Ayanna Pressley's discharge petition to bring HJ Res 25 to the House floor for a vote added 14 new signers to the previous 196. Keep the pressure on to reach the required 218 signatures. Check out the Democrats to contact [HERE](#) and Republicans [HERE](#).

H.J. Res. 82/S.J. Res 39 states that the ERA has been validly ratified and is enforceable as the 28th Amendment and calls on the Archivist to certify and publish it without delay. See the [Outreach list](#) for H.J. Res.82, and contact representatives on the list.

Ask your state legislature to pass a state bill affirming the ERA as the 28th Amendment, as have California, Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, Hawaii and Illinois. Maryland is working on a similar bill. Learn more and find sample language on the Caucus [website](#).

Check out the Caucus website for an ERA [toolkit](#) and [additional information](#) on the initiatives to get the ERA passed.

Health

After a mastectomy, some women are not able to use an off-the-shelf breast prosthesis but rather require a custom fit. In addition, it can be very difficult for some women, particularly women of color, to find prostheses that match their skin tone. In recent years, technological advancements have enabled the creation and precise fitting of custom breast prostheses, which are typically made from higher-end silicone products produced in a unique mold. However, unlike other prosthetic devices, custom breast prosthetics are not currently covered by Medicare, which considers them “not medically necessary.” Since Medicare does not provide reimbursement for custom prostheses, many private insurance companies have also begun to limit their reimbursement for them. The bipartisan Breast Cancer Patient Equity Act (S. 3069) would ensure breast cancer patients and survivors who have experienced a mastectomy are able to access custom breast prosthetics under Medicare. Please use Zonta’s pre-written [letter](#) to urge your representative and senators to co-sponsor and support S.3069.

Periodical, a new eye-opening documentary by MSNBC Films, examines science, politics, and the mystery of the menstrual cycle, through the experiences of doctors, athletes, movie stars, journalists, activists, and everyday people. The film addresses topics such as women’s reproductive health, the stigma around menstruation, period poverty, taxation of feminine hygiene products and menopause. Learn more about the film [HERE](#) and watch [HERE](#).

The Menstrual Equity for All Act (H.R. 3646) is a whole-of-government approach to eradicate period poverty and achieve menstrual equity. Use Zonta’s [pre-drafted letter](#) to urge your representative to co-sponsor and support the Menstrual Equity for All Act or thank them for sponsoring or co-sponsoring the bill.

Climate Action

Still wondering what climate change has to do with women’s welfare? Read this CNN Report on [How the Climate Crisis Fuels Gender Inequality](#), which highlights most of the issues Zonta addresses. And check out a 17 minute [video](#) created by Carole Theobald, leader of the Zonta Says NOW Working Group which was included in the Zonta Says NOW Intercontinental Think Tank on November 19. Find a recording of the Think Tank [HERE](#), the slides from the presentation [HERE](#), and recordings of other Zonta Intercontinental Think Tanks [HERE](#).

The Zonta Intercontinental Think Tank started in 2022 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. Members are invited to join the next Think Tank on Sunday, January 21, 2024, 1:00 pm ET to share your ideas and gather inspiration on how we can address climate justice now! Register [HERE](#).

Zonta Says NOW USA also held a Think Tank on “Severe Winter Weather: How to Deal with the Storm” on November 5, addressing disaster preparedness and adaptation to extreme cold and winter weather. Guest speaker Melissa Venable, executive director of the Northern Colorado Red Cross, discussed disaster readiness when faced with extreme weather that displaces families, individuals and our most vulnerable. Read a recap [HERE](#).

The next Caucus Think Tank will take place on February 11 at 4pm ET on financial preparedness for natural disasters. Watch for registration information in your Fast Action Friday and next month’s bulletin. The Climate Committee also plans 10 Days of Activism, March 1-10. Watch for information packets in February.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

At the November Caucus meeting, ZI International Director, Renee Coppock, shared information about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), sharing her personal history of being of Native American descent and statistics on the topic. Native American women are 2.5 times more likely to disappear and/or be victims of rape, with over 5,000 known missing women in North America at this time. The murder rate of indigenous women is 10x the rate of non-indigenous women.

At the federal level, the bipartisan [Savanna's Act](#) was signed into law in Oct. 2020, to improve the federal response to MMIP, including by increasing coordination among Federal, State, Tribal, and local law enforcement agencies. [Operation Lady Justice \(OLJ\)](#) was launched by the Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) to enhance the operation of the criminal justice system and address the concerns of AI/AN communities regarding missing and murdered people, particularly missing and murdered women and girls.

Learn how you can [get involved](#) with the [Medicine Wheel Riders](#), a grassroots movement of women who ride motorcycles to bring national awareness and resources to issues impacting their indigenous relatives and help end violence against American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian women.

Prairie Rose Seminole, an educator, culture bearer and storyteller has co-directed ["We Ride For Her,"](#) a short documentary on the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. Listen to her [ERA Coalition podcast](#) and find more resources [HERE](#).

And read this [article](#) from the American Bar Association on the underreporting of crimes and the lack of documentation of Indigenous people in police reports.

Ending Violence Against Women

In November, the Senate unanimously passed the bipartisan IMPACTT Human Trafficking Act (S. 670), which will enhance the Dept. of Homeland Security's ability to combat human trafficking, allowing survivors to receive improved support and providing law enforcement with more resources to combat these crimes. The bill is now under consideration in the House. [Ask your representative](#) to support the bill. Learn how trafficking victims are sometimes forced to scam others, leaving them with liability even after being rescued from trafficking in this [Time article](#).

The Senate and House both passed versions of the Debbie Smith Act of 2023, which reauthorizes crucial funding for rape kit testing. However, according to Sen. John Cornyn (R.-TX), the House "passed a version of the bill that inadvertently deauthorized existing funds for the Debbie Smith Act." The House needs to take action to swiftly take up and pass the Senate version to reauthorize the program.

Studies have shown that when survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault are represented by an attorney, their ability to break out of the cycle of violence increases dramatically, but often survivors cannot afford a lawyer. The bipartisan Ensuring Representation for Survivors Act (S. 3124), works to ensure that all survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault have access to free legal representation if needed. Use Zonta's pre-drafted [letter](#) to urge your reps to support the bill.

What is rape culture? Watch and share a PSA from the Representation Project, [Voices in Action](#), featuring stars such as Ashley Judd, Laura Dern and Ricki Lake highlighting examples from judges, lawyers and politicians who dismiss and trivialize rape. And listen to a [briefing](#) on Women Veterans' Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, and Military Sexual Trauma.