October, 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.

Equal Rights Amendment

Big News! On August 6, 2024, the American Bar Association approved **Resolution 601** which supports the recognition of the Equal Rights Amendment as the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The resolution "supports two important legal principles: (1) a deadline for ratification of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is not consistent with Article V of the Constitution, and (2) under Article V states are not permitted to rescind prior ratifications. The resolution urges support of ERA implementation by the legal community and all federal, state, local, territorial, and tribal governments." Watch this **video** for a concise explanation of the history of the ERA.

The ERA Coalition has a new digital campaign: **Equal Voice = Equal Vote!** "designed to empower individuals to use their voices and their votes to create meaningful change. The initiative focuses on the ERA and the trans-formative impact it can have on advancing gender equality." Watch and share this **video**.

Call President Biden at 202-456-1111 or text him at 302-404-0880 **asking him to instruct the archivist to publish the ERA as the 28th Amendment to the US Constitution** during his lame duck period. Personalize your note by saying why gender equity is important to you.

The Zonta USA Caucus continues to urge members to sign the SIGN-4-ERA Petition, a national campaign calling on Congress to affirm that the ERA should be recognized as the 28th Amendment. 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. Follow Sign4ERA2024 and Sign4ERA on social media, like, repost, share and comment. The petition supports H.J. Res. 25/S.J. Res.4 which affirms ratification of the ERA and removes the 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 almost enough signatures from House members to move to the floor for a vote, where it has a good chance of passing and moving back to a Senate vote. **Ask your representatives** to sign the Discharge Petition if they have not already done so..

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.

Ending Child Marriage

Since the last Caucus bulletin, the Missouri bill to end child marriage died after the House of Reps refused to move the bill that the state Senate had passed nearly unanimously. Rep. Hardy Billington insisted pregnant teens must marry lest they turn to abortion, although Missouri has one of the strictest abortion bans in the US! New Hampshire, however, became the 13th state to end child marriage!

On October 21, members of the Zonta Clubs of Washington, DC and Fairfax County attended the DC City Council's hearing on the "Child Marriage Prohibition Amendment Act of 2024" Bill (25-955), which would make the marriage age in DC 18 with no exceptions. Currently 16 and 17 year olds can marry in DC with written or verbal consent from one parent or guardian. The bill was introduced by Council member Brooke Pinto, and an advocacy day coordinated by Tahirih, Unchained at Last, and The Person Center, with members of the DC and Fairfax County Zonta clubs in attendance, led to eight additional council members out of DC's 13 signing on to sponsor the bill. In 2023, 15 minors were married in DC, up from 2 in 2020. Except for Maryland, the surrounding states have ended child marriage; Virginia ended the practice in 2024 thanks to the advocacy of Zonta Clubs of Fairfax County and Virginia NOW. Since Washington, DC does not have a residency requirement for marriage, children from those states can travel to DC to marry.

Don't miss the webinar from the ZI Advocacy Committee, **Ending Child Marriage,** on Zoom Nov 12, 9:00 am ET. It will feature a panel of speakers including Fraidy Reiss from Unchained at Last, a speaker from Nepal and a speaker discussing UNFPA and UNICEF USA's latest work in the Global Program to End Child Marriage, of which Zonta is a partner.

On August 1, 2024, Sen Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Sens Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced the Child Marriage Prevention Act of 2024 (S. 4990) that, if passed, would undo the child marriage bans organizations like Zonta, Unchained at Last and allies worked for nine years to pass in 13 U.S. states. Furthermore, the bill would make it nearly impossible to ban child marriage in the remaining 37 states.

Ironically, Sen. Durbin has been a longtime ally in the push to end child marriage in the US. Although a federal bill is needed and this bill contains some positive provisions, they are overshadowed by several detrimental parts of the bill. Check out the Caucus's **Fast Action Friday** for details on the problematic aspects of the legislation and to sign Zonta's pre-drafted letters urging your senators to amend the bill in order to support it. Also read recent articles in **Teen Vogue** and **Ms. Magazine,** which spell out the need for a federal law, without addressing the problems in the bill. And then read Unchained At Last's **article** in Ms. Magazine asking Sen Durbin to withdraw or amend the bill with reasons why.

A recent VAWA **report** confirms what we already knew: in most of the U.S., child marriage gives a "get out of jail free" card to child rapists.

Check out the Tahirih Justice Center's Child Marriage in the US **Survivor Story Compilation** for harrowing stories of forced marriage.

View a short, powerful **video** on child marriage produced by the Kathmandu Club of Nepal.

Women and Work

A new analysis by **the National Partnership for Women & Families (NPWF)** recently found that the gender wage gap has **increased** for the first time in 20 years! And an **NPWF analysis** shows that, on average, disabled women working full-time are paid 67 cents for every dollar non-disabled men are paid; including part-time and seasonal workers, they earn just 50 cents to the dollar. The wage gap for many disabled women of color is even more pronounced. Disabled Black women and American Indian/Alaska Native women are paid 45 cents to the dollar, while Latinas are paid 44 cents. This disparity was recognized on September 18, 2024, the first-ever Disabled Women's Equal Pay Day. Senator Patty Murray, and eight bipartisan co-sponsors, have also introduced Disabled Women's Equal Pay Day Resolution (S. Res. 825), recognizing the significance of this inequity. Please use Zonta's pre-drafted **letters** to urge your senators to co-sponsor and support the bill.

Equal Pay activist, Lilly Ledbetter, who filed a lawsuit against her employer, resulting in the landmark Supreme Court case that created more public awareness around gender pay discrimination, recently passed away at the age of 86. Honor her memory by reading about her **HERE** and continuing the fight for pay equity.

Women-owned businesses have grown 114% over the last two decades, with a large part of this growth happening after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Women's Business Centers (WBC's) Improvement Act would increase federal support to WBCs and establishe an accreditation program run by the Association of Women's Business Centers to ensure all WBCs provide excellent service and counseling. Please use Zonta's pre-drafted **letter** to urge your representative and senators to co-sponsor and support the Women's Business Centers Improvement Act (H.R. 5361 and S. 2184) bill.

Women's Health

Menopause is an often-overlooked period of a woman's life. The Women's Congressional Policy Institute (WCPI) recently held a congressional briefing, "Menopause and Midlife Women's Health" in conjunction with the leadership of the Bipartisan Women's Caucus. The briefing featured a wide range of speakers who presented bipartisan policy and on-the-ground recommendations for expanding public education and medical research on menopause and midlife women's health. The panel also discussed how menopause affects women in the workforce and how employers can improve workplace accommodations and destigmatize the topic. Listen to the recording **HERE.** **World Menopause Day** has passed but is held every year on October 18. The purpose of the day is to raise awareness about menopause and the support options available for improving health and well being. Plan now to pariticipate next year to raise awareness by printing and sharing materials, organising events to engage your communities and sharing social media posts.

Many women in rural areas face more hurdles for maternal health care than those in urban or suburban areas. Urge your representative to co-sponsor and support the bipartisan Rural Obstetrics Readiness Act (H.R. 8383) which calls for improved obstetric emergency care with Zonta's **pre-prepared letter.**

Climate Change

The next **Zonta Says NOW Intercontinental Think Tank** will be held November 10, 2024 at 05:00 am ET hosted by Zontians in African and Europe, with the following session on Jan 11, 2025 10:00 PM ET hosted by .Zontians from Asia and Oceania. The next Zonta USA Think Tank will be January 26. Mark your calendars and watch for details.Zonta International invites all Zontians to sign the **Zonta USA Climate Pledge,** committing to take certain actions to support climate justice.

Violence Against Women

On November 25, to kick off the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, the Zonta USA Caucus will offer the opportunity for Zonta USA Caucus members, including District Governors and Lt Governors, to preview the movie **"Ratified,"** virtually at 7:30pm EST. The film covers the 100-year fight for the Equal Rights Amendment and the inspiring story of the multi-racial, multi-generational, bi-partisan effort that made Virginia the 38th and final state to ratify the ERA. Details to come. After viewing, consider hosting a showing in your community until the ERA is recognized in the constitution. Also, use ZI's Zonta Says No **Toolkit** to help plan your activities for the 16 Days Campaign.

Save the date and share with your clubs: December 10--the Zonta Says NO to Violence Against Women 2024 Virtual Summit will include three sessions. Susanne Strand, a professor of criminology focusing on risk assessment and management of intimate partner violence will speak on "A Psychological View of Violence Against Women." Tony Porter, author, activist and educator, who works to advance gender and racial justice and prevent violence against women while promoting healthy, respectful manhood, will speak on A Call to Men – Ending Violence Against Women. Elizabeth Flock, an Emmy Award-winning journalist and author with a focus on stories about gender and justice, will facilitate a session set up as a "book club." General Admission: $10; Students: $5, benefitting the Zonta Foundation. **Purchase tickets.** Prior to each session a short artistic presentation will be made from a young adult Zontian on their personal reflections on violence against women and girls. Z club or Golden Z club members who want to share an artistic piece-performing art, poetry, short story, song or visual art contact **programs@zonta.org.** .

On October 1, 2024 the IMPACTT Human Trafficking Act (H.R. 1405 and S. 670) was enacted after being signed by President Biden. A Fast Action Friday was distributed on July 27, 2023 to our constituents to create awareness and to move this bill forward, and your actions have made the difference. Thank you to all of those who supported this bill.

The Zonta USA Caucus recently signed on as a contributing organization to **pledging recommendations** for the U.S. Government delegation to the first-ever Global Ministerial on Ending Violence Against Children regarding gender-based violence and child and forced marriage. The recommendations include establishment of a National Survivors' Council; support for critical domestic and global programs (including GBV, FGM/C, Child Marriage, and Adolescent Girl Strategy); a Cross-Agency Priority on Children and Youth, Child Impact Statements, and a Best Interests of the Child standard.

On average, over once per day, a perpetrator kills an intimate partner and then takes their own life in the US. Of these incidents, 93% involve a gun, and 95% involve women killed by male partners. Yet, these events get little public attention and recognition as a frequent form of gun violence. Everytown's research report on this topic: **Dual Tragedies: Domestic Homicide-Suicides with a Firearm** looks at the widespread impact on victims and survivors, including children

US Women's Caucus

2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the 4th World Conference on Women, and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action. To commemorate this important year, the Zonta International UN Committee is hosting a series of 12 weekly Conversation Circles from Nov to Feb led by Zonta UN Committee Chair, Pamela Morgan, each covering one of the twelve critical areas in the Beijing Platform. All Conversation Circles begin at 10am (ET). Register **HERE.**

Nov. 13 – Women and Poverty
Nov. 20 – Violence against Women
Dec. 4 – Education and Training of Women
Dec. 11 – Women and Health
Dec. 18 – Women and Armed Conflict
Jan. 8 – Women and the Economy
Jan. 15 – Women in Power and Decision-Making Positions
Jan. 22 – Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
Jan. 29 – Human Rights of Women
Feb. 5 – Women and the Media
Feb. 12 – Women and the Environment
Feb. 19 – The Girl Child

The priority theme of the 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), March 10-21, will be the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. Find resources, materials and recordings on the Zonta **CSW webpage** and check out the **recording** of Zonta's Oct. 4th Session on CSW69. Don't miss the **Shadow Reports on the Beijing Platform**, a series of short briefs prepared by The US Women's Caucus addressing how the US measures up to the commitments in the Beijing Platform with recommendations for improvements. Particularly note the **Shadow Report on Violence Against Women** which finds that, while the US has made important strides in this area, violence against women remains a crushing problem in the US.

In honor of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2025, the US Women's Caucus, of which Zonta is a member, is asking members and friends to complete a brief **survey** about how well they think the US has met the commitments made to American women on women's rights since the 1995 Beijing conference and what issues they think are the most important to address in the future. The Caucus hopes to share the aggregated results of the survey with members of the State Department and Congress to advocate for changes in policy. Please complete and share the link with your clubs and others. The US Women's Caucus is also asking those women who attended the Beijing Conference in 1995 to **share their own stories and photos** of the conference, which the Caucus will publish on their website. Deadline for completing the survey and submitting stories is November 15.

A 2024 Report entitled **"Equal Measures- A Gender Equal Future in Crisis?"** includes the 2024 Gender Index, a survey of 139 countries covering 14 of the 17 SDG goals. The index ranks the US 40th on gender equity, behind Cyprus at 39 and the United Arab Emirates at 32, but ahead of China at 41 and Kazakstan at 46 ! The report also found that 40% of the world's countries, with about 1 billion women, had seen progress towards gender equality stagnate or decline in 2022! And, if you wonder about the connection between climate and gender, note that the survey indicated that 80% of the people displaced globally by climate change are women or girls.

At the **Twelfth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime** – UNTOC COP12, October 14-18, in Vienna, ZI co-sponsored a side event with multiple organizations : **Making sure that firearms do not end up being used in gender-based violence.** Watch the video **HERE.**