

2008 -2009 Women's Agenda Issues Guide¹

CHAPTER 1: ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Aging

Facts:

The elderly population in NC is growing rapidly, there are more than one million citizens over the age of 65; 60% are women. Women comprise 74% of citizens over the age of 85.

Elderly and Disabled people prefer to remain in their homes but funding for home care is not made available.

The inadequate mental health system has spilled over into the care of the elderly. Care givers in the adult care system need more training and further screening.

Recommendations for Action:

Help NC's older citizens live independently by increasing funding for the Home & Community Care Block Grant program which provide services to elderly persons living at home. The Home & Community Care Block Grants include services such as Meals on Wheels, personal care and transportation needs.

Provide for screening, assessment and care plans for new admissions to adult care homes. Require increased training for aides that work with older mentally ill residents.

Emergency Contraception

Facts:

Data show that 25,000 women become pregnant as a result of rape each year in the US; 88% of these pregnancies could be prevented with emergency

¹ Prepared by Sandra Abromitis, September 2008. See www.NCWU.org for the complete Draft Women's Agenda, the basis for the 2008 Women's Agenda Assembly meetings across the state.

contraception (EC). Thirteen states have mandated that hospital providers offer EC to women after sexual assault.

NC does not require hospitals to provide EC to women after sexual assault. One in 4 hospitals in NC does not provide EC. Given that in 2004-2005, 5,000 sexual assault victims sought help, some 1,000- rape victims were sent away without being provided EC.

Providing EC to sexual assault victims is a time sensitive issue. EC greatly reduces the chances of pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of intercourse.

Recommendation for Action:

The General Assembly should pass HB 961 and SB 968 that require hospitals to provide EC to sexual assault victims regardless of the physician on duty.

Mental Health

Facts:

It is estimated that 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness, but less than one-third will be diagnosed; statistics for children are even lower. Mental illness in adults can have a significant and continuing effect on children in their care.

Women are 2½ times more likely to experience depression than men. While most treatment occurs during health care visits, mental illness typically goes undiagnosed.

Recommendations for Action:

Expand comprehensive mental health parity legislation in health coverage to end discriminatory differences between mental and physical health care and include addictive disease in this coverage.

Urge lawmakers to build on recent increases in community-based mental health funding to ensure services to those in need, especially in the area of crisis services.

Support polices and programs that connect primary care and mental health services, especially for returning veterans, and specifically those in the guard and reserve.

Comprehensive Sex Education

Facts:

Everyday in NC, 53 teenage girls (15-19 yrs) become pregnant. In NC in 2006, 405 young girls 10-14 years old became pregnant.

In 2006, 35% of female students and 19% of male students dropped out of high school to become parents.

In 2005, 48% of female high school students and 54% of male high school students reported having sexual intercourse.

Approximately, 50% of all new sexually transmitted infections occur among youth ages 15-24.

Recommendations for Action:

The NC General Assembly must restore medically accurate, unbiased comprehensive sex education to NC schools.

The governor of NC must reject Title V. Federal "abstinence-until-marriage" funding. Schools in NC must not be able to accept funding that denies young people lifesaving information.

The NC General Assembly must include comprehensive sex education in their high school drop out initiatives in order to address the disproportionate effect that teenage pregnancy has on girls completing high school educations.

CHAPTER 2: CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND EQUALTY

Equal Educational Opportunity

Facts:

In 1994, the NC Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr. handed down a decision that forces the state to provide equal amounts of money to all school systems.

In spite of recent improvements, NC schools are not yet providing all students with their constitutionally required "sound basic education".

Recommendations for Action:

Increase funding for the Disadvantaged Students Supplemental Fund and implement criteria defining allowable fund purposes and accountability procedures.

Ensure that all students who are at risk of academic failure have a written personal education plan that will be implemented and monitored regularly.

Reduce the high suspension and dropout rates for all students with particular focus on the needs of minority students.

Ensure all students are academically prepared to meet the state's new graduation standards by providing them with the necessary resources.

Ensure equity in community college admissions and enforcement of state mandates for equal educational opportunity.

Educational Rights

Facts:

The NC Constitution Supreme Court decreed that the state of NC is ultimately responsible for providing each child with access to a sound basic education and that this ultimate responsibility cannot be abdicated.

In 2006-2007, over 23,000 students dropped out of NC public schools, a four-year high number and the largest number in some 6 years.

Minority students accounted for the vast majority of the dropouts.

Recommendations for Action:

The state must determine the human and capital resources needed to ensure academic success for every child.

End the racial and gender achievement gaps by ensuring that students are not excluded from the education process.

Well paid, high-quality teachers and funding are necessary to meet this need.

Equal Political Representation

Facts:

Women hold 55% of the voting force but hold less than one-fourth of the seats in NC General Assembly, less than one-sixth of all elected offices, and less than one-third of the positions on boards and commissions.

Money determines who can run for office and who wins. Men have an advantage over women in campaigns simply because traditionally they can more access to money.

In NC female candidates raise 85% of the funds male candidates raise; candidates who raise the most money win 90% of the time.

Voter-Owned Elections (VOE) provides an alternative to the money chase and level the playing field for women candidates.

While statewide 86% of women are registered (compared to 75% of men), only 55% of women make it to the polls.

NC ranks among the worst 15 states in terms of voter turnout.

Recommendations for Action:

The General Assembly should expand Voter-Owned Elections to include state legislative and gubernatorial races.

The General Assembly should extend the opportunity to register and vote on Election Day and take other steps to make voting more convenient.

Driver's License Identification

Facts:

In 2006, NC changed the state law that allows only people with a Social Security number or a valid, unexpired visa to obtain or renew a driver's license.

The restrictions create circumstances that force untrained, unlicensed, and uninsured drivers onto the roads, making highways less safe of all North Carolinians.

Recommendation for Action:

Go back to the original criteria of identification required to get a valid NC driver's license. Safety for all people is a concern. Fair and non-punitive laws are another concern.

CHAPTER 3: ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Affordable Child Care

Facts:

High quality, affordable childcare is hard to find in NC. According to the NC Division of Child Development, there are currently 27,000 children on the waiting list for childcare subsidies, subsidies that is necessary for low-income families.

The average annual cost for childcare for an infant is \$7800.

North Carolina reduced all childcare programs by 4% including Smart Start and the More at Four Program that offers a half-day preschool program for disadvantaged 4 year olds.

The average income for a full-time, year-round childcare provider is \$18,120.

Early, high-quality childcare from early infancy improves scholastic success and educational attainment; adults who received such care were twice as likely to still be in school or attend a four-year college and were more advanced socially, cognitively and grammatically and less likely to need special education, receive welfare, or be arrested.

Recommendations or Action:

Increase appropriations for subsidized childcare enough to eliminate the waiting list and invest in early childhood educational programs.

Provide increased reimbursement and funding to childcare centers to promote better-educated child-care providers and to keep them in business.

Displaced Homemakers

Facts:

The NC Council for Women & Domestic Violence defines a “displaced homemaker” as an adult who has worked primarily in the home without remuneration and therefore has no marketable skills.

Issues and barriers affecting displaced homemakers include poverty, health care, childcare, employment opportunities, education/training, legal aid, transportation, housing and mental health.

The NC Legislature created the Fund for Displaced Homemakers in 1993 but assistance has been little to maintain the fund.

Statistics for 2006/2007 revealed that the 35 Displaced Homemakers Programs served 4,896 displaced homemakers, the average client being white, female, and 34-44 of age. Of those served, 33% were subsequently employed either full-time or part-time and 26% enrolled in an

education/training program, of which 60% enrolled in a community college. See page 20 of the Women's Agenda for statistics from Women Work!

Recommendations for Action:

Provide adequate wages and benefits and a living wage for Displaced Homemakers. Support the CNA program; an accessible education opportunity that provides an avenue to the workforce in less than six months.

Guarantee health care as a fundamental right especially to children at or below the poverty level as well as to the working poor. Many displaced homemakers would be able to accept a smaller living wage if health care for their children was provided.

Increase the funding for the North Carolina Housing Trust Fund to \$50 million yearly to expand affordable housing for low-income families.

Raise the minimum wage.

Establish a state Earned Income Credit.

Increase cash assistance, public assistance, and childcare subsidies for low-income families while the "head of household" is completing job retraining or education.

Expand family-related leave policies.

Address the needs of female workers with Social Security reform.

Housing

Facts:

Across NC, the cost of housing has risen faster than wages, especially since manufacturing jobs have been replaced with lower paying service jobs.

Over two million residents have a housing problem because of the high cost of rent, inadequate facilities, and over-crowding.

Women make up a disproportionate share of those who live in low-income housing. Elderly women make up a high percentage of people living in subsidized housing.

NC has created the NC Home Protection Pilot Program which allows homeowners who have lost their jobs through layoffs to apply for a bridge loan to help with mortgage payments while looking for new employment.

Recommendations for Action:

Provide annual funding of \$50 million to the NC Housing Trust Fund to increase availability of affordable housing.

Increase funding for the NC Home Protection Pilot Program to help displaced workers to avoid home foreclosure.

Paid Family Leave

Facts:

In 2005, the National Partnership for Women and Families gave NC a grade of "F" for failing to provide a family leave program that helps support families before and after the birth of a child. (See page 23 of the Women's Agenda for the description of the current Family & Medical Leave Act [FMLA]).

Studies show that paid family leave results in better prenatal and postnatal care, lower accident rates in the first year of life, and more intense parental bonding over a child's lifetime.

Recommendations for Action:

The General Assembly should support legislation that requires employers to provide paid family leave for parents with a new child in their home.

New mothers should receive short-term disability leave for childbirth recovery.

Living Wage

Facts:

One-third of NC's working families earn low-incomes, and the number continues to rise. In 2006, some 24% earned less than \$9.12 per hour. Low paying jobs are less likely to provide basic benefits or advancement opportunities.

According to the NC Justice Center's 2008 Report, Making Ends Meet on Low Wages, a family with children must earn at least \$41,184 annually to afford the actual costs of essential expenses.

The current minimum wage of \$6.15 buys less today than it did in 1968.

An estimated 1.6 million NC residents (42% of the state's workforce) lack paid sick days to use when a short-term illness touches their family.

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a federal tax credit designed to provide low-wage workers with additional income. Based on criteria, the program can put an additional \$4,700 in the pocket of those that qualify if the annual wage limit is \$39,783.

Starting in 2009, if wage earners qualify for the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, NC will credit an additional 3.5%. To keep up with the cost of living, the NC credit should be at least 15% of the federal amount.

Collective Bargaining allows workers through their union or association to negotiate a binding contract with their employers for specific wages and benefits. Under the current NC law, public employees can join a union but cannot negotiate a contract. The federal government and all states except NC and VA have this right.

Recommendations for Action:

Increase the state Minimum Wage to at least \$8.15 per hour and index it to inflation.

Enact legislation to provide workers with up to 7 paid sick days annually to care for themselves or a family member.

Increase the percentage of the state Earned Income Tax Credit to at least 15% of the federal program.

Repeal NC's ban on collective bargaining for public employees.

Immigration & Citizenship

Facts:

The National Organization for Women believes that comprehensive immigration reform must include fair and non-discriminatory implementation for our immigration and enforcement policies and economic, legal and social justice for immigrant women.

There are 14.2 million foreign-born women in the US. Five and a half million are naturalized citizens, another 5 ½ million are documented and 3.2 million are undocumented. Women make up 30% of the 10 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.; another 1.6 million are children under the age of 18. More than half of all undocumented immigrants have expired visas.

Both documented and undocumented immigrant women are affected by low wages in the service industry, primarily domestic work. Domestic workers are forced to accept low wages while working as many as 60-70 hours a week. These workers are excluded from our country's employment protection laws such Fair Labor Standards Act, Occupational Safety & Health Act or existing laws that protect against sexual harassment.

Recommendations for Action:

Any reform legislation dealing with immigrants must be inclusive and contain provisions that address the needs and challenges specific to immigrant women and their children who live and work in the US.

Fair, comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include (1) a legalization program that allows undocumented immigrants living in the US to apply for residency; (2) enforcement of existing federal labor laws for all workers including domestic workers; (3) improvements in the family reunification program; (4) adequate health care for children; (5) reproductive health care coverage; and (6) adoption of the provision of the WISH Act

which provides safe harbor and safety net benefits to immigrant victims of sexual and domestic violence.²

CHAPTER 4: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Domestic Violence

Facts:

Domestic Violence is a widespread national and state problem. Nearly 25% of American women report being raped and or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lifetime. On an average more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends every day in this country. Women of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds are vulnerable to violence by an intimate partner.

In NC, local domestic violence programs responded to over 119,000 crisis calls and provided services to 47,000 victims. The North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence reported 82 domestic violence-related homicides in NC for 2007; 50% were committed with firearms.

In 2005, NC ranked 11th (15th in 2004) in the nation for the number of per capita homicides committed by men against women.³

Current efforts of NCCADV and the Joint Legislative Committee on Domestic Violence include increasing funding for domestic violence programs and supervised visitation centers as well as strengthening the enforcement of protective orders.

Recommendations for Action:

Support the recommendations of the Joint Legislative Committee on Domestic Violence.

Support the Legislative Agenda of the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (www.nccadv.org)

² See pages 29-30 of the complete Women's Agenda for additional information on these recommendations.

³ See page 31 of the Women's agenda for further statistics.

Sexual Assault

Facts:

According to the Violence Against Women Act, violence against women is a term used to describe specific forms of violence: sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, teen dating violence, peeping, fondling, indecent liberties with a minor and cyber stalking.

During 2007 in NC, there were 420 charges of 1st degree rape against a child and 55 convictions. In the same time frame, there were 383 charges of 1st degree rape and 43 convictions. These statistics speak to the need for advanced training and education related to sexual assault in NC.

Most hospitals provide compassionate and comprehensive care to rape victims.

Recommendations for Action:

Increase the funding for Rape Victim Assistance Program which should be accessible to all victims of sexual violence. (NB: The RVAP pays a maximum of \$1000 per survivor after the victim's private insurance companies have been billed; victims are responsible for the rest.)

Provide emergency contraceptives (EC) to all sexual assault victims at Emergency Hospitals. Ensure that hospitals do not have refusal clauses to avoid giving EC to victims and provide EC at the hospitals to preclude prescriptions that may not be filled by local pharmacies.

Clarify and strengthen stalking laws in NC; current laws are vague regarding what actions constitute stalking.

Support HB-223: Expand the Sex Offender Accountability & Responsibility Program (SOAR).

Support HB 688 which would increase criminal penalties for computer solicitation of a child.

