



April 19, 2021

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Members of Congress:

The undersigned organizations thank you for your commitment and leadership to chart an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to build the most inclusive middle class our nation has ever seen. We are excited to partner with you in building a durable caregiving system as a core pillar of the American Rescue Plan, and we champion your plan to create over one million high-quality jobs and to advance racial equity by investing \$400 billion in Medicaid home and community based services (HCBS).

This long-overdue investment in a majority-women workforce, powered by Black, Latina, Asian and immigrant women, will support the very workers and communities who have been hardest hit by the economic recession and lay the foundation for future economic growth. It will make it possible for more people with disabilities and older adults, particularly those from marginalized communities who face significant structural barriers to access, to receive long-term services and support in their homes and communities. And it will reduce financial burden and time pressures on unpaid family caregivers, allowing many women and particularly women of color, who left the workforce during the pandemic due to caregiving challenges, to go back to work.

Our nation's care workers make all other work outside the home possible. But racism and sexism, dating back to slavery, has contributed to the poor quality of home care jobs. For example, it wasn't until the Obama Administration that workers finally had basic wage protections after years of being excluded from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)—a deal made to appease pro-segregation lawmakers.¹ Even today, too many home care workers—87% of whom are women, more than half are Black, Latina, and Asian women, and three in ten are immigrants—are paid poverty wages and given few employment benefits and protections. Due to the disaggregated nature of working in people's homes, and the limits of labor and employment laws, many of these workers lack the most basic protections and far too many have been intentionally excluded from the right to form and join unions and collectively bargain to build a stronger voice in decisions that affect them. Worse yet, they are often isolated and unsupported in their work. Undocumented direct care workers who work in the large gray market are especially vulnerable.

¹ Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klien, "History Shows How 2 Million Workers Lost Rights," *Time*, January 13, 2015, <http://time.com/3664912/flsa-home-care-history/>; Claire Zillman, "The Worst Paying Fastest Growing Job in America," *Forbes*, September 15, 2014, <http://fortune.com/2014/09/15/home-care-workers/>; Ariela M. Migdal, "Home Health Care Workers Aren't Guaranteed Minimum Wage or Overtime, and the Legacy of Slavery Is the Reason Why," *Huffington Post*, May 6, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ariela-m-migdal/home-health-care-workers_b_7224080.html.

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Our nation faced a home and community-based services crisis well before the pandemic, which hurts workers, consumers, and entire communities — especially Black, brown and immigrant communities burdened with unequal access to quality services and other basic lifelines. A patchwork of underfunded Medicaid programs has forced far too many aging adults and people with disabilities to forgo the services they need or to rely on family or friends for unpaid care and support. Care jobs are, all too often, undervalued and underpaid, which is only compounded by inadequate Medicaid funding and rate setting that does not account for necessary labor costs; this results in high rates of worker turnover and chronic worker shortages across the country, which leads to families fending for themselves to access care for a loved one or people with disabilities and older adults going without needed services. The care crisis is not an issue for individual families to figure out — it’s an issue that holds our entire economy back.

At a time when COVID-19 has exposed entrenched racial and gender inequities whose effects ripple across the economy, research indicates that the long overdue investment in Medicaid’s HCBS will lift up American families, workers, and our economy at large.² More than a year into this pandemic, immediate action is necessary for our economy and the health and safety of those who need services, the workers who support them, and their families. Simply put, any attempt at economic recovery that does not prioritize building a strong, resilient caregiving system will fall short of the Build Back Better agenda.

We have an opportunity, through the investment of \$400 billion, to create more than one million new jobs—and transform those jobs into the good, family-sustaining, union jobs of the future, just as we did with auto and steel jobs of the last century. Creating these green jobs will address a growing shortage of care workers as our country’s population ages, and it will ease the burden on unpaid family caregivers while also making entire communities more resilient. The economic recovery plan must include a path to citizenship for qualified immigrant care workers, who have provided vital care services before and during the pandemic, risking their lives and those of their families. Providing a path to citizenship will create a pipeline of needed caregivers while guaranteeing them basic protections and a real shot at economic security and opportunity.

Following a summer of historic Black Lives Matter protests, it is clearer than ever that targeted investments are necessary to solve for widespread inequities. Investing in a workforce of Black and brown women is an urgent step to begin addressing the racial wealth gap and the shortcomings of the current care system.

We urge you to work with Congress to ensure that the second jobs and economic recovery package prioritizes an investment in caregiving. This is a once-in-a-generation chance to properly position care work, and place the wellbeing of Black and brown women at the center of the American economy. With

² See Palladino, Lenore, and Mabud, Rakeen. (2021). *It’s Time to Care: The Economic Case for Investing in a Care Infrastructure*. Time’s Up Foundation, accessed February 9, 2021 at https://timesupfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IMLB_01_Feb2021_Investing-in-Care-Paper_FINAL.pdf

a strong foundation to support America's professional care workers, every person in this nation can age with dignity and with access to quality long-term services and support, and we can build a middle class that reflects the rich character of our nation. We must see care as essential and start building the infrastructure on which our economy will rest for years to come.

Sincerely,

Mary Kay Henry, President
Service Employees International Union

AAPIs for Civic Empowerment
African Communities Together
All Our Kin
American Federation of Teachers
America's Voice
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)
Asian Americans United
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance (API PA)
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation
Black Women's Roundtable, NCBCP
Blue Future
Brotherhood Crusade
Build Back Better USA
Californians for Safety and Justice
Casa San Jose
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Popular Democracy
Church World Service
Coalition on Human Needs
COLAGE
CommunicationFIRST
Community Coalition
Comunidades Sin Fronteras CSF
Courage California
Demos
Feminist Majority Foundation
Fight for \$15 and a Union
Freedom Network USA
Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda
Girls for Gender Equity
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama

Immigration Hub
In the Public Interest
Income Movement
Institute for Women's Policy Research
Japanese American Citizens League
JENESSE CENTER
Jobs With Justice
Justice for Migrant Women
Mainers for Accountable leadership
March On
Michigan Asian American Progressives, a project of Tides Advocacy
Morehouse College International Comparative Labor Studies
NAACP
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Black Worker Center
National CAPACD- National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Crittenton
National Employment Law Project
National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA)
National Organization for Women
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Odyssey world international education services
One APIA Nevada
Oxfam America
Pacific Community Ventures
Paid Leave for the United States (PL+US)
PHI
Poder Latinx
PolicyLink & Alliance for Boys and Men of Color
ROCUNITED
SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Supermajority
The Center for Popular Democracy
The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Rising Majority
The Workers Lab
Treatment Action Group
UndocuBlack Network
Urban Strategies Council
Voices for Progress

Voto Latino
Washington State Indivisible Coalition
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Women Employed
Women's March