

The Chicago Women's Agenda

What Chicago Women Want For Women Everywhere

On October 18, 2014, nearly 200 women from diverse communities across Chicago came together at the end of a two month process to forge, through discussion and debate, the first *Chicago Women's Agenda*. Some issues – like equal pay and reproductive rights – are long time challenges faced by previous generations of women. Others reflect more recent concerns – about Democracy, protection of public assets, gun violence. Together these issues represent the thoughts and desires of women on which we intend to act and on which we should judge candidates, elected leaders and corporate actions alike.

This document contains draft statements for the eleven major issues that emerged from the October 18th Women's Assembly. For each we offer an objective statement, a brief description of the issue, and a list of potential actions.

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**All agenda items are of utmost value. They are numbered for clarity and ease of reference.*

To learn more about the Women's Assembly, the Chicago Women's Agenda, and Chicago Women Take Action, visit <http://chicagowomentakeaction.com>.

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1: Full Reproductive Rights

Ensure full, affordable access to health services, including contraception and abortion, as well as the pre-natal and family health care services, paid sick leave, and other family-friendly policies that make real choice possible

The ability to control if and when to become pregnant is central to a woman's ability to control all other aspects of her life – her education, employment, the very life she can lead. That is why the core issues of reproductive justice are full access to contraception and abortion. Yet full reproductive justice also requires that the choice to have children be made knowing that they can be raised in safe and healthy environments, with economic and housing security.

Older women have particular needs as well. As women typically take more time off to care for family members, they often face great challenges as they age since their lifetime earnings, pensions, and retirement savings are likely to be less than those realized by men.

Potential Actions:

- Protect full access to contraception and abortion in Illinois
- Pass the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act
- Pass the Family Care Act
- Protect Social Security and pass the Caregivers Act
- Boycott businesses that deny women full health care and insurance

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2: Economic Security

Raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour for a full week of work, and ensure equal pay for equal work

A great many Chicago-area women are responsible for their own economic security and that of their families. According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, 476,550 households in the metro area are headed by women. About 29 percent of those households, or 138,676, have incomes below the poverty level.

With 66 percent of low-wage jobs held by women, and women earning 80 cents for every dollar earned by a man, only by ensuring equal pay for equal work, raising the minimum wage, and guaranteeing a 35 - 40 hour work week will women be assured of a “sustainable family income.”

Potential Actions:

- Pass minimum wage and minimum hour legislation at the City, County, State and Federal levels, preferably at \$15 per hour
- Pass federal legislation calling for equal pay for equal work
- Pass the Federal Paycheck Fairness Act to protect and empower women
- Support legislation and worker efforts to ensure full-time employment with benefits

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3: Economic Empowerment

Ensure that women have the opportunities they need for economic success, including access to quality, affordable education and training and to capital for entrepreneurial ventures

Women need access to high quality education from early childhood to college and post graduate training, with a focus on higher paying STEM skills. A two-year degree means an average 38 percent increase in pay; with a four-year degree, a woman earns 88 percent more than with a high school diploma. Increasing financial aid, counseling and career guidance, and support services such as childcare and transportation, will ensure that women receive the education they need and want. Education alone is not enough.

While entrepreneurship is perhaps the best route to better pay, even with education and ideas, women are often denied capital. Seven percent, or 183 of 6,517 companies receiving venture capital funding from 2011-2013, had a woman CEO. With 7.8 million women-owned businesses in the United States, only 3 percent of total venture capital dollars, or \$1.5 billion out of the total of \$50.8 billion invested during 2011-2013, went to companies with a woman CEO.

Potential Actions:

- Ensure STEM programs for girls in all neighborhood and specialized schools
- Reduce the interest rate on student loans to zero percent
- Create funds to help women start and scale businesses to triple job growth

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4: Expanded Opportunities for Young Women

Increase access and funding for sports, education, good nutritional choices, and health care, and end objectification, including rape and sex trafficking, that stifles possibilities

Girls face unique challenges to their health and development that are often overlooked. Despite Title IX, girls, particularly those of color or living in poor communities, do not have equal access to sports and fitness opportunities and face higher rates of obesity and other related health risks, yet less than 4 percent of national funding is directed to girl-specific programs and opportunities.

While much progress has been made, sex stereotypes, parental, educator and peer expectations as well as the dominant culture too often discourage girls from fully realizing their potential.

Potential Actions:

- Ensure that there is parity in City, State and Private funding for after- school and summer programs for young women as well as health education and care
- Encourage girls' leadership in science, sports, and other non-traditional activities
- End stigma and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation

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5: Real Immigration Reform

Pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation that protects women and reunites families

More than 16 million people live in mixed-status families in the United States, with at least one person an unauthorized immigrant – vulnerable to exploitation and deportations that disrupt families with dire consequences. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in deportations, with an estimated 204,000 parents of children with U.S. citizenship deported between July 2010 and September 2012 alone.

The harm is palpable: from families that suffer the loss of income to the suffering of thousands of children who end up in the public child welfare system; from the under-reporting of domestic violence by women who fear deportation more than their abusers to the children and parents who often miss work or school to avoid encounters with law enforcement and bureaucracies.

Potential Actions:

- Provide access to schools, health care, drivers' licenses and bank accounts for all immigrants
- Replicate Illinois' immigrant-friendly policies in other states
- Pass comprehensive Federal immigration reform

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6: Freedom from Violence

Create real consequences and laws to end the violence against women, particularly young women, that affects every realm of their lives – from harassment on public transportation, sexual assaults in the military, and on campus, to the violence that occurs at home

Sexual assault and domestic violence are pervasive, seen in recent revelations about sex trafficking, sexual assault on campus and in the military. Domestic violence and date rape are not simply problems; they are crimes and should be treated as such. Girls, in particular, face the challenge of violence; from public harassment to sexual exploitation in the privacy of home, to rape on college campuses, where nearly 1 in 5 young women are sexually assaulted.

Of growing concern is the increase in human trafficking. Over 100,000 children are commercially exploited for sex each year in this country; most of them girls. This will only end with efforts to eliminate demand, prosecute traffickers, and provide services and shelter to victims.

Potential Actions:

- Begin anti-violence education in the schools at an early age
- Increase funding for legal advocacy and domestic violence shelters
- Monitor media for 'blame the victim' and voyeuristic coverage
- Prosecute human traffickers and increase services for victims

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7: Common Sense Gun Control

Enact sensible gun control laws that outlaw assault weapons and make guns of all types less accessible

Gun violence in schools rivets public attention, and nightly news reports are filled with stories of yet another young person killed. Women in particular are vulnerable to gun violence. As moms, sisters, and daughters, spouses and girlfriends, they suffer first-hand the effects of the more than 11,078 homicides and 19,393 suicides that occur each year.

According to the Center for American Policy, from 2001 through 2012 alone, 6,410 women were killed with a gun by a husband or boyfriend. This is a figure that, according to the Center for American Progress, is “more than the total number of U.S. troops killed in action during the entirety of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.”

Potential Actions:

- Pass meaningful gun control legislation at the federal and state level
- Increase funding for mental health services
- Boycott stores (like Target or Walmart) that sell guns

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8: Criminal Justice Reform

Decriminalize drug laws and reform police, courts and prisons to end brutality, wrongful convictions and sentences that impair lives

Called the New Jim Crow, today's criminal justice system is filled with youth of color – victims of poverty, racial profiling, and disparate sentencing, and too often of police brutality and wrongful conviction. That the tragedy of such injustices is compounded by laws that make gainful employment, housing and even voting difficult has created whole communities where poverty, prison, and constrained options combine to harm women and families most at-risk.

Potential actions:

- Pass legislation to decriminalize minor drug possession
- Press for transparency of police review board records of those involved in shootings or beatings and support reparations for Burge victims
- Restore rights to those who have served time and returned to communities to begin or resume productive lives with real freedom

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9: Protection of Public Assets

Preserve and protect the public institutions and assets that provide opportunity and well-being for women and their families

Much of America's social mobility derives from the creation and protection of public assets – schools, parks, health care, roads, etc., from which all benefit. The privatization of schools, and the shuttering and selling off of assets like schools, health clinics, and roads, deprive women and their families of needed assets, robs communities of anchors, and shuts doors on opportunity.

Potential Actions:

- Demand public vote referenda before public assets (parks, schools, lakefront, etc.) are converted to private use
- Strengthen the power of landmarks and other preservation entities
- Protect national parks and other parts of the country's patrimony
- Restore mental and other public health care clinics to public stewardship
- Safeguard public schools and keep them public

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10: Protection of Democracy

Ensure the right to vote, the right to speak and voice unpopular opinions, to gather in public places and to unfettered access to the Internet

The past decade has not been good for democracy. The draconian rules passed in the wake of 9/11 that restrict public gatherings, criminalize certain relationships, and enable the vast surveillance network of the NSA, threaten both public and private spaces for thought and dissent. At the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court decisions created corporate personhood and 29 states attempted to restrict voting rights. Not since African Americans and women won the right to vote has democracy been so threatened.

The third front of the battle is one of technology. With the advent of the smart phone and digital technology, the Internet can be a great force for more democracy—only if it remains an open and accessible, where all content is considered equal and where access cannot be bought or sold.

Potential Actions:

- Keep Illinois free of special identification requirements and other prohibitive rules, and repeal City, State, and Federal laws designed to curb demonstrations
- Protect free speech rights on campuses and in the workplace
- Encourage women of all ages to engage in the digital world
- Protect the Internet from a two-tiered content system
- Overturn Citizens United

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11: Livable Conditions

Pass legislation and engage in practices that ensure that the environments in which women and families live are affordable, healthy, and safe, with access to nutritious food

A safe, affordable home near employment, good schools, transportation, and nutritious food is essential to raising a family. Yet too often women, with their lower wages, are priced out of housing in such locations. Policies are needed to assure fair, affordable housing in a supportive environment, so that low and moderate income residents can live sustainably.

Toxic chemicals and pesticides in the air, water and earth (crops) are responsible for a variety of women's health risks. They enter body tissues and breast milk and are passed on to infants. Sustainable development demands recognition and value for the many ways women's lives intersect with environmental realities. The State of Illinois ranks 7th in the country for carbon pollution from power plants. These plants are the state's largest single source of dangerous emissions.

Potential Actions:

- Increase the availability and amount of well-located affordable housing through Federal, State and local funding
- Create an independent Illinois Environmental Justice Commission
- End Petcoke stockpiling, fracking and Great Lakes oil exploration
- Eliminate food deserts and encourage local organic farming