

The Big 5: Issues that Matter Most to Women and Girls in 2008

1

Economic Security: There are 37 million people (12.6 percent) and 7.7 million families in the United States living in poverty. Of families headed by single mothers 28.7 percent or 4.0 million live below the poverty compared to 13.0% or 669,000 of single-headed households led my men. In 2005, the proportion of women aged 16 and older in poverty was 12.7%, compared to 9.2% of men. When women are economically secure, they are able to contribute to society, earn comparable salaries for comparable work, provide for their families, pursue a chosen occupation, and develop their capacities without restrictions or discrimination. Critical issues to be addressed include paid sick leave, equitable taxes, retirement, social security, elder and child care, housing, and pay equity.

2

Health: In 2006, the U.S. census reported that 45 million Americans had no health insurance and that over one-third (36%) of families living below the poverty line were uninsured. A majority of U.S. citizens have identified access to affordable health care as a priority for them and for their families. Along with affordable health care, universal and portable health care, health disparities, and reproductive health are top concerns for women and girls.

3

Violence: In the United States, each year, women are the victims of more than 4.5 million violent crimes, including approximately 500,000 rapes or other sexual assaults. And it is estimated that 50,000 women are trafficked into the United States every year. In a 2006 NCRW Poll, three-quarters of adults surveyed (74%) said they were in favor of fully funding the Violence Against Women Act to ensure adequate support for domestic violence shelters, prevention programs and rape crisis centers. Ending violence against women needs to be a national priority. A safe society for women and girls is a prerequisite to enable them to lead productive and successful lives.

4

Immigration: Women are 50 percent, or 14 million of the foreign-born U.S. Population. Of those, it is estimated that 58% are legal immigrants and as many as 42% are unauthorized migrants. Immigrant women are often caught in a double bind and suffer abuse and violence crossing borders and on the job. They receive inadequate and low wages, have higher family caretaking demands, and reproductive health care needs. They are also vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment at higher rates than the general population and have significantly less recourse, legal protections, or rights.

5

Education: Despite significant gains in educational achievement for women and girls over the last few years, the gap continues to widen for low-income women and women of color with regard to educational attainment and achievement. Access to education is key to women's economic security and well-being and more vigorous efforts are needed to ensure sufficient federal programs to fund education across income levels, especially for low-income women and women head of households. Educational disparities must be addressed!