

Summer, 2023

# 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.**

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## Ending Child Marriage

While we have a long way to go, the diligent work of Unchained at Last and the National Coalition to End Child Marriage, of which Zonta is a member, is paying off. **The Connecticut Senate and House passed a bill to end child marriage.** Gov. Lamont has promised to sign it, but has not done so.

**And hot off the press! The Michigan House voted 104-5 for a marriage age of 18, no exceptions and the Senate just passed the bills overwhelmingly as well!!!** This package of bills is very thorough—it even eliminates the previous exemption that allowed marriage to provide an exemption for statutory rape! The Governor plans a signing ceremony, but it could take several weeks. **Hopefully soon we will have the ninth and tenth states that have ended child marriage.**

Congratulations to Zonta D15, which, since 2019, has been working tirelessly to change Michigan's law which contained NO minimum age to marry, making change more urgent. D15 sent postcards and emails to elected officials, attended representatives' coffee meetings and office hours, held in-person and virtual advocacy days and educational programming, and sponsored billboards to educate the public about the consequences of child marriage. In May 2023, members of the Michigan Coalition to End Child Marriage, of which D15 is a member, joined a rally at the Capitol building calling on legislators to pass Senate and House Bills for a marriage age of 18. Caucus member, Denise Sylvester and Cheryl Hall testified respectively on behalf of D15 and the Coalition to House and Senate

Committees. D15 also submitted written testimony in support of the bills. **Our efforts DO have an impact!**

Check out the **billboards** the Caucus has erected around the country urging an end to child marriage.

Unchained held a **Chain-In** at the California State Capitol in Sacramento on June 22 to urge legislators to pass a bill to end child marriage in California, ANOTHER state that has NO minimum marriage age.

Catch Journalist Elizabeth Vargas' interview with Unchained founder, Fraidy Reiss, about forced and child marriage in the US, and hear the heartbreaking stories of four US child marriage survivors in a two-hour A&E **documentary special** airing on Hulu titled "I Was A Child Bride: The Untold Story."



## Equal Rights Amendment

A new generation of young people is joining the fight for the ERA. Generation Ratify is a youth-led movement to ratify the ERA and advance gender equality in the US. Their mission is to build a coalition of young people across the country leading an intersectional feminist revolution that empowers and advocates for the full equality of young women. Learn more in the [newest episode](#) of the ERA Coalition's Equality Talks podcast.

The Seneca Falls ERA Convention in NY, July 21-23 commemorates the 100th anniversary of the original Seneca Falls Convention, one of the most important events in the women's suffrage movement. Special events are being organized by Zonta's fellow members of the ERA Coalition. The focus of THIS convention is engaging a younger generation of women, to take on the challenge of getting the ERA recognized as the 28th Amendment. Tickets are free for anyone under 25 and any Zontian or Golden Z member under 25 who attends the event will be eligible for financial support. Tentative donations will cover the cost of two reserved rooms housing 4 or more, so rooms and registration would be free to selected young members. Tickets available [HERE](#) and information on the planned activities [HERE](#). To guarantee paid rooms, eligible young Zonta members should contact Bobbee Cardillo before July 11, 2023 at [bobbeecardillo@gmail.com](mailto:bobbeecardillo@gmail.com).

Be sure to sign the new Sign4ERA [petition](#) launched by feminist leaders, including Gloria Steinem, Carolyn Maloney, Eleanor Smeal, ERA Coalition President, Zakiya Thomas, and NOW President, Christian Nunes. The goal is for legislators to see the overwhelming support the public has for the ERA.

An [article](#) from the ERA Coalition describes how recognition of the ERA would provide a legal framework to challenge discriminatory practices that contribute to period poverty, lead to policy reforms and help dismantle stereotypes surrounding menstruation.

## Gender-Based Violence

On May 25, the White House released the first-ever [US National Strategy to End Gender-Based Violence](#), developed by the White House Gender Policy Council, addressing sexual violence, intimate partner violence, stalking, and other forms of GBV. The Strategy "advances a comprehensive, government-wide approach to preventing and addressing GBV in the United States" across governmental departments. The plan states that while it is focused on federal action, it is "designed to be accessible and useful to public and private stakeholders across the United States for adaptation and expansion." The Strategy establishes seven "pillars" or approaches to GBV including (1) prevention; (2) support, healing, safety, and well-being; (3) economic security and housing stability; (4) online safety; (5) legal and justice systems; (6) emergency preparedness and crisis response; and (7) research and data.

A [press release](#) accompanying the Strategy includes other measures taken by the current administration to address GBV including the creation of an Office on Family Violence Prevention and Services in HHS and more funding for Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) programs, as well as numerous other programs addressing various forms of GBV. These include increased funding for domestic violence programs and tribal and culturally-specific programs on sexual assault response and prevention. HHS also recently announced a Health Resources and Services Administration strategy on addressing domestic violence.

The bipartisan International Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S. 920) will reauthorize and enhance critical programming, policy and funding essential to the US's efforts to combat human trafficking around the world. Use Zonta's pre-drafted [letter](#) to urge your Senators to co-sponsor and support S. 920,

## Women's Health

The quest for menstrual equity continues. In some good news, a [new Texas law](#) removes state sales taxes from the purchase of several items, including menstrual products, diapers, baby wipes, maternity clothing, baby bottles and breast milk pumping and storage products and goes into effect September 1, culminating seven years of effort by Rep. Donna Howard, D-Austin and advocates. In addition, Rep. Grace Meng [D-NY-6] has introduced H.R.3646 - [Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2023](#). Watch for details to come.

Thanks to Caucus member, Sheila Cook-Cohen, for the news that the Hilo Zonta club received a proclamation from the Mayor of Hilo for their efforts to address Period Poverty. This is the third proclamation the Hilo club has received this year.

The inventor of the menstrual pad was an African-American woman, Mary Kenner, who is known for holding the most patents as a Black woman. Kenner created a sanitary belt that improved on earlier versions by adding an adhesive to hold the pad. Although she was able to get a patent, she couldn't get a manufacturer to make her products, allowing her patent to expire and competitors to copy and profit off of her idea. Read more [HERE](#).

Listen to a recording of the Women's Congressional Policy Institute (WCPI) congressional [briefing](#), "Reducing Maternal Mortality in the United States." A wide range of speakers representing both government and the private sector, present bipartisan policy and on-the-ground recommendations for improving maternal health and reducing preventable maternal mortality. In the U.S., the maternal health crisis particularly affects women of color and women living in rural areas. Despite these challenges, maternal mortality is preventable. The bipartisan Healthy Moms and Babies Act (S. 948) will improve maternal and child health by delivering high-quality, coordinated care and 21st century technology. [Urge your senators](#) to co-sponsor and support S. 948.

## Women and Work

The Zonta USA Caucus issued a [statement](#) in conjunction with Equal Pay Day, March 14, 2023, a date that symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned in the previous year. The Caucus subsequently approved Equal Pay Day Statements regarding Black women (July 27), Latina women (October 5) and Indigenous women (November 30) representing the days of the year when those women earn what men earned in the previous year.

The After Hours Child Care Act would expand capacity for an existing child care program to serve families working nontraditional hours, support efforts to establish on-site child care programs at workplaces, ensure that federal funds supplement existing efforts by requiring a 25% match, and mandate a report every two years on the bill's effectiveness in improving child care availability. [Urge your senators](#) to support and co-sponsor this important and much-needed legislation.

President Biden recently released an [Executive Order](#) on Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors recognizing "that military spouses are an underserved community." The order addresses issues such as the need for reliable childcare, the special demands of dual income families and the "unique demands of military life" on "veteran families, military caregivers, and survivors for years after a service member's time in uniform".

## Charitable Deductions

A bipartisan and bicameral group of lawmakers introduced the Charitable Act (S.566/ H.R.3435) which would restore a universal charitable deduction by allowing non-itemizers who donate to the charities of their choice to deduct from their taxes up to one-third of the standard deduction. This change could result in higher donations to non-profits like Zonta. [Encourage your legislators](#) to support this legislation.