



January 19, 2016

Dear Senator,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to share with you our legislative goals for the coming year. Our 15 task forces worked to identify and develop a comprehensive list of priority legislative initiatives that represent a path forward for our country in advancing social and economic justice — including initiatives to expand the economy, promote job growth and workplace fairness, encourage educational opportunity, ensure fairness in the criminal justice system, build strong families and communities, and promote civic involvement.

The Leadership Conference believes that these important legislative priorities are well-positioned for Congressional action. A number of the legislative items on our list have had bipartisan support and others have emerged to address critical issues, such as voting rights, economic insecurity, immigration reform, and preventing discrimination in employment, contracting, and housing. While the list that follows does not reflect the complete agenda of all of our member organizations, it does highlight the issues that are at the top of the coalition's agenda. We believe that these goals can and should be met by the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The Leadership Conference looks forward to continuing to work with you to further these important goals. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Nancy Zirkin or Corrine Yu at 202-466-3311.

Sincerely,

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President & CEO

**Nancy Zirkin**  
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## CENSUS

- Provide **sufficient funding** to support thorough testing and planning for the 2020 Census to ensure that operational and technological innovations designed to contain overall census costs are robust and do not diminish efforts to address the persistent disproportionate undercount of populations of color and other historically harder-to-count population groups, such as immigrants, young children, and rural and low-income households, as well as prison gerrymandering and other design and policy issues that affect a fair and accurate census.
- Ensure an accurate **American Community Survey** by actively supporting continued mandatory response and full annual funding to ensure adequate sample size, and by implementing steps to ensure reliable, comprehensive measurement of smaller and special populations.
- Ensure that the 2020 Census fully includes all segments of the population, with a goal of eliminating the differential undercount of people of color, young children, rural communities, and low-income households.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Support **sentencing reform** legislation that addresses front-end drivers of mass-incarceration, racial disparities in incarceration, overcrowding in the federal Bureau of Prisons, and over-criminalization.
- Support legislation that eliminates discriminatory profiling in all of its forms, similar to the **End Racial Profiling Act**; mandates racial bias training for all law enforcement agencies receiving federal funds; addresses the problem of police misconduct and brutality; de-militarizes the police; and ensures due process of law and protection of personal property rights by reforming civil asset forfeiture laws, which disproportionately impact people of color, similar to the **FAIR Act**.
- Support legislation that removes barriers to reentry and addresses collateral consequences for formerly incarcerated individuals in the areas of education, employment, voting, housing, and public assistance, such as the **Fair Chance Act**, the **REAL Act**, the **REDEEM Act**, the **Democracy Restoration Act**, and the **Fairness and Accuracy in Criminal Background Checks Act**.
- Support the **Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2015**, which provides funding assistance to state and local governments, and other key stakeholders working with reentering populations, and provides appropriate funding for Second Chance and Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) programs at the fully authorized levels.
- Oppose legislation that undermines efforts to provide formerly incarcerated individuals with pathways to successfully reintegrate into their communities.
- Support the **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2015**. Support legislation like the **Youth Promise Act** to address the specific and unique needs of young people, and support evidence-based practices and alternatives to incarceration.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

### Budget

- Protect **programs for low-income and vulnerable people** and reject structural changes that would negatively impact beneficiaries, such as a block grant for SNAP, a per capita cap or block grant for Medicaid, or transforming Medicare into a voucher program.
- Enact **tax policies** that improve tax fairness and raise revenue by closing tax loopholes for corporations and the wealthy.
- Reject **budget process** changes that make it easier to enact tax cuts without offsets and oppose a balanced budget constitutional amendment.

### Economic security and jobs

- Raise the **federal minimum wage** and eliminate the minimum wage for tipped workers, indexed for inflation.
- Invest in **job creation** that builds the economy and meets pressing needs, and ensure that underrepresented populations have access to these jobs.
- Protect and expand **income and work supports**, including Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, nutrition assistance, housing assistance, unemployment insurance, and child care.
- Protect consumers from **predatory lending** practices by enacting a 36 percent Annual Percentage Rate limit applicable to all borrowers and rejecting limits on the authority of the CFPB.
- Oppose all proposals to undermine or weaken the CFPB by changing its structure or attacking its independent funding.

## EDUCATION

- **Postsecondary:** Any reauthorization of the **Higher Education Act** and the **Perkins Career and Technical Education Act** must increase the quality and access to postsecondary education and job training, including for non-traditional students such as those who are parenting or who attend school part-time while working. Reauthorizations of these critical laws should increase college affordability by expanding Pell grants and making federal student loans affordable, and support programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and HEP-CAMP and minority serving institutions to expand access to education.
- **School Climate and Civil Rights Protections:** Approve critical legislation to ensure students attend school in a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment, free of bullying, harassment and assault, discrimination, or harsh disciplinary practices. Pass a comprehensive **Safe Schools Improvement Act**, the **Student Nondiscrimination Act**, the **Ending Corporal Punishment Act**, and the **Keeping All Students Safe Act**. Provide sufficient funding to the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Education and to the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice to enforce federal laws protecting students and employees from discrimination based on race, national origin, sex, disability, age, or religion.
- **Early Childhood:** Increase funding for early childhood programs, including child care, and pass the **Strong Start for America's Children Act**, which would increase access to quality critical early learning opportunities for all children regardless of race, color, or ZIP code.

## EMPLOYMENT

- Prioritize legislation that reflects the realities of the modern workforce with respect to work and family obligations. Legislative action is needed to assure workers access to paid sick days through the **Healthy Families Act**, affordable family and medical leave through the **Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act** and through state paid leave grants to states through DOL appropriations; protections for working women who need reasonable accommodations related to pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions through the **Pregnant Workers Fairness Act**; and fair and predictable schedules through the **Schedules That Work Act**.
- Adopt legislation that strengthens workers' rights, including assuring women and all workers stronger protections against pay discrimination through the **Paycheck Fairness Act**; modernizing civil rights protections in employment as well as public accommodations, housing, access to credit, and other areas of life through the **Equality Act**; strengthening nondiscrimination protections for older workers through the **Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act**; and strengthening workers' rights to bargain collectively through the **WAGE Act**.
- Ensure that workers get fair treatment in bringing claims and adjudicate their rights, including ensuring fairness in tax treatment of discrimination awards through the **Civil Justice Tax Fairness Act** and ensuring their claims are able to be fully litigated, and not subject to arbitration agreements in the areas of employment, consumer, antitrust, or civil rights disputes by passing the **Arbitration Fairness Act**, with a further goal of ending forced arbitration more broadly.
- Oppose efforts to limit or defund efforts to protect workers' rights including riders to defund DOL implementation of Executive Orders or reductions in DOL or EEOC program or enforcement budgets.

## HATE CRIMES

- Recognizing the limits of legal responses to hate violence, the administration and Congress should promote the enactment of comprehensive legislation focusing on inclusive anti-bias education; hate crime prevention; and bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment education, policies, and training initiatives.
- The President and Congress should support budget authority to fund, for the first time, grants authorized under Sec. 4704 of the **Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA)**, which are intended to promote federal coordination and support for bias-motivated criminal investigations and prosecutions by state, local, and tribal law enforcement officials.

## HEALTH CARE

- Ensure Medicaid is not converted into a block grant or funding is otherwise restricted as part of the budget reconciliation or other legislative processes.
- Maintain the health programs, benefits, and funding that everyone needs to achieve and sustain maximum health, including those enacted in the Affordable Care Act.
- Ensure and protect women's timely access to trusted, quality women's health providers so they can access comprehensive health services.
- Pass the **Health Equity and Accountability Act**.
- Pass the **Health Equity & Access under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Women & Families Act**.

## HOUSING

- Oppose any amendments or riders to FY2017 appropriations and other future legislation that prohibits the use of federal funds to provide grants for private enforcement under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program. It must also oppose any appropriations legislation that prohibits federal agencies from using appropriated funds to enforce HUD's Discriminatory Effects Standard ("Disparate Impact") or Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing ("AFFH") regulations.
- Fund FHIP at \$52 million dollars and allow HUD the discretion to flexibly allocate appropriated funds in its grant making as it sees fit.
- Oppose **the Local Zoning and Property Rights Protection Act of 2015, and the Local Zoning Decisions Protection Act of 2015**. Both bills would withdraw HUD's AFFH rule and burden HUD with unnecessary administrative procedures that distract from enforcement of the Fair Housing Act.
- Support the **Eleanor Smith Inclusive Home Design Act of 2015**, which requires that newly constructed, federally assisted single-family houses and town houses include at least one level that complies with the Standards for Type C (Visitable) Units of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standards for Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities (1005-ICC ANSI A117.1-2009) and any future revisions. This legislation would help ensure that federal financial assistance for single-family homes expands the nation's limited accessible housing.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

- The Senate should ratify **the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**.
- The Senate should ratify the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**.

## IMMIGRATION

The executive actions taken by the President are no substitute for comprehensive immigration reform. Congress still needs to pass legislation creating a realistic path to citizenship, protecting the rights of immigrant and citizen workers alike (including **the POWER Act**), promoting family reunification, strengthening due process in detention and removal, and ending all profiling. It should also:

- Reject piecemeal enforcement proposals, including efforts to undermine community trust policies, which would harm both individuals and our nation as a whole;
- Prevent children of immigrants from being penalized through cuts to safety net programs;
- Pass legislation to expand health care for immigrants, which benefits entire communities; and
- Pass the **Freedom of Faith Act**, to permanently extend the religious worker visa program.

## MEDIA/TELECOMMUNICATIONS

- Enact an update to the **Electronic Communications Privacy Act**. Law enforcement searches of emails, cell phones, online content and location information should receive the same Fourth Amendment protections as letters and telephone calls. Reject any civil agency warrant-for-content carve-out that would swallow the new rule.
- As it considers any proposed changes to the **Communications Act**, Congress must respect and incorporate central civil rights values, including non-discrimination, access to affordable and

quality information services for all, diversity in ownership, consumer protection, and the preservation of jobs.

- Reject efforts to weaken the **ConnectEd** or **Lifeline** programs, or to weaken FCC **media ownership limits**.
- Support passage of the **Broadband Adoption Act**.
- Oppose efforts to weaken the FCC's **joint services agreement rule**, either through stand-alone legislation or appropriations riders.
- Maximize the benefits of **big data** while minimizing its risks to foster discrimination and diminish opportunity.

## U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Congress should increase appropriations for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to support additional staff that can undertake more investigations and hearings (particularly field hearings), reduce the backlog of reports, and develop new reports and other documents reflecting research and analysis of current and emerging civil rights issues.

## VOTING RIGHTS

- Enact the **Voting Rights Advancement Act** or comparable legislation to restore the protections of the VRA struck down or rendered inoperable by the Supreme Court's *Shelby County* ruling.
- Enact legislation that would modernize the voter registration system.
- Enact the **Democracy Restoration Act**, which would restore voting rights in federal elections to the 4.4 million Americans who have lost their voting rights following a criminal conviction, and who have been released from prison and are living in their communities.
- Oppose legislation that would create barriers to the right to vote, including, but not limited to, photo voter identification laws, laws requiring voters or voter registration applicants to provide documentary proof of citizenship, laws limiting early voting opportunities or proposing widespread precinct closures and/or consolidations, and laws purging qualified voters.