



Policy Pack II.XI

YEAR IN REVIEW

December 2020

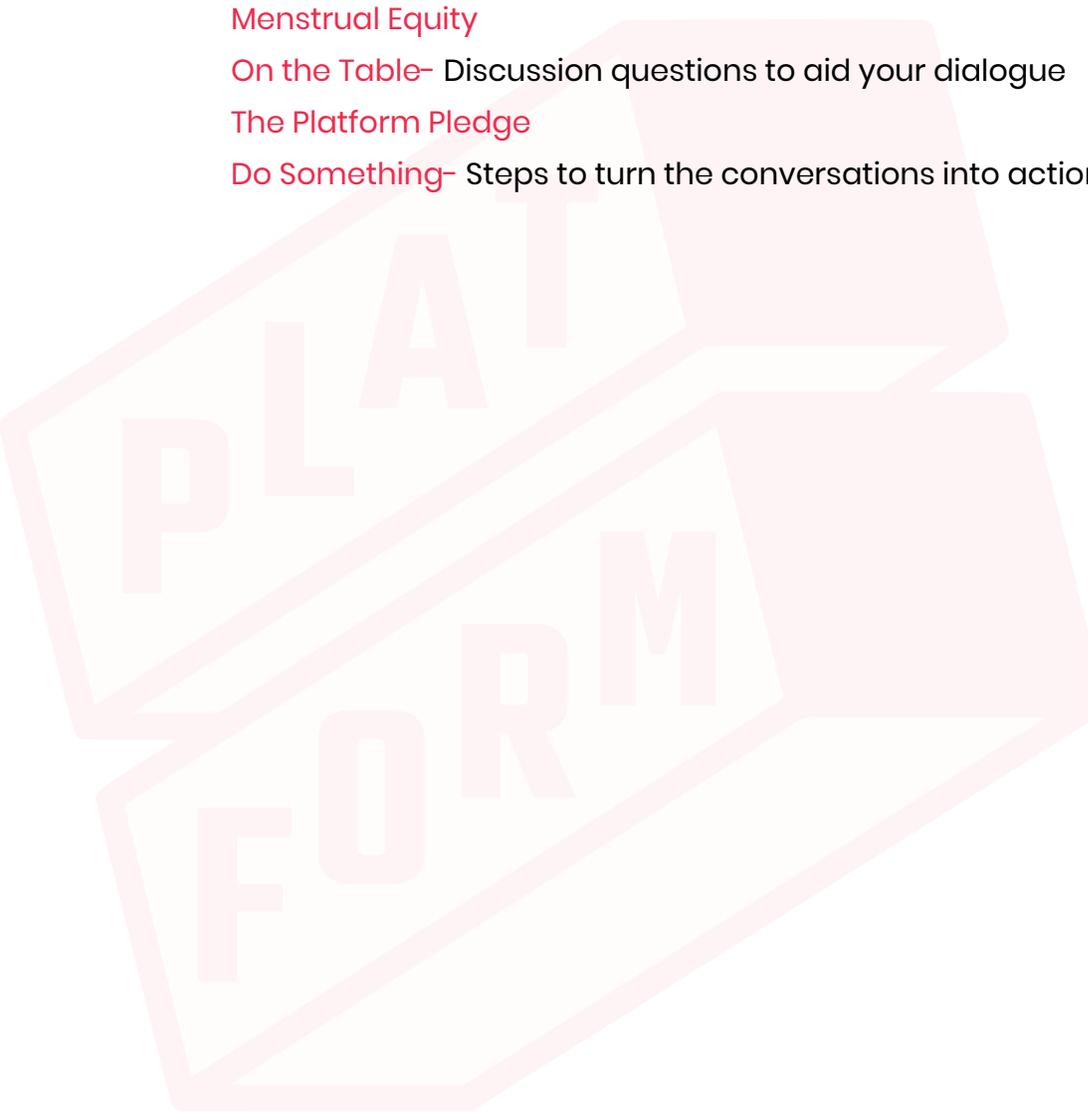




YEAR IN REVIEW

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Note from the Team

This year has been historic. It has been one of heartbreak and pain, of triumph and celebration, of rollbacks on human rights, of amazing steps and feats toward progress. It has been a year that not only felt like the end of a decade, but a decade all on its own. As the year comes to a close, we take pause to reflect and recharge, because we know that next year we have to leave it all on the table.

But before we talk about what's to come, let's honor the work we did together:

- Together with our friends at De Lune, we convened 150 people for a Period Party in honor of the Menstrual Equity for All Act; turned people out for a lobby day that led to key co-sponsorships of the bill including by Representatives Madeleine Dean (D-PA-4), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE- At Large), and Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D-FL-26); and released a #ME4All advocacy video that was uplifted by Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA-13), Ilhan Omar (D-MN-5), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY-12), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA-7), and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7).
- With our partners at End Rape on Campus and a coalition of champions, we led the reintroduction of Senator Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman's #CommitmentToSurvivors Resolution, S.Res.281/H.Res.514/
- We worked with the Act For Women! Campaign to host Young Advocates for WHPA (the Women's Health Protection Act). We brought over 100 young people to Capitol Hill for strategic meetings and yielded 15 new cosponsors, including cosponsors who seldom—if ever—sign onto pro-reproductive justice legislation.
- At our National Convention, we joined in community with 85 young leaders from across the country; heard from Representative Grace Meng (D-NY-6), Bossed Up Founder Emilie Aries, and celebrated activist Brittany Packnett; learned from policy leaders on the ground on issues including democracy reform and justice reform; and lobbied 30 Congressional offices on issues including Black maternal health and immigration rights. We also amended our Platform Pledge to more intentionally recognize indigenous rights, call us to action to address climate change, call out the intersection of gun violence and state violence; and use even more gender-inclusive language to better reflect our values and community.

We are proud of the work we did in 2019, and grateful to have done it by your side. Next year, we know the 2020 election is not just about the names on the ballot; it's about the issues up for debate, up for a vote, and up for a fight. And we intend to fight.

That is why we are launching the Our Voices Summits in Ohio and Iowa as our 2020 convenings. We are teaming up with Ohio State University's Multicultural Center to host Our Voices Ohio, taking place February 23-24, and working with University of Iowa's Women's Resource Center for Our Voices Iowa, set for April 5-6.

Throughout the Sunday of the Summits, delegates will learn how to channel their stories into lobbying power, get the rundown on state-wide policy issues from the leaders on the ground, gain the tools to register and turn out issue voters, and develop their own policy goals. THEN, on Monday we will head to the State House to meet with their lawmakers to advance those goals.

Mark your calendars, make a gift at platformwomen.revv.co/20for20 to make it happen, and we will see you in 2020!



YEAR IN REVIEW

Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice

“We will not go back to Jim Crow. We will not go back to the days of back-alley abortions. We will not go back to the days when others had control over our bodies. Instead, we are going back to our communities to educate, mobilize and go to the polls on Election Day!”

— Marcela Howell, Founder and President of In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda & Deon Haywood, Executive Director of Women With a Vision

1

In 2016, Renee Bracey Sherman created the hashtag #AskAboutAbortions because of a lack of discussion about abortions during the presidential debates. Three years later, the hashtag became just as relevant. After stepping off the debate stage in September, Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) tweeted, the debate “was three hours long and not one question about abortion or reproductive rights.”

The failure to ask about abortion or specifically engage candidates in the larger framework of reproductive justice during the September debate was a weird, to put it mildly, departure from reality as this year we witnessed rampant threats to our self and body autonomy. Fortunately, a number of candidates took it upon themselves to talk about repro and abortion was a debate question on other nights.*

While abortion access is just one part of the larger, necessary conversation and action regarding reproductive justice, for the purpose of this year-end catch up, we’re going to focus on what happened in the abortion debate, because there’s a lot to keep track of.

State Action:

Emboldened by Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court, which is poised to give the anti-choice movement an additional vote, states rushed to pass anti-abortion legislation. Their actions reflect a dangerous hope that with Kavanaugh on the bench, *Roe v. Wade* might be overturned nearly 50 years after the ruling was made.

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This year, was, as Steven Aden, general counsel to the anti-abortion Americans United for Life, said, “the most active legislative year in recent memory.” In fact, “state legislatures across the South, Midwest and the Plains enacted 58 abortion restrictions, 25 of which would ban all, most or some abortions.” Here’s a recap of what the states did in 2019:

Alabama took one of the most extreme stances this year, effectively banning all abortions, criminalizing the procedure, and making it so doctors could face felony charges and up to 99 years in prison. The only exception is if the mother’s life is at risk. After the court issued an injunction, the state decided not to appeal stating, “It will take time to develop a record in support of our arguments that *Roe* and *Casey* were wrongly decided and should be overruled. We hope to have a chance to build that record before any appeal. And for that reason, we have not appealed the preliminary injunction.”

*A previous version of this Policy Pack failed to recognize the other nights and times moderators and candidates, alike, included abortion, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice in the debates. We regret the error.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice (cont'd)

While Alabama decided to make a splash and then go quiet, Ohio is doubling down in 2019. In April, the state signed its fetal heartbeat bill into law. Among its provisions, it would ban abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected; doctors performing abortions would face up to a year in prison; and there are no exceptions for rape or incest. In July, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction after deeming the bill to be an “undue burden” on an individual’s right to get an abortion.⁵ In the face of defeat, Ohio lawmakers came back in November with new legislation to classify abortion as an “abortion murder” felony, so that people who have or perform an abortion face life in prison. The bill would also call on doctors to attempt to reimplant an ectopic pregnancy in a patient’s uterus, despite the procedure not being medically possible.⁶ The bill’s champion, Representative John Becker, admitted he did not research the medical viability of the ectopic provision and an investigation found that while he worked closely with anti-abortion groups to write the bill, he failed to consult with any doctors.⁷

In Georgia, Brian “Governor-who-stole-his-election” Kemp signed a “fetal heartbeat” ban, which would ban abortion after about six weeks, down from the state’s current ban after 20 weeks. A District Court judge temporarily blocked the law stating, “Under no circumstances whatsoever may a state prohibit or ban abortions at any point prior to viability.”⁸

Kentucky passed a six-week ban and Missouri passed an eight-week ban while Utah and Arkansas moved to ban abortion after the middle of the second trimester.⁹ Kentucky’s has since been blocked and so have parts of Missouri’s. While Louisiana similarly enacted a “fetal heartbeat” ban without exception for rape or incest, the bill states “it will not take effect unless a similar law in Mississippi... is upheld.”¹⁰

Fortunately, Mississippi’s recently passed 15-week ban was blocked In December. The Appeals Court upheld the District Court’s decision to prevent the law from taking effect.¹¹

There were four states—Kentucky, Nebraska, North Dakota and Oklahoma—that passed laws requiring medical providers to inform patients about the possibility of reversing medication abortion during pre-abortion counseling. Similarly, Arkansas law now requires patients receive written information after taking the first drug. Fortunately, Kansas reversed course when the governor vetoed this form of counseling requirement and the veto-override attempt just barely failed.¹²

In October, Florida Representative Mike Hill filed his latest attempt at a “fetal heartbeat bill.” His bill, which will be raised in the 2020 legislative session, would ban abortions after six weeks without exceptions and institute third-degree felony charges for performing an abortion.¹³ Hopefully, his colleague in the Senate will successfully block a vote on that bill. State Senator Lauren Brook is calling for a constitutional amendment to prohibit the legislature from voting on abortion access legislation until half the chamber is composed of women.¹⁴



YEAR IN REVIEW

Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice (cont'd)

Thanks to many District and Appeals Courts, as well as bold lawmakers across the country, all's not lost:

- After South Carolina lawmakers introduced a six-week ban, State Senator Mia McLeod introduced the South Carolina Pro Birth Accountability, which would not only require the state compensate individuals forced to carry their births until term, it would allow the individual to participate in a program that would pair them with a specially trained nurse to provide home visits from early pregnancy through the child's second birthday; ensure the pregnant person is eligible for any public assistance until the child is 18 years old; cover all medical expenses if the individual becomes disabled as a result of pregnancy; cover all medical expenses for the rest of their life if the child is born with a congenital abnormality or disability; cover all costs associated with health, dental, and vision insurance until the child turns 18; and require the state to pay child support if the biological father is unknown or unable to provide support.¹⁵
- New York went on the record to affirm the right to abortion “up to the point of fetal viability and when a patient’s life or health is at risk at any stage, and protects the right to contraception, pregnancy and sterilization.” Illinois and Vermont laws followed in similar nature.
- Rhode Island passed a law protecting the right to have an abortion up to fetal viability and in cases when it affects a patient’s life or health.
- Maine now allows physician assistants and advanced practice nurses to provide abortion care. The state will also require Medicaid and private health insurance plans provide coverage for abortion care.
- Nevada removed its (unenforced) trigger law, which would criminalize abortion if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.
- California Governor Gavin Newsom added his signature to the College Student Access Act, which will ensure university students have access to the abortion pill.¹⁶
- New York, New Mexico, and Washington expanded or protected insurance coverage of reproductive health-related care.¹⁷
- Six states—New Jersey, Tennessee, Virginia, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado—along with D.C. expanded sex education with various provisions including more LGBTQ+ inclusive education, violence prevention, and understanding consent.¹⁸
- Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Virginia established maternal mortality commissions. And Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia agreed to better support their commissions.¹⁹
- Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia passed legislation to expand programs like Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program, to support improved maternal health.²⁰
- Colorado, Indiana, Minnesota, and Virginia signed into law better care for pregnant patients who use substances.²¹



YEAR IN REVIEW

Reproductive Rights, Health, and Justice (cont'd)

Federal Action:

Many of these state laws will come to a head in 2020 after the Supreme Court hears *June Medical Services LLC v. Gee* on March 4. The case deals with Louisiana's 2014 "Unsafe Abortion Protection Act," requiring doctors who perform abortions to receive admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. There are only two doctors who perform abortion in the state who have admitting privileges and one already stopped performing abortions and the other is on the brink of retirement. This law is now at the heart of an upcoming Supreme Court case.²² All eyes are on Brett Kavanaugh and Chief Justice John Roberts, since the latter has sided with the Court's liberal justices in another Louisiana-centered case in February of this year.²³

While the Court agreed to hear *June Medical Services LLC v. Gee*, it refused—without explanation—to hear Kentucky's Ultrasound Informed Consent Act, which requires people who are pregnant to have an ultrasound, during which a doctor must narrate the features of the fetus and play the fetal heartbeat. Patients are not allowed to refuse the narration and they cannot ask for the screen to be turned away.²⁴ By refusing to hear the case, it allows to lower Appeals Court decision, which upheld the law as constitutional, to stand.²⁵

Aside from the Courts, the Trump Administration is working around the clock to roll back reproductive rights and access. The Administration recently handed down a rule that prohibits federally-funded clinics from providing abortion referrals. It was the latest intentional move in the campaign to defund Planned Parenthood. After the rule was implemented, organizations that participated in the Title X program had to show how they would comply with the rule. Planned Parenthood refused saying, "We will not be bullied into withholding abortion information from our patients. When you have an unethical rule that is asking us to limit what our providers can tell our patients, then it becomes really important for us to not agree to be in the program." Title X money was already barred from paying for abortion care and was used by healthcare providers, like Planned Parenthood, to provide low-income individuals with wellness exams, cervical and breast cancer screenings, birth control, and STI and HIV testing and treatment to name a few. This courageous and difficult decision cost Planned Parenthood \$60 million in annual funding and has serious financial implications on their ability to care for low-income individuals who turn to them for reproductive health care. Planned Parenthood and the American Medical Association are teaming up and taking the Administration to court. They are joined by 24 states and other providers who are also challenging the rule.²⁶

In the third branch of government, we are finding some hope. The Women's Health Protection Act was reintroduced in May this year and has since received 215 cosponsors in the House, putting it just within reach of the 218 it needs to pass through the Chamber. The bill would establish a statutory right for health care providers to provide, and their patients to receive, abortion services free from medically unnecessary restrictions, limitations, and bans that delay, and at times, completely obstruct, access to abortion. While experts initially just hoped the bill would receive a subcommittee hearing, a vote on the floor of the House seems possible.

We, at Platform, are proud of our work to bring 100 young people to lobby our representatives to cosponsor the critical Women's Health Protection Act. Because of our work, 15 cosponsors signed on, including Representative Stephen Lynch (D-MA-8), who considers himself a Pro-Life Democrat.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Justice-Involved Women and Girls

“You cannot have a government for and by the people if it is not represented by all of the people. For far too long, those closest to the pain have not been closest to the power, resulting in a racist, xenophobic, rogue, and fundamentally flawed criminal legal system.”

— Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7)

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It seems 2019 was the year of celebrities making justice reform their pet projects. While we celebrate the victories that were won this year and recognize their role in them, we also recognize the activists who have been fighting for decades for reforms, releases, and commutations. Among those activists is Susan Burton. Burton founded a California-based nonprofit, “A New Way of Life” after experiencing incarceration and recovering from addiction. She works to support women and their children adjust to life after prison, a cause a certain *Desperate Housewife*—who recently spent 11 days in a federal corrections center—is now supporting. ²⁸

State Action:

At the state level, pieces of justice system-related legislation are taking varied approaches:

- Kentucky’s new Governor, Andy Beshear, wasted no time after getting into office. In December, he signed an executive order to restore voting rights and the right to hold public office to individuals who complete their sentences for nonviolent felonies. This will immediately impact over 140,000 people who have completed such sentences. ²⁹
- In Colorado, 170 transgender women are suing the state after experiencing discrimination based on their gender identity from the Colorado Department of Corrections and experiencing systemic abuse while housed in male prisons, despite the state’s anti-discrimination act. ³⁰
- Conversely, in Syracuse, New York, the police department introduced a new policy for how officers should interact with transgender people. It includes using a person’s preferred pronouns and to “be respectful of a person’s gender preference and refrain from using derogatory or demeaning language.”³¹
- Georgia and Texas’ respective bans on shackling pregnant people who are incarcerated went into effect. Texas already prohibited shackling of people while in labor and immediately after, so this new law extends the time period ban. Meanwhile, Ohio and Nebraska lawmakers are hoping to follow suit.
- Investigations are being prompted in both Vermont and Florida following reports of abuse. In Vermont, Governor Phil Scott and Attorney General TJ Donovan are already working together to investigate while ³² in Florida, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) sent a letter to U.S. Attorney General William Barr demanding an FBI investigation. ³³
- In Washington, DC the effort to decriminalize sex work hit a wall. After 14 hours of hearings, lawmakers declared that divisions among DC residents to be too great to proceed. ³⁴



YEAR IN REVIEW

Justice-Involved Women and Girls (cont'd)

- The Dignity for Incarcerated Primary Caretaker Parents Act is making its way through the New Jersey legislature. If passed, it would help families stay connected even after a parent is incarcerated. It would also prohibit solitary confinement and shackling of pregnant individuals who are incarcerated; ensure parenting classes are available to people who are incarcerated; provide trauma-informed care for people who are incarcerated, and trauma-informed training for officers; establish mandatory mentoring to help people prepare for reentry; make menstrual products available at no cost; ban “corrections officers from entering the restrooms or showers of the opposite sex unless deemed necessary by the commissioner;” and offer primary caretakers who are incarcerated the option to participate in drug abuse and mental health programs. ³⁵
- New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced plans to add 500 cops to patrol New York City subway stations in an effort to curb fare evasion, despite the fact that it will cost more to add police than to accept the money lost from fare evasion. After the announcement, the New York Police Department arrested at least 58 people protesting the militarization of police. ³⁶

Federal Action:

Rather than criminalizing poverty like Governor Cuomo, Representative Nydia Velázquez (D-NY-7) introduced The Transportation Equity Act to provide federal grants so certain people—including seniors, persons with disabilities, and people receiving means-tested benefits (i.e. SNAP)—can receive free public transit passes. ³⁷

While Velázquez’s legislation importantly addresses the larger factors that lead to justice system-involvement, many of her colleagues took direct swings at the justice system:

- Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7) introduced a resolution before the House titled “The People’s Justice Guarantee.” The resolution puts forth a “comprehensive, people-centered, decarceration-focused” framework for legislation for redoing the criminal legal system. Her plan includes provisions to “dramatically reducing jail and prison populations; transform the experience of confinement; eliminate wealth-based discrimination and corporate profiteering; and invest in impacted communities.” ³⁸
- Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX-18) introduced the End Racial Profiling Act of 2019. Among its provision, the bill would prohibit law enforcement from engaging in racial profiling; mandating federal law enforcement agencies have proper policies and procedures in place to eliminate racial profiling; and require law enforcement agencies that apply for federal funding submit certification that they have policies to eliminate profiling and that they have eliminated racial profiling.
- Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) introduced a near-identical bill in the upper chamber, but his specifies a prohibition on “racial, religious, and other discriminatory profiling.”



YEAR IN REVIEW

Black Maternal Health

“Black mothers across the country are facing a health crisis that is driven in part by implicit bias in our health care system. We must take action to address this issue, and we must do it with the sense of urgency it deserves.”

— Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)

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This spring, She The People, an organization that “elevates the political voice and leadership of women of color,” hosted its first presidential forum and brought the issue of Black maternal health the center stage.

Not only did the forum’s focus lay out the issues presidential hopefuls must center in their campaigns, it signified the greater attention lawmakers at federal and state levels are paying to the epidemic of maternal mortality, particularly among women of color.

State Action

While a number of states are beginning to take action, the routes they are taking to achieve better maternal health care are varied:

- In Virginia, Governor Ralph Northam—whose history of racism (sort of) caught up with him this year—announced a plan to dedicate about \$22 million over two years in an effort to reduce the maternal mortality rates of women of color.⁴⁰
- In New Jersey, First Lady Tammy Murphy has made maternal and infant health her office’s priority. She, along with the state’s Department of Health, announced that New Jersey is one of nine states receiving “technical-assistance funding through a [federal] maternal health innovation grant program.” New Jersey will receive \$10.5 million as a part of the program.⁴¹
- Across the country, California passed the California Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act, which will, among its provisions, mandates perinatal healthcare providers receive implicit bias training.⁴²
- In Illinois, Gov. J.B. Pritzker “signed the last bills from a package of new laws to create new maternal legal rights and a task force to study the high death rate among African-American mothers and babies, to force hospitals to collect more accurate data on maternal mortality and be better equipped to treat pregnant women, and to mandate proper training for medical staff that are likely to treat pregnant women.”⁴³
- Alabama “launched its own Maternal Mortality Review Committee to examine circumstances surrounding the women who die each year from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes.”⁴⁴



YEAR IN REVIEW

Black Maternal Health (cont'd)

Federal Action

In an effort to dedicate more resources to address Black maternal mortality, Representatives Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14) and Alma Adams (D-NC-12.) created the Black Maternal Health Caucus. By the time the Caucus was announced, 57 other lawmakers counted themselves members.⁴⁵

Starting the new caucus was not the only thing keeping Congress busy in regards to Black maternal health. Here are just some of, the many pieces of federal legislation introduced in recent months:

- Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) and Representative Alma Adams (D-NC-12) reintroduced the Maternal Care Access and Reducing Emergencies (or Maternal CARE) Act. If passed the bill would allocate \$25 million for medical schools, nursing schools, and other health professional training programs to implement programs that include evidence-based implicit training; provide \$125 million to help states identify high-risk pregnancies, and provide mothers with the culturally competent care and resources they need; and support medical schools in adding “bias recognition in clinical skills testing by directing the National Academy of Medicine to study and make recommendations.”⁴⁶
- Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7) and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced the related Healthy MOMMIES Act and MOMMIES Act, respectively. Both bills are intended to improve Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program for low-income mothers.
- Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12) and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) introduced the Healthy Maternity and Obstetric Medicine Act, which “designates pregnancy as a Qualifying Life Event, which would trigger a special enrollment period for pregnant women to enroll in health insurance coverage through the Marketplaces, group health plans, and the Federal Employee Health Benefits system.”⁴⁷



YEAR IN REVIEW

Mental Health

“There are a number of factors that have led to the disparities in mental health care between young people of color and their white counterparts, and that means there are a number of opportunities for us to close the gap.”

—Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12)

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In a year characterized by political divisiveness and bipartisanship, the need to act on mental health was a great unifier. This, perhaps, is brought on by the heightened urgency. A recently published study by the American Psychological Association found that “between 2008 and 2017, the amount of adults that experienced serious psychological distress in the last month increased among most age groups, with the largest increases seen among younger adults aged 18-25 (71 percent).”⁴⁹

While the mental illness doesn’t discriminate, the support available vs. the punitive measures inflicted does discriminate.

State Action

That’s why New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams’ focus was on addressing the role of police in a mental health crisis. His proposals were a response to the number of 911 calls regarding an “emotionally distressed person” that resulted in the police-involved deaths of the persons dealing with mental illness. His plan would require the city to create new phone number, not run through the Police Department, specifically for mental health crisis treatment as well as secure funding for mental health urgent care centers.⁵⁰

Senator Brad Holyman brought the fight for mental health care to the state level when he introduced a bill in the New York legislature to allow students to count mental health days as excused absences in addition to sick days. Senator Holyman hopes the bill will both give students time to care for themselves and lead to more honest conversations about mental health since students won’t have to lie to explain their absence.⁵¹

In Massachusetts, there was a similar focus on youth dealing with mental health, but state lawmakers took a more insurance-centered approach. Among its provisions, the Act Relative to Children’s Health and Wellness, which was just signed into law, requires insurance provider networks to be more transparent about behavior health care specialists and doctors; automatically enrolls people under the age of 26 who aged out of the foster care or were under Department of Children and Families custody in MassHealth coverage; and creates a pilot program establishing three regional Childhood Behavioral Health Centers of Excellence.⁵²

In Kentucky, lawmakers are already preparing for 2020 action with a pre-filed bill to create the Kentucky Mental Health First Aid training program. The goal of the program is to provide people with the skills to identify and support people experiencing a mental health crisis. This program is necessary, because as Rep. Kim Moser (R-KY-64) said, “Individuals suffering from mental illness are more likely to be justice-involved. We have a huge number of incarcerated folks who are essentially being housed in jail because they haven’t gotten treatment early.”⁵³



YEAR IN REVIEW

Mental Health (cont'd)

West Virginia Senate Majority Whip Ryan Weld (R - Brooke, 01) also has his sights set on 2020 bills. Among his legislative plans is addressing mental health parity. He said, "If you have a chronic condition like diabetes, you are not limited by the number of times you can go see a doctor. But yet, many insurance plans limit the number of visits they will cover to go see a mental health provider for something like bi-polar depression or schizophrenia." ⁵⁴

Federal Action

Mental Health Awareness Month, back in April, ended with really intentional efforts out of Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman's (D-NJ-12) office. She rounded out the month, along with Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Karen Bass (D-CA-37) and their colleagues Alma Adams (D-NC-12), Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO-05), Danny Davis (D-IL-07), Alcee Hastings (D-FL-20), Jahana Hayes (D-CT-05), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30), Barbara Lee (D-CA-13), John Lewis (D-GA-05), Ilhan Omar (D-MN-05), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-07), and Frederica Wilson (D-FL-24) to create the 'Congressional Black Caucus' Taskforce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health. Representative Watson Coleman does not want this to be a long-standing committee; rather, she intends for it to "study the issue, find outcomes, and then form a plan of action for legislation or funding." ⁵⁵

She followed up with taskforce's creation with the introduction of a resolution: "Acknowledging the racial disparities in diagnosing and treating mental health among youth in communities of color." The goal of the Resolution is to put fire under the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to "research best practices and incentives for those considering education and working in the mental health field." ⁵⁶

While the FCC is actively working against internet freedom and access via its repeal of net neutrality, it did take a major step toward progress on mental health. This month, the Commission approved a plan to move forward with the creation of a three-digit suicide prevention number. If passed, people in crisis would be able to call 9-8-8 to reach the Suicide Prevention lifeline, instead of having to dial the full 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The approval, however, does not mean it is set to take effect. Instead, it simply opens up a public comment period before the FCC issues a final rule. ⁵⁷

In the meantime, a truly bipartisan coalition in Congress is working to give the plan legislative legs, making it less susceptible to rollbacks in the future. In August, Representatives Seth Moulton (D-MA-6) and Chris Stewart (R-UT-2) introduced The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. Original cosponsors included Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30), and Rep. Greg Gianforte (R-MT) and there are now 116 cosponsors in the House. In October, Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Jack Reed (D-RI) brought the effort to the Senate.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Mental Health (cont'd)

Among the many other Congressional efforts are:

- Representatives Katie Porter (D-CA-45), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12), and Donald Norcross (D-NJ-1) teamed up to introduce the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act, which would “improve health plans’ and insurers’ compliance with mental health parity laws, which require that mental health coverage cannot be more restrictive than coverage for other medical care.”⁵⁸
- Representative Judy Chu (D-CA-12)’s reintroduced Stop Mental Health Stigma in Our Communities Act would have the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provide “outreach and education strategies for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community by partnering with local advocacy and behavioral health organizations that have an established record of serving AAPIs.”⁵⁹
- Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-01) and Susan Wild (D-PA-07) teamed up to introduce the Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act, which aims to address the critical shortage of mental health professionals, including school psychologists and social workers, by establishing a partnership between the Department of Education and certain graduate programs. This partnership would work together to cover “up to 100 percent of attendance costs for students who complete five years of service as a school-based mental health service provider.”⁶⁰



YEAR IN REVIEW

LGBTQ+ Rights, Equity, and Liberation

“LGBTQ employees have been punished simply for not conforming to the employers’ sex-based stereotypes about how they should behave or who they should be attracted to. The Court has the opportunity to set the record straight and it’s time.”

— Lambda Legal ⁶¹

It was a history-making year across the country, with that history consisting of the good (the ways advocates showed up), mainly the really bad (everything the Administration did), and the too-soon-to-know (SCOTUS rulings) regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, intersex, and asexual equity and liberation.

State Action

At the state level, we saw a mix of progressive and regressive actions. Let’s start with the positive:

- In a blow to binaries everywhere, New York state Senator Brad Holyman (D- 27) introduced a bill to ban "medically unnecessary" surgeries on intersex children. As interACT Executive Director Kimberly Zieselman states, "Genital normalizing surgeries such as clitoral 'reductions' and vaginoplasties instill deep shame and sexual trauma in young children when they cannot make a decision for themselves." The bill clarifies that when the intersex individual is able to give informed consent, they can elect to have the surgery. ⁶²
- Over in Mississippi, Holly Spring became the fourth city in the state to institute city-wide prohibitions against discrimination in housing, including discrimination on gender identity and sexual orientation. ⁶³
- Utah went through a roller-coaster of an effort to ban conversion therapy. After a bill was introduced earlier in the year to ban the practice, it became so distorted that even the bill sponsor refused to support it and the governor publicly apologized. Following the disappointment, Governor Gary Herbert made a deal to put forth a rule effectively banning conversion therapy on LGBTQ children. ⁶⁴
- Ohio lawmakers were also engaged in a back-and-forth fight to extend protections to LGBTQ2IA+ folks. After House Speaker Larry Householder denied a request to extend employment protections to LGBTQ House employees, Ohio lawmakers decided to introduce a bill to ban employment and housing discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. ⁶⁵



YEAR IN REVIEW

LGBTQ+ Rights, Equity, and Liberation (cont'd)

And now the setbacks:

- In Tennessee, Representative Bruce Griffey (R-D75) recently introduced legislation requiring athletes participating in school-sanctioned sports to compete based on the sex they were assigned at birth. The bill states, "A school shall not accept any birth certificate for purposes of participation in an athletic or sporting event that has been revised or amended with respect to the sex of an athlete." Failure to comply would render the school ineligible to receive public state or local funds; impose a fine up to \$10,000; allow civil suits be brought against the officials who violate the rule; require the official's removal from office and bar them from holding public office, school administration positions, or principal positions for a period of 5 years. ⁶⁶
- The new Kentucky Student Privacy Act, which will be officially filed in 2020, intends on prohibiting transgender students from using the bathroom that matches their gender identity. ⁶⁷

Federal Action

This fall, all eyes were on the Supreme Court as it heard *Altitude Express Inc. v. Zarda*, *Bostock v. Clayton County*, and *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC*, all of which raise the question of whether or not sexual orientation and gender identity are covered by federal bans on sex discrimination. Zarda and Bostock were fired for being gay while Aimee Stephens of the Harris Funeral Homes case was fired for being transgender. This is a major test of the new Court and of a court without retired Justice Anthony Kennedy. Kennedy, a conservative Justice, authored the opinion to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act. Only 22 states explicitly ban discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, meaning that this case could leave millions of LGBTQ2IA+ people without workplace protections. ⁶⁸

While we wait to learn the Court's decision, Trump's Cabinet was actively working to release companies from rules protecting against discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation:

- Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, who earlier this year issued a rule allowing federally funded shelters to deny transgender people shelter or disregard their gender identity during placement, flippantly talked about 'concerns' regarding "'big, hairy men' trying to infiltrate women's homeless shelters." ⁶⁹
- While Carson was reinforcing bigotry in his department, his colleagues over at the Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule releasing grant recipients from requirements enforcing nondiscrimination protections. As a result, "the rule will allow anti-transgender discrimination in HIV and STI prevention programs, opioid programs, youth homelessness services, health professional training, substance use recovery programs, and many other life-saving services addressing crises with a disparate impact on transgender people in the US." ⁷⁰
- Finally, at the Department of Labor, the Administration announced a proposed rule to allow for religious exemptions under an Obama-era regulation that federal contractors cannot discriminate in hiring on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. ⁷¹



YEAR IN REVIEW

LGBTQ+ Rights, Equity, and Liberation (cont'd)

While the Executive Branch was working to end protections for LGBTQ2IA+ people, Congress was busy introducing new legislation to extend protections. Among the many bills introduced are:

- The Fair Pay for All Act of 2019, led by Representative Anthony Brown (D-MD-4), to require that prohibitions against sex discrimination in paying minimum wage explicitly include prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- The Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act of 2019, sponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), was introduced to “prohibit, as an unfair or deceptive act or practice, commercial sexual orientation conversion therapy.”
- The Every Child Deserves a Family Act, authored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative John Lewis (D-GA-5), would prohibit discrimination against foster youth on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.





YEAR IN REVIEW

Immigration

“Fear shouldn’t stop us from getting involved and educating ourselves on an issue that affects millions of people in our country. Fear didn’t stop my aunt from getting into the back of that truck. And for that, I will always be grateful”

— Selena Gomez, Actress & Executive Producer of *Living Undocumented*

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In the three months since we released the Immigration Rights Policy Pack, it’s fair to say very little good happened, but there sure was a build up of national horrors. To name one: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Justice were found to have created a fake university as “a sting operation that critics say was an entrapment scheme to lure foreign nationals into violating immigration law.”⁷³ We also learned that White House advisor Stephen Miller has been using information and rhetoric generated by white supremacist organizations and channeling it into the Administration’s immigration policy.⁷⁴ As a result of the inhumanity, a man from Cuba died by suicide in ICE custody in Louisiana.⁷⁵ What’s more, after learning that three young people died in U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s custody because of the flu, doctors made their way to detention centers to set up mobile clinics, but were refused entry upon arrival.⁷⁶

State Action

For a dose of positive state-level news, a federal judge just cleared the way for New York’s Green Light Law to take effect. The law allows undocumented individuals in the state to receive drivers licenses by accepting foreign-issued documents to prove identity and age. Earlier in the year, Rensselaer County Clerk Frank Merola attempted to sue the state over the law, but the District Court judge threw out the lawsuit this December.⁷⁷ New York joins 12 other states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Vermont and Washington—and Washington, DC in making drivers licenses available to undocumented individuals.

Federal Action

The devil works hard, but the Trump Administration works harder to advance anti-immigrant policies. In the past few months, the Administration released an interim final rule that would reduce the asylum cap; expedite removal proceedings and allow “immigration judges in regular removal proceedings to conduct a threshold screening to determine whether an alien is barred by a Safe Third Country agreement from applying for asylum.”⁷⁸ Separately, the Administration also rolled out a proposal to deny work visas to undocumented immigrants and asylum-seekers who have been convicted of a felony or arrested for certain crimes. This piggy backs off a Department of Homeland Security proposal to mandate asylum-seekers pay a fee in order to apply for a work visa.⁷⁹ Finally, Trump, for a second time, vetoed a joint resolution from Congress that would have overturned his emergency declaration at the southern border to aid construction of a wall.⁸⁰



YEAR IN REVIEW

Immigration (cont'd)

While Trump and Congress were fighting it out, federal court judges were blocking the Administration's efforts. In Texas, a District Court judge determined that the emergency declaration was unlawful and he issued an injunction against the diversion of funds to pay for the wall. He also said the city of El Paso has grounds to sue Trump and his Cabinet because "the country 'suffered reputational and economic injuries.'"⁸¹ The Administration will likely appeal the judge's decision.

This isn't the only immigration court case we are waiting on: In late June, the Supreme Court agreed to hear a case that will determine the future of DACA. After the Administration moved to end the program in 2017, lower courts successfully ruled to keep it in effect. This federal case, which was heard in November, will be the final arbitrator in the fight for DACA. A ruling is not expected until the spring. While it already appears the Supreme Court Justices are decided and split in their votes between conservatives and liberals, Chief Justice John Roberts may still be holding out. Roberts recently broke from his party when he ruled against adding a citizenship question to the 2020 census, so there is still hope that he may break away again.⁸²

Of the many immigration-related pieces of legislation introduced since September, here's a recap on a key few:

- Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kamala Harris (D-CA) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the Restricting Solitary Confinement in Immigration Detention Act to curb the use of solitary confinement in detention centers except in select cases and increase mental health support in the centers.
- Representatives Grace Meng (D-NY-6), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA-7), and Jesús "Chuy" García (D-IL-4) introduced the New Deal for New Americans Act to "establish critical assistance programs for immigrants and refugees to overcome common challenges such as language barriers and employment attainment, and help in breaking down barriers to naturalization."⁸³
- Representative Pramila Jayapal led the introduction of the HEAL for Immigrant Women and Families Act of 2019, which would "expand access to health care services, including sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services, for immigrants by removing legal and policy barriers to health insurance coverage."⁸⁴
- House lawmakers, led by Representative Jesús "Chuy" García introduced The New Way Forward Act, which would end mandatory immigration detention; stop the pipelines to deportation through the criminal legal system; block automatic deportation of people who have had contact with the criminal legal system; prohibit local police from engaging in immigration enforcement and reduce the increased over-policing of communities of color; and decriminalize border crossing without documentation.
- The House passed the relatively bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act to grant legal status to a very specific designation of undocumented farmworkers.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Menstrual Equity

"Menstrual hygiene is a right, not a luxury, and the tampon tax tells us that it's essentially a luxury. That assumption is one of our biggest barriers in front of us, so we need to take that down so we can continue to fight for menstrual equity."

— Nadya Okamoto, founder of PERIOD

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This year saw the first National Period Day, which consisted of 61 rallies in all 50 states, Washington, DC, and in 5 countries. Needless to say, this youth-led movement is a force to be reckoned with. And it's just getting started. After all of the banners were taken down and megaphones packed up after the rallies, PERIOD launched phase two: Free the Period, which calls for a take down of the tampon tax in all remaining states as well as increased pressure to provide menstrual products in schools.

State Action

While there is a great deal of work ahead, the menstrual momentum is in full swing. In the two months since National Period Day, we have gone from 35 to 32 states with the tampon tax. In early October, we indicated that Rhode Island was likely going to repeal the tax as part of its larger budget bill and that has since been signed into law.

Menstruators got a victory this month when the Utah State Legislature voted to ax the tampon tax as part of a major tax overhaul. Though stand-alone legislation to exempt menstrual products from sales tax had been introduced over the last four sessions, it never saw a vote.⁸⁶ This comes on the heels of Ohio's move to exempt menstrual products after Governor Mike Dewine signed SB26 into law. The legislation passed through the Republican-led General Assembly with an unanimous vote in the House and a vote of 30-1 in the Senate.

Out of the remaining states with the tax, State Representative Krystle Matthews (D-Ladson) positioned South Carolina to be among the 22 other states introducing legislation to move toward menstrual equity.⁸⁷ Wisconsin lawmakers, on the other hand, took a partial step forward and will now be offering free menstrual products in 24 state office buildings.⁸⁸

At an even more local level, the New Orleans City Council recently and unanimously approved a resolution to express support of an effort allowing local governments to decide whether or not to exempt menstrual products from sales tax. This resolution is purely symbolic, but hopefully will add weight to Representative-elect Aimee Adatto Freeman's pledge to introduce such legislation in the state House in 2020.⁸⁹

Finally, thanks to high school student leaders of PERIOD Eugene, the Eugene School Board passed a policy to provide free products in all middle and high school girls' and gender neutral bathrooms. Now, the young leaders are fighting to get them in every gender bathroom in every district.⁹⁰



YEAR IN REVIEW

Menstrual Equity (cont'd)

As the call to end period poverty becomes more normalized and is finding root in legislatures led by Republicans and Democrats, alike, the tide is moving in favor of menstrual equity. But we're still seeing backwards and downright creepy efforts to police menstruators' bodies. In fact, during a hearing to decide the fate of Missouri's last-standing abortion clinic, Missouri's health Director Dr. Randall Williams "admitted to keeping a spreadsheet that tracked the menstrual periods of its patients. According to the Kansas City Star, Williams said he had requested that the state's primary investigator identify patients who had undergone "failed abortions" at the St. Louis Planned Parenthood facility." Menstrual equity is part of the broader reproductive justice movement, so it is of no surprise that it is being used in efforts to weaponize reproduction. ⁹¹

Federal Action

Thanks to National Period Day and Representative Grace Meng's (D-NY-6) leadership, menstrual equity is also finding ground in the national discourse. Presidential candidates joined the call to action; Representatives Barbara Lee (D-CA-13), Ilhan Omar (D-MN-5), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY-12), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA-7), and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-7) all uplifted our joint video with De Lune to support the Menstrual Equity for All Act; and there are now 86 cosponsors of the Menstrual Equity for All Act.

The bill's cosponsor, Representative Joyce Beatty (D-OH-3) is also leading forward with her new Homeless Youth Menstrual Product Access Act of 2019. The legislation would allow grant recipients under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to provide menstrual products among their services.



YEAR IN REVIEW

On the Table

When we surround ourselves with passionate young people, our knowledge grows. Get together with your organization, a few friends, or your peers and talk about your process in learning or reexamining this topic. These questions are meant to aide your conversation, but feel free to explore ideas and questions of your own. Step outside your comfort zone. None of us have all the answers, that's why we need to work together. You are sure to bring something to the table that no one else considered. Your voice is meant to be heard. Let's hear what ideas you have on the table. Share only what you feel comfortable sharing, but be sure to share the space.

1. What does it mean to look at issues through a gendered and racial lens?
2. What does “gender equity issues” mean to you?
3. How do you think politicians/advocates/media typically approach “gender equity issues?”
4. How can you work to expand the notion of “gender equity?”
5. Why is it important to have young people engaged on these issues?
6. What topic did you feel most connected to this year? Why?
7. What was something you learned from this year’s Policy Packs?
8. What is a topic you want to take action on? What do you want to do about it?
9. How can you take action in your local community?
10. How can you take action with your lawmakers?
11. What topics should Platform cover going forward?



YEAR IN REVIEW

The Platform Pledge

- ✓ I pledge to make space for young women-identifying, non-binary, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, genderfluid, and femme voices in the rooms where decisions about their bodies, lives, and futures are made.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to end racial profiling and the criminalization of women, girls, and femme-identifying people of color.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to protect all immigrant and refugee rights and opportunities, and support viable paths to citizenship.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to secure economic and employment justice for all women and femme-identifying people.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to end sexual violence, gender-based violence, and guarantee protections and access to affirming resources for all survivors.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to end over-policing in Black, Brown, and LGBTQIA+ communities by state-sanctioned officials.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to end all forms of gun violence.
- ✓ I pledge to dismantle the colonizing history and ongoing colonizing culture of this country as well as center the history and present truths of indigenous and enslaved people in the creation of the land on which I govern or intend to govern.
- ✓ I pledge to pursue solutions to ensure full access to and protection of reproductive justice for all who need and want it.
- ✓ I pledge to promote, explore, and support sustainable solutions that advance environmental justice and eliminate environmental racism.
- ✓ I pledge to center communities that face systemic barriers, including communities of color; the disability community; American Indian and Alaska Native communities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual and intersex communities, and all other gender identities and sexual orientations; justice-involved communities; and systemically oppressed faiths with the understanding that liberation and progress will not come unless we protect and advocate for the most directly impacted.



YEAR IN REVIEW

Do Something

Take a stand and make your thoughts heard. We ask that in your outreach you do not state that your opinion is the official stance of Platform unless it is taken from our Platform Pledge. But you can certainly give Platform a shoutout for having the conversation.

Blog It *We know you have something to say*

Walk us through your perspective and rally people to your cause. Your posts will be featured on our website and social media.

Email your blog to: media@platformwomen.org, include "Blog Post" and a title in the subject line

Get On Social Media *This isn't #slacktivism*

According to a report from the Congressional Management Foundation, which surveyed Congressional Staff, "71 [percent of respondents] said social media comments directed to the Member/Senator by 'multiple constituents affiliated with a specific group or cause' would have 'some' or 'a lot' of influence on an undecided lawmaker." There you have it—tweet, Instagram, and post away on Facebook. #GiveMeAPlatform.



[@PlatformWomen](https://twitter.com/PlatformWomen) | facebook.com/PlatformWomen | [@PlatformWomen](https://www.instagram.com/PlatformWomen)

Ask Your Lawmaker to Take the Platform Pledge *If you want our votes, protect our rights*

Young women-identifying, non-binary, gender nonconforming, and femme folx across the country are rising up to take ownership for our democracy and our future. Platform launched our Pledgemaker series to help us make informed decisions as we head into the voting booths and connect us to lawmakers who pledge to advance necessary legislation.

Pledgemakers are not Platform-endorsed candidates or lawmakers, but rather individuals who completed our questionnaire and made the Platform Pledge

Pledgemakers for the 2018 Midterm Election Cycle:

We are honored to have Representatives Bonnie Watson Coleman (NJ-12) and Yvette Clarke (NY-09); Representative-elect Tom Malinowski (NJ-07); and former candidates Stephany Rose Spaulding (CO-05), Anita Malik (AZ-06), Lorie Burch (TX-03), Mindi Messmer (NH-01), Felicia French (AZ-LD-06), Erika Johnson (MA- 19th Middlesex) as our first pledgemakers.

What can you do about it?

Set up a meeting, call, or write your lawmaker to tell them why this Pledge matters to you (as their constituent), what it means for your neighbors in the community, and specifically ASK them to take the Pledge. Want help with your outreach? Email jennifer@platformwomen.org and she'll walk you through the process. Then, send your lawmaker to platformwomen.org/the-pledge/ so they can take the Pledge online.



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