

The Best Mother's Day Gifts From Congress: Policies Moms Need to Thrive

May 2019

Flowers, chocolate, and breakfast in bed are nice, but moms and working women need and deserve so much more on Mother's Day and throughout the year. While our country claims to value mothers and families, in reality our policies are making childbirth more dangerous, pushing working moms out of the labor force, perpetuating a punishing gender wage gap and blocking people from deciding when and if to become a parent.

Below are some of the ways members of Congress can make their actions match their rhetoric by helping to improve the health, economic security and overall well-being of America's moms.

Improve Maternal Mortality, Particularly for Black Women

Moms in the United States die at a higher rate than in any other developed country.¹ For Black moms, the statistics are even worse. Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth than white women, and are more likely to experience maternal health complications than white women.

To address the maternal health crisis, Congress needs to pass legislation that improves maternal health for all women, and ensures that maternal health outcomes are equally good for everyone living in the United States. Policies should address inequitable social conditions, including systemic racism, bias and poverty. Policies should expand patient-centered care that is culturally appropriate, and support community-based models that provide quality care to low-income and high-risk women. This Mother's Day, we urge Congress to pass the MOMMA's Act, the MOMS Act, the MOMMIES Act and the Quality Care for Moms and Babies Act. All of these bills are focused on eliminating maternal health disparities and improving maternal health by expanding access to postpartum Medicaid coverage, authorizing funding for maternal mortality review committees, and developing quality measures. Moms need more legislation like this to support themselves and their families not only on Mother's Day, but throughout the year.

Tear Down Barriers to Comprehensive Reproductive Health Care

Nearly one in four women in the United States will have an abortion by age 45,² and almost 60 percent of women who access abortion care are mothers.³ In addition, 60 percent of all women of reproductive age, and more than 99 percent of sexually active women aged 15-44, have used contraception.⁴ A woman's access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion care, helps enable her to participate equally in society. Having the freedom to decide if, when, and how to start or grow a family benefits a woman's health, education, career, earnings, and ability to save for retirement. Women should not be stigmatized for their decisions, but many women face multiple barriers to accessing the reproductive health care they need.

This Mother's Day, we need Congress to support the Title X national family planning program and ensure that women can see their trusted providers when accessing reproductive health care. We need them to pass the [EACH Woman Act](#), which would allow all women, regardless of where they live or work or how they are insured, to better access abortion care. And we need Congress to pass the [Women's Health Protection Act](#), which would stop the onslaught of harmful restrictions that push abortion care even further out of reach.

Guarantee Safe, Just Workplaces

Women make up nearly half of the U.S. workforce. Mothers are key breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of families with minor children.⁵ Discrimination, harassment and a lack of supportive workplace policies is unjust and puts women – including mothers – on an unlevelled playing field. Moms need paid family and medical leave to address their own serious health conditions during and after pregnancy, care for their newborn or newly adopted child, and to care for family members, including children with serious health conditions. Moms also need paid sick days so they don't have to choose between their paycheck and keeping their job and taking their sick child to the doctor. This Mother's Day, we urge Congress to pass the [FAMILY Act](#) and the [Healthy Families Act](#). Moms also need policies that would prevent and remedy workplace sexual harassment like the [EMPOWER Act](#) and the [BE HEARD in the Workplace Act](#), as well as the [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#), which would provide workplace accommodations during pregnancy so they can keep working without risking their own health or the health of their pregnancy. The U.S. Senate should follow the lead of the House of Representatives and pass the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#) to help close the wage gap so mothers can support themselves and their families.

¹ Martin, N., Cillekens, E., & Freitas, A. (2017, July 17). Lost Mothers. *ProPublica*. Retrieved 6 May 2019, from <https://www.propublica.org/article/lost-mothers-maternal-health-died-childbirth-pregnancy>

² Guttmacher Institute. (2017, October). *Abortion is a common experience for U.S. women, despite dramatic declines in rates*. [News release]. Retrieved 4 April 2019, from <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/abortion-common-experience-us-women-despite-dramatic-declines-rates>

³ Guttmacher Institute. *United States Abortion Demographics*. Retrieved 7 May 2019, from <https://www.guttmacher.org/united-states/abortion/demographics>

⁴ Guttmacher Institute (2018, July). *Contraceptive Use in the United States*. Retrieved 7 May 2019, from <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/contraceptive-use-united-states>

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, February). *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: Table 3, Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by age, sex, and race*. Retrieved 6 May 2019, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.pdf>; Glynn, S. J. (2016, December). *Breadwinning Mothers Are Increasingly the U.S. Norm*. Retrieved May 2019, from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/12/19/295203/breadwinning-mothers-are-increasingly-the-u-snorm/>

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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