

October, 2021

# Zonta International 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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## Participate in Zonta Advocacy

If you find the process for passage of federal laws bewildering, watch this 5-minute [video](#), which gives an excellent overview of the various steps in the process. Understanding the process is invaluable when advocating for the passage of a particular law.

Thanks to Tammy Gibbons from the Zonta Club of Longview for her idea of including an Advocacy Minute at each meeting. Please share your ideas.

## US Women's Caucus at the UN

The U.S. Women's Caucus at the UN (not to be confused with the Zonta US Caucus) has a new [website](#) which contains a history of the Caucus, the Board of Directors, the Caucus's latest statements and tweets, and many short Global Feminist Briefs about various matters related to global feminism (CSW, Beijing Platform for Action, UN Women, CEDAW, Women, Peace, and Security, etc). The website is intended to be a resource for those new to the UN CSW so that they can quickly learn about the international space for women. Shout out to Zonta Club of Houston Advocacy Chair, Pam Perraud, who contributed to the briefs, as did other Zonta members.

## Child Marriage Update

UNICEF USA recently included a tweet from the Zonta USA Twitter account in their blog post on ending child marriage in the U.S.. The UNICEF post identifies the biggest barrier to ending child marriage in the U.S. as a lack of awareness, among the public and legislators.

Find a way your club can help remedy that situation later in this bul.

Personal stories of survivors make the issue more real. An [article](#) from the California Health Report (thanks Mary Quinn, ZC Houston for sharing) contains moving stories as well as clear explanations of the arguments for (and a few against) 18 as a minimum age for marriage.

The article highlights a particular Catch-22 for children who marry. Child brides are often the victims of various types of abuse, both before and after the marriage. In fact, these marriages are often used to allow a sexual abuser to escape prosecution. Once married, the child generally loses all independence and has few options to keep the abuse from continuing.

Domestic violence shelters accept adults with children but generally cannot accept minors not accompanied by an adult, particularly if they bring children of their own. Youth shelters are usually for homeless minors, not those escaping child marriage. In fact, shelters are required to report an unaccompanied minor to a legal guardian or CPS, which can be terrifying for young people trying to escape an abusive husband or coercive parents! Child marriage often traps children in an abusive marriage.

## Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights

The Zonta US Caucus issued the [statement](#) below on Texas law SB8, in keeping with the [Zonta International Statement on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health](#).

"On August 31, 2021, the US Supreme Court failed to prevent the implementation of Texas law SB8, which not only prevents women from seeking abortions after six weeks of pregnancy but incentivizes private citizens to sue abortion providers or anyone aiding a person in obtaining such an abortion. In addition to harming women's rights to bodily autonomy, this law circumvents normal legal practice and eliminates the accountability of states to follow federal law.

The Zonta USA Caucus asserts that reproductive rights are human rights and a prerequisite for poverty eradication and for positive sustainable development. The Caucus reiterates that every person should have the freedom to make decisions about their bodies and to safely and privately access healthcare. The Texas law is unacceptable, as it disrespects women's ability to make choices and sets a dangerous precedent in turning citizens against one another by delegating enforcement to private individuals.

Members of the Zonta USA Caucus will use every avenue available to advocate for and to uphold women's full and equal rights in the United States in keeping with Zonta International's objects, which include promoting justice and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

## Reproductive Freedom/ Reproductive Coercion

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) also issued a [statement](#) on Texas S.B.8 as it relates to reproductive coercion, which exists at the intersection of "patterns of power and control as a part of intimate partner violence". Reproductive coercion involves behavior used to pressure or coerce someone into becoming pregnant, continuing a pregnancy, or ending a pregnancy against their will "through the use of manipulation, intimidation, threats, and/or actual acts of violence".

The statement addresses the particular impacts that the legislation has on domestic violence victims and provides the following astounding findings of the [2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#):

- an estimated two million women in the US have ever become pregnant as a result of intimate partner rape;
- when interpersonal violence occurs in a relationship, the chance of an unintended pregnancy doubles; and
- 6--22% of women terminate their pregnancies because they are in an abusive relationship.

Learn more reproductive coercion in a series of videos from [Voices4Change: Episode 1, Episode 2, Episode 3](#). And, for a better understanding of the pattern of coercion and control in domestic violence, don't miss the documentary ["Finding Jenn's Voice"](#), a film that "paints a picture of the anatomy of abusive relationships that looks beyond the black eye." The film shockingly reveals that a recent study shows that the leading cause of death in pregnancy is homicide!

## Equal Rights Amendment

If the status of the ERA confuses you, you are not alone. Although a sufficient number of states (38) have ratified the ERA, the 38th occurred only recently, well after the March 22, 1979 deadline Congress established when they introduced the Amendment. In March, The U.S. House voted to eliminate the artificial deadline for passage. Now we must [write](#) and urge the Senate to pass the bi-partisan S.J. Res. 1 to do the same. The Caucus particularly needs advocates in Ohio, Missouri, Utah, West Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Alaska, Alabama, Iowa, Louisiana, Nebraska, or Wyoming, to contact your Senators. Find details, sample wording and a toolkit [here](#).

In a separate process, several state Attorneys General filed suit to have the ERA become a part of the Constitution claiming the deadline is invalid. The suit was dismissed but has been [appealed](#).

Another step ERA supporters are taking is to ask AG Merrick Garland to reverse a directive from Former AG, Bill Barr, advising the Congressional archivist to refrain from publishing the ERA upon passage by the 38th state because the deadline had passed. Find background arguments [here](#). Ask Attorney General Garland (sample language [here](#)) and President Biden (language [here](#)) asking that AG Barr's memo be rescinded.

Complicating things further, five states, (Idaho, Kentucky, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Tennessee), after ratifying the ERA, have tried to rescind their ratifications, the legal validity of which is unclear. Watch here for updates.

Learn about why passage of the ERA is important to addressing gender based violence elsewhere in this bulletin.

## Family Violence

[The Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2021](#) (HB2119) is continuing to move through Congress. The bill modifies, expands, and reauthorizes through FY2026 the Family Violence and Prevention Services program, expanding resources for survivors and initiatives to end domestic violence.

Specifically, the bipartisan bill will increase funding for domestic violence programs including investment in prevention; expand support for and access to culturally specific programs to address the needs of racial and ethnic minority populations around domestic violence; strengthen the capacity of Indian tribes to more fully respond to domestic violence in their communities; and create a new grant program for underserved populations including services provided by tribal domestic violence coalitions.

Please continue to [urge](#) your Senators and Representatives to support this vital legislation.

## Supporting Indigenous People

Many people are becoming aware of the international crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, including women and girls. Join ZI, the Zonta Club of Billings and the Montana Native Women's Coalition on October 11 at 10:00 a.m., U.S. Central time for a conversation focusing on how Zontians around the globe can be involved in increasing awareness of the MMIP crisis. Learn also how to work with Indigenous organizations to find solutions for prevention, aid victims and their families, and empower Indigenous women. Register [here](#).

## Human Rights in Focus

The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO) invites you to a free, virtual event, "Human Rights in Focus," November 4-6. The forum will include presentations addressing topics such as gender-specific challenges facing female refugees; the latest on the status of women in Afghanistan; prevention of child trafficking; early and forced marriage in the US; and the role of strangulation in all forms of gender-based violence and the role that victim centered investigations play in catching and stopping rapists and killers.

A child marriage panel will include Fraydi Reiss from Unchanged at Last and Zonta Caucus co-convenor Bobbee Cardillo, who will share Zonta's efforts to address the issue.

The event is designed not only to raise awareness on women's human rights issues, but also to share ways to make a difference on these topics. Attendees can join whatever portion of the event they wish. Don't miss this great opportunity to learn about the latest in women's human rights issues. Find details and registration link [here](#).

## Help End Child Marriage

Zonta D10 invites other districts to join us to host virtual or in-person postcard parties asking our state legislators to end child marriage, in observance of the 16 Days Campaign. Unchained at Last provides postcard templates with language specific to each state, and district chairs or club reps can request postcards for their state [here](#). Members can write the postcards on their own, at in-person club events, or during a Zoom virtual postcard party hosted by D10 to which all are invited. Watch this space for the date and details next month.

## Climate Change

ZI hosted a webinar on Women and Climate Change in September as part of the Zonta Advocacy series. If you missed it you can watch a recording [here](#). The webinar gives an overview of gender-specific challenges that women experience globally due to climate change, as well as the comprehensive approach that Zonta clubs in Australia have taken to the issue. In response to the urgent need to address climate challenges, the Zonta US Caucus decided to add a committee on Climate Change so we can share with our clubs ways that you can have an impact. Watch for future announcements.

## Influencing White House Gender Policy

Recently, several US Caucus members attended a virtual White House Listening Session on Gender Based Violence and the ERA. The session was an opportunity to influence President Biden's National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence by demonstrating the importance of the ERA to ending GBV and show that GBV affects every aspect of women's and girls' lives. The White House will use the comments to inform their analysis and findings to be included in the Plan.

The Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor on Gender-Based Violence at the White House and a Gender Policy Council Special Advisor to the White House Gender Policy Council attended the session. Only a few people had the chance to speak, but comments in the chat will also be noted by the White House advisors.

A recording of the session should be available soon.