



FEBRUARY 2026 | ISSUE 28

Public Policy News

A monthly dispatch from the AAUW California Public Policy Team

NEW CA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Legislature reconvened January 5, 2026

The 2025-26 legislative session started on December 2, 2024 and will end on November 30, 2026. For the 2025-2026 two-year legislative session, California legislators are limited to introducing a maximum of 35 bills per member. This is a significant reduction in allowed bill introductions, as previous limits were higher (50 for Assemblymembers and 40 for Senators)

As 2026 is the second year of this session, many legislators will be focused on moving bills introduced in 2025. That said, there will still be a large number of new bills. The Public Policy Committee will be working to select the 30 bills most aligned with our values for AAUW California's 2026 Legislative Agenda.

This year we are sponsoring two bills related to human trafficking education and protection. The next issue of Public Policy News will include additional details on these bills, which are still in development. Stay tuned!

Upcoming Events

Mark Your Calendars!



AAUW National webinar: Promoting AAUW Education Values Through School Board Advocacy. An ACLU expert will provide an overview of the legal landscape. AAUW state leaders will speak about what's happening across the states, including our own Kathi Harper who will share an update of AAUW California's School Board Project. **Thursday February 12, 2026 at 4:00pm PT.** Register [HERE](#).

Lobby Days Team Leaders Q&A: **Thursday February 6, 2026 at 7:00pm PT.** All Lobby Days participants, including non-team leaders, are welcome. Zoom link [HERE](#).

CCAMP Project Launch Webinar: **Friday, February 27, 2026 at 1:30pm PT.** See p.10 for additional information about CCAMP. Registration link [HERE](#).

Lobby Days Training webinar: **Monday March 23, 2026 at 7:00pm PT.** THIS WEBINAR IS MANDATORY for all Lobby Days participants. Register [HERE](#).

If you missed it...

- AAUW National webinar: The Future of Higher Education. Find the recording [HERE](#).
- AAUW Turlock/Modesto Branch event: Reproductive Health Care Post Dobbs. Find the recording [HERE](#).
- AAUW Silicon Valley Branch event: A discussion about the Supreme Court and attacks on reproductive rights featuring [Leah Litman](#). Find the recording [HERE](#).

BRANCH PUBLIC POLICY CHAIRS' MEETING

NEXT PEER GROUP MEETING

Friday February 6, 2026
at 1:30pm Pacific
ZOOM LINK [HERE](#)



Click [HERE](#) for meeting information.



Peer Group Meetings will be bi-monthly on Fridays at 1:30pm.

All are welcome!

If you miss a Peer Group Meeting, Recordings and Slide Decks can be found [HERE](#) under Public Policy

2026 Meetings:

Fri Feb 6 at 1:30pm
Fri Apr 3 at 1:30pm
Fri Jun 5 at 1:30pm



SIGN UP FOR ACTION ALERTS [HERE](#).

WHERE IS THAT?

Key links to your public policy resources:

- [Google Workspace](#)
- Contact us at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org
- Tell us about your branch public policy events by filling out this [form](#).

FOLLOW US ON RESISTBOT [HERE](#).



AAUW Letter Defending Dept. of Education

Thank you for answering the Call to Action!

In November 2025, the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to move key education programs to other agencies – hollowing out civil rights enforcement and moving core K-12 and higher ed. functions into agencies that focus on labor, health, or foreign policy.

We reached out to Branch Presidents and Public Policy Chairs, asking their branches to sign on to letters to our U.S. Senators urging them to conduct congressional oversight and block the unlawful transfer of education programs and responsibilities. **Thank you for the overwhelming response - 67 branches signed on to the letters!**

Click the links to see the fully signed letters to [Senator Padilla](#) and [Senator Schiff](#). You can also submit a version of this letter individually to your senators [via Resistbot](#).

Three Steps to Take Action in February

Focus: Defend and Advance Reproductive Justice

Taking action is as easy as 1-2-3! Each month we provide you with a short list of targeted action-items focused on a topic-area that we care about. This month our focus is on DEFENDING AND ADVANCING REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE.

If you want more options for action, please visit the [AAUW California public policy website](#), stop by our peer group meetings, or visit the [Take Action!](#) spreadsheet (soon-to-be website for easier navigation).



Take Action: Defend and Advance Reproductive Justice

1

STEP 1: Self-Focused: Education

- If you missed it, watch the recent AAUW Silicon Valley branch webinar with [Professor Leah Litman's](#) update on legislative challenges to reproductive health and what we can do to respond. Find the recording [HERE](#).
- See the excellent program hosted by the AAUW Turlock branch exploring issues in reproductive health care and medical school training since the Dobbs decision. Find the recording [HERE](#).
- Watch the PBS documentary, "Growing Up Trans", which shares the perspectives of parents, doctors, and kids on navigating gender and identity. Find the documentary [HERE](#).
- Listen to this powerful and deeply moving podcast episode from The Daily: "[Parenting a Trans Kid in Trump's America](#)".
- Watch this very informative episode of John Oliver's Last Week Tonight about trans athletes. Find the episode [HERE](#).
- Read the article about Reproductive Freedom on p.6-7 of this issue of PP News.



2

STEP 2: Other-Focused: Education & Connection

- Organize a watch-party for one of the excellent documentaries listed above. Pair your watch-party with an opportunity to have a group discussion about something you learned or something that surprised you.
- Share your favorite resources with 3-5 people via word of mouth or social media.



3

STEP 3: Politically-Focused

- If you've not already done so, please [click here to download the 5 Calls application](#). Once in the app, click on...
- [Protect Funding and Access to Gender-Affirming Care \(UPDATED 12/19\)](#), and [Defend Reproductive Rights](#), to select from a menu of actions



Standing In Solidarity With Minnesota

We Demand Accountability, Stop ICE

AAUW California Public Policy has created the following petition language, regarding ICE activities in Minnesota, and throughout the country. You can send this statement to your Senators via Resistbot by clicking [HERE](#) or you can copy and paste this language to send to your representatives manually, via email.

Petition Language:

The recent activities of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Minneapolis have been horrific - an escalation of an already socially and legally questionable series of law enforcement actions. As in other communities across the country, masked ICE officers have terrorized law-abiding people, ruptured tight-knit communities, broken happy families, and stolen innocent lives.

The presence of ICE in our communities has also trampled on our individual and collective civil rights, ensuring regular violations of our fundamental rights to due process, to privacy, to protest, and to humane treatment—rights that are afforded to everyone who steps foot on American soil. A sharp increase in racial and ethnic profiling, based on the language that one speaks or the color of one's skin, has accompanied ICE activities.

All of this has occurred, ironically, in the name of making our communities safer.

With gratitude, empathy, and love, we stand in solidarity with the people of Minneapolis. We condemn the tactics of federal officers who continue to interfere with our rights and who unnecessarily take our lives.

We must see a return to policies and practices that seek to ensure that all who live, work, and visit the United States are free from violence in all its forms and wherever it occurs. We must ensure that anyone subject to harassment or violence based on race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality must have full protection and recourse under the law.

Accordingly, we demand action. You must rein in these violations. We demand that you, our representatives, protect our civil and constitutional rights, which are being regularly infringed upon by ICE officers.

For Alex Jeffrey Pretti

Murdered by I.C.E. January 24, 2026

by Amanda Gorman

We wake with
no words, just woe
& wound. Our own country shoot
ing us in the back is not just brutal
ity; it's jarring betrayal; not enforcement,
but execution. A message: *Love your people & you
will die.* Yet our greatest threat isn't the outsiders
among us, but those among us who never look
within. Fear not the those without papers, but those
without conscience. Know that to care intensively,
united, is to carry both pain-dark horror for today
& a profound, daring hope for tomorrow. We can feel
we have nothing to give, & still believe this world wait
ing, trembling to change. If we cannot find words, may
we find the will; if we ever lose hope, may we never lose our
humanity. The only undying thing is mercy, the courage to open
ourselves like doors, hug our neighbor,
& save one more bright, impossible life.



Upcoming Decision Coming in Legal Challenge To Proposition 50

By Missy Maceyko, Co-chair, AAUW California Public Policy Committee

As you all know given your impressive get out the vote efforts, Proposition 50 was approved by California voters in a special election in November 2025, passing with 64% of the vote. Its passage allows for the state constitution to be amended for redistricting mid-cycle, and a new district map used in California from 2026 through 2030.

But will these new California maps go into effect? This depends on an upcoming decision by the Supreme Court of the United States, which is expected to be issued by February 9, 2026. We have some indication of how the Court may decide, given previous decisions issued about redistricting in Texas in California over the past few months.

Texas

The effort to pass Proposition 50 was triggered in response to problematic redistricting efforts in Texas where, in August 2025, under pressure from the U.S. Department of Justice, the Republican dominated Texas legislature reworked state district maps, adopting a new district configuration that would likely allow Republicans to gain five more seats in the U.S. House.

These redistricting efforts in Texas met an immediate legal challenge, with civil rights groups claiming that Texas legislators had redrawn districts in ways that were heavily dependent on race, and thus a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. In November 2025, a district court agreed and in a detailed 160-page decision, prohibited Texas from using their redrawn maps in 2026. However, this lower court ruling was put on hold by the Supreme Court on December 4, 2025. Justices Kagan, Sotomayor, and Jackson issued a dissent in this decision, stating:

We are a higher court than the District Court, but we are not a better one when it comes to making such a fact-based decision. That is why we are supposed to use a clear-error standard of review—why we are supposed to uphold the District Court’s decision that race-based line-drawing occurred (even if we would have ruled differently) so long as it is plausible. Without so much as a word about that standard, this Court today announces that Texas may run next year’s elections with a map the District Court found to have violated all our oft-repeated strictures about the use of race in districting. Today’s order disrespects the work of a District Court that did everything one could ask to carry out its charge—that put aside every consideration except getting the issue before it right. And today’s order disrespects the millions of Texans whom the District Court found were assigned to their new districts based on their race. Because this Court’s precedents and our Constitution demand better, I respectfully dissent.

California

Three days after Proposition 50 passed in November 2025, a group of Republicans in California sued to block the use of the new map. In their suit, they made claims similar to those made by the civil rights groups in Texas, suggesting that California voters had been duped into voting for a map that violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. Specifically, their legal challenge claimed that race was the primary factor in redrawing the new districts passed by Proposition 50, with an attempt to problematically favor Latinos in the new districts.

Upcoming Prop 50 Decision, Con.

In January 2026, a district court in Los Angeles rejected these claims, saying that there was little evidence to support the contention that the new maps were driven by race—especially as the new map has the same number of majority-Latino districts as the old map (16). With this ruling in district court, the new maps passed by Proposition 50 could go into effect, as intended, for the 2026 midterm elections.

On January 20, 2026, with the midterms in California only a few months away, and filing deadlines for candidates approaching, the decision was appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States. The Trump Administration filed a brief in support of this appeal on January 22, 2026.

What To Expect Next



Timing. While the appeal asks the case to be resolved prior to the February 9, 2026, opening date for candidates in California to file candidacy declarations in advance of this year's June primary, it is unclear whether this request will be honored.



Who Will Decide? Procedural, emergency, and time-sensitive requests are often heard on the “emergency docket”—which you may know as the “shadow docket.” Some time-sensitive requests on this docket are decided by one Supreme Court Justice, the Justice that oversees the district from which the appeal originated—which in this case would be Justice Kagan. However, given the potential nationwide importance of this appeal, it will likely be decided by the full court. This means that the appeal will need five votes to succeed.



Reasoning. The Court's decision on Texas redistricting should influence their decision on California redistricting, leading the court to find in favor of keeping the new district maps approved by passage of Proposition 50. Why? While there was stronger reason to step in in the Texas case, as there was stronger evidence of racially motivated redistricting, and while there was no input by voters in Texas, one of the primary reasons the Court gave for not intervening was timing—in essence, when they ruled on the Texas case in November 2025, the Justices who wrote the majority opinion said that it was already far too late into the 2026 primary election season for a “lower federal court” to step in to “alter the election rules” (go back to the pre-August maps).

Texas has also made a strong showing of irreparable harm and that the equities and public interest favor it. “This Court has repeatedly emphasized that lower federal courts should ordinarily not alter the election rules on the eve of an election.” Republican National Committee v. Democratic National Committee, 589 U. S. 423, 424 (2020) (per curiam). The District Court violated that rule here. The District Court improperly inserted itself into an active primary campaign, causing much confusion and upsetting the delicate federal-state balance in elections.

So, by the Court's own logic, they should decide in favor of the voters in California. However, only time will tell.

AAUW California Public Policy will offer updates on these developments on BlueSky. You can also watch for updates from the knowledgeable Court watchers at [SCOTUS Blog](#).

Abortion Access or Reproductive Freedom?

The Positive Turn Toward Reproductive Freedom and Intersectionality Post-Dobbs

By Missy Maceyko, Co-chair, Public Policy Committee

In November, Ginny Hatfield and I attended an in-person meeting for one of our key coalition partners, the California Coalition for Reproductive Freedom (CCRF). Because most of our work with CCRF has been done virtually, I was excited to finally meet some of the members of this coalition in-person. I was doubly excited to meet them at the historic LGBTQ center in downtown Los Angeles, currently the largest LGBTQ organization in the world.



CCRF was founded in the 1980s to help advance “the effectiveness of policy and advocacy in women's health and reproductive health rights” in California. AAUW California is a member of this coalition because we have long had similar goals, focusing our advocacy heavily on issue areas like sexual and reproductive healthcare (e.g., abortion and contraception access), maternal health (e.g., healthcare access), and parenting families (e.g. access to quality affordable childcare).

As of 2026, CCRF has expanded their original focus, stating that they “advance reproductive freedom for all.” This shift in language aligns CCRF with larger trends, including our own at AAUW California, as organizations that have historically focused almost exclusively on women and/or on a narrower set of issues, like abortion and contraception access, have shifted their name and their mandate. Even NARAL Pro-Choice America, a famous abortion rights organization, has re-named itself “Reproductive Freedom for All.”

Why the seemingly expanded focus with the shift toward “reproductive freedom for all”? In a moment when abortion access is shrinking for the first time in 50 years, should we not more narrowly focus on women and reproductive health rights?

The answer, of course, is no. This moment is not the time to have a narrow focus. Most organizations centering women's rights and gender equity have long acknowledged that whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. While we can have specific priority areas, we should do so with a better understanding of our common experiences. We should work in coalitions with an eye to how our priority areas are connected, creating strategies that clearly help us to advance together..

The move toward the language of “reproductive freedom for all” is also an extension of the intentional move to actively diversify historically white-dominant organizations; to honor the often unrecognized women of color who have been critical in reproductive justice fights of the past; and to more directly acknowledge the compounding burdens faced by women of color, whose fight for racial justice had already been inseparable from the fight for gender justice.

Abortion Access or Reproductive Freedom, con

The shift toward “reproductive freedom for all,” as indicated by the choice of location for our CCRF meeting, also points to the fact that any focus on women’s rights and/or reproductive health is equally inseparable from the larger fight for LGBTQ+ rights—a collective struggle connected through shared gender marginalization and the fight for our bodily autonomy. We all fight to be who we are because of and in spite of assumptions about gender, which influences our ability to make informed decisions about our bodies and our families, and our support and inclusion in the workplace. We all deserve to be paid equally and treated humanely regardless of others’ assumptions about how we should look and act, based on our sex/gender/sexuality.

These connections between shared struggles and fundamental freedoms have long existed, but after the overturning of Roe v. Wade, these connections have become perhaps more apparent. This can be seen in the Dobbs decision, which overturned Roe, where Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas signaled that similar reasoning might be used to roll back contraception access and marriage equality.

But really, these shared struggles are even bigger. As a women’s organization that has historically focused on reproductive health, the turn to reproductive freedom means that we acknowledge the many and intersecting ways that marginalization happens, and how they are connected. In essence, we will not achieve our goals related to reproductive health unless we protect the fundamental freedoms of all people and support democratic norms. So, to truly insulate abortion access and reproductive health, we **MUST** do things like protect the rights of trans women, support the inclusion of non-binary kids, advocate for the diversification of leadership, and push the need for affordable housing. These are all connected. We must also protect the democratic norms that are the bedrock of our advocacy, protesting against the militarization of law enforcement, resisting anti-immigrant policies, pushing back against the dismantling of public education, and calling out rising authoritarianism.

Accordingly, one of my favorite parts of the in-person CCRF meeting was a working session where we shared ideas about how we might strategically act, as individual organizations and as a coalition, in the face of federal challenges to the things we care about:

- Sexual and reproductive health care
- Maternal health and pregnancy justice
- Parenting families
- Reproductive health care work force and clinic infrastructure
- Protecting trans communities, immigrant communities, people with disabilities, people in incarceration systems, and other historically marginalized populations

The work of CCRF and AAUW California, and the move toward the language of reproductive freedom, gives me hope. It shows awareness of the need for all marginalized groups to come together—and through forums like CCRF meetings—provides an actual forum for us to actively work in coalition to preserve our fundamental rights and plan for our collective futures.



Celebrating International Women's Day March 8th, 2026

By Asha Bajaj, Member AAUW California Public Policy Committee

"Oftentimes today looking back, we think about discrete and distinct movements. We think that the Black movement was one movement and then that the Chicano movement was over here and then there was the Native American movement, but all those movements, and the individuals within those movements, were connected and we knew that one movement would not be successful without the other." – Angela Davis

"Human rights are women's rights" This declaration by Hillary Clinton at the Beijing conference in 1995 to mark the forward progress of women's rights-expansion globally seems to ring a little hollow today. In 2026, we are now watching the erosion of basic women's rights throughout the world, a widespread turning back of the progress we have made on so many fronts; from reproductive rights, to access to education and income inequality. In the United States, this backward movement is compounded by the stagnation of important legislation and constitutional changes, including the Equal Rights Amendment and the Equality Act.

However, the fight goes on, as we watch women from all over the world, from the United States to Iran to Ireland, standing up to once again demand more from their governments. It is in this context that we once again celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th.



While International Women's Day has a much longer history, marked for the first time in March 1911 by over a million people in Austria-Hungary, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland demanding women's right to vote, hold public office, and acquire gainful employment, we now tend to associate the holiday with the United Nations, which began celebrating International Women's Day in 1975. It has since been commemorated annually by the UN, with each year's observance centered on a particular theme or issue within women's rights.

The theme for 2026 is "Give to Gain." Represented visually by a gesture of outstretched hands to symbolize a request for both help and connection, this theme was selected to emphasize the power of collective generosity, reciprocity, and support in expanding opportunities for women. Individual giving may be financial, through donations, but it also means offering knowledge, resources, infrastructure, visibility, advocacy, education, training, mentoring, or time. These all contribute to women's advancement, which helps create a more supportive and interconnected world, overall. When women thrive, we all rise.

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As part of this campaign, the UN is also calling on governments to "act boldly and decisively for all women and girls" in six priority areas that they feel can make a big difference to women's lives—areas that parallel AAUW California's public policy priorities in many ways.

- Fostering a Digital Revolution, defined as backing the Global Digital Compact so that everyone can benefit from technology and its potential.
- Targeting Zero Violence by investing in women's rights organizations already working to prevent and end violence.
- Aiming for Freedom from Poverty by investing in social protection systems and public services to give women an equal chance to thrive.
- Establishing Greater Peace and Security by supporting women's leadership to build peace.
- Offering More Decision-Making Power to women everywhere by adopting laws that support women's participation in politics and business.
- Centering Climate Justice by prioritizing not only climate action itself, but women and girls in climate action, boosting their leadership and access to healthy environments and green jobs.

Let us not forget eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. On March 8th, and every other day, we will continue to stand together and demand more, from ourselves, our communities, and our governments. As we all celebrate, please consider what you will Give to Gain gender equality in 2026.

City Council Action & Monitoring Project (CCAMP)

New Special Project Is Launching!

CCAMP is a special project being launched by AAUW California Public Policy to provide action-based resources that support local advocacy and relationship-building with city councils and boards of supervisors.

In 2026, we will focus our advocacy on local anti-discrimination education and protection. Why anti-discrimination? As we've witnessed all too blatantly, the federal government can no longer be counted upon to protect our citizens from discriminatory practices; in fact, their actions on numerous fronts speak to the opposite effect. Protections taken for granted are now reliant on state, county and city governments.

To this end, through CCAMP, we guide you to take stock of what your city/county is already doing to teach residents about anti-discrimination—to dispel misinformation, educate, and provide resources and pathways for reporting. This year, the project will rollout as follows:

Launch Webinar: Friday, February 27th at 1:30pm PT (register [HERE](#))

- **Step 1:** Build Your Team (March-April 2026)
- **Step 2:** Learn More About Your City/County (March-May 2026)
- **Step 3:** Attend A Council/Board Meeting & Make A Public Comment (April-June 2026)
- **Step 4:** Meet One-On-One With A Council/Board Member & Make Specific Asks (June-September 2026)
- **Step 5:** Report Back to AAUW California Public Policy (ongoing)

Please see this [overview document](#) for additional information and join us on February 27th for our launch webinar, where we will answer all of your questions and provide you with a toolkit filled with resources. In the interim, you can also email us your questions at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org.

Supporting All Women & Girls

Demonstrating Allyship and Inclusion

As a gender equity organization, it is important for AAUW members to demonstrate allyship and inclusion for people of all genders. Support for transgender people is particularly important in this moment as transgender communities find themselves under unprecedented levels of attack from individuals and institutions. This attack is doubly focused on transgender women and girls, and non-binary people.

Good allies offer transgender and non-binary people sustained support, listening and acting in ways that are driven by the needs of the transgender people with whom they want to ally. A very simple way to show support is by including pronouns in your Zoom name. Sharing pronouns helps ensure that everyone is addressed respectfully and correctly, without requiring individuals—especially transgender, nonbinary, or gender-nonconforming people—to repeatedly correct others or disclose personal information in uncomfortable moments. When pronouns are visible, it reduces assumptions based on appearance, name, or voice and sets a tone of care and respect from the outset. This very small thing has a big impact, acknowledging and validating a range of gender identities and promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Continue educating yourself on the many ways you can be an ally and support the transgender people in your communities, as well as in the wider world. Here are some resources for you to learn more:

- The AAUW San Fernando Valley Branch recently hosted a conversation: “What does it Mean to be Trans?” See the recording and slides [HERE](#). Password is equity.
- Listen to this powerful and deeply moving podcast episode from The Daily: “[Parenting a Trans Kid in Trump’s America](#)”.
- Visit or revisit AAUW California Public Policy’s [Trans Allyship Guide](#) to learn how to use terminology, have meaningful conversations, and be a better ally.
- Learn more about [why displaying pronouns is important](#) for inclusion, share your own pronouns, and share this information about pronouns with others.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO ACCESS AAUW CALIFORNIA’S TRANS ALLYSHIP GUIDE