



Public Policy News

A monthly dispatch from the AAUW California Public Policy Team

HUMAN TRAFFICKING EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

AAUW California co-sponsors two important bills

We are pleased to announce that AAUW California will be co-sponsoring two bills in 2026, AB 1766 and AB 1845. These bills are authored by Assemblymember Maggy Krell and are focused on human trafficking education and prevention.

AB 1766 requires the Instructional Quality Commission to consider inclusion of curriculum providing for annual, developmentally appropriate lessons for grades K-12 about how to prevent human trafficking, how to prevent exploitation for labor and services, and how to stay safe from sexually exploitative materials and deepfakes online.

AB 1845 requires postsecondary educational institutions, as part of their sexual harassment training for employees, to also include certain information related to human trafficking, and requires those institutions to ensure that each employee annually completes this training.

In addition to these two bills, the Public Policy team is hard at work evaluating newly introduced legislation as we develop AAUW California's 2026 Legislative Agenda. We look forward to sharing the full agenda in the April issue of Public Policy News.

Upcoming Events

Mark Your Calendars!



AAUW California and Lift Up Public Schools present The Public School Webinar Series. Find more information and registration links [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 California School Board Project: Defending the Frontline of Democracy - Half-day Symposium. See the recording [HERE](#).
- Lobby Days Team Leaders Training. See the recording [HERE](#).
- AAUW National webinar: Promoting AAUW Education Values Through School Board Advocacy. See the recording [HERE](#).
- CCAMP Project Launch Webinar. Find the recording [HERE](#).

BRANCH PUBLIC POLICY CHAIRS' MEETING

NEXT PEER GROUP MEETING
Friday April 3, 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 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](#).





Three Steps to Take Action in March

Focus: Voting Rights in Advance of the Primaries and Midterms

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 VOTING RIGHTS, which will likely be a theme more than once this year.

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: Voting Rights in Advance of the Midterms

1

STEP 1: Self-Focused: Education



- On February 11, 2026, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the SAVE America Act, a new and newly dangerous voter suppression bill. Now it's up to the Senate to stop this bill. The SAVE America Act creates unnecessary hurdles and opens the door to mass disenfranchisement, disproportionately harming people of color, voters with disabilities, older adults, and women - especially those whose names have changed due to marriage or divorce. Read more about the SAVE Act from the ACLU [HERE](#), the Brennan Center [HERE](#), and the Center for American Progress [HERE](#).

2

STEP 2: Other-Focused: Education & Connection



- Share what you have learned! Share the articles linked above on social media. Repost from [AAUW CA Public Policy](#) or create your own post on your preferred platform. You can use the description in step 1 as your caption.
- Tell AT LEAST TWO other people that you know about the SAVE Act. Talking to people you know and sharing on social media is a great way to help get the word out!

3

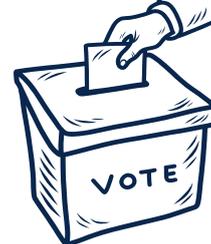
STEP 3: Politically-Focused



- Tell your Senators to [Oppose the SAVE Act](#) via AAUW's Two Minute Activist platform.
- Adapt the excellent [Letter to the Editor](#) written by Martha Bunce, President of the AAUW Marysville Yuba City Branch, to explain why the SAVE America Act is an unnecessary and harmful piece of legislation. Reflect your own voice and local context when submitting in your community's media outlets.

Gearing Up for Midterm Election Season

2026 Voting and Election Resources



AAUW California and AAUW National will be providing resources around voting rights, nonpartisan advocacy, and voter engagement throughout the year. Below are a few to get you started--stay tuned for more throughout the year!

→ **AAUW Voter Engagement: It's My Vote!** is AAUW's nonpartisan voter engagement effort to help Branches lead meaningful, community-rooted civic education, public mobilization, and coalition building.

→ **Nonpartisan Advocacy in an Election Year:** New AAUW resource on nonpartisanship: Leading with Values: A Nonpartisan Playbook for AAUW Affiliates and Branches. Recording (can be shared with AAUW members): Advocacy in an Election Year Staying Nonpartisan While Taking Real Action

→ **Voter Guides for Key Congressional Districts (CA):** The Public Policy Committee is preparing Voter Guides for closely contested congressional districts, including candidate comparisons for CA-48, 22, 45, and 13. We focus on districts where:

- the incumbent is not aligned with AAUW's values and there is a strong opportunity to replace them with a candidate who better reflects our priorities, or
- the incumbent is aligned with AAUW's values and is at risk of being unseated by an opponent whose positions conflict with our priorities.

If you believe your district is also closely contested and is not included on this list, please email publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org with "Candidate Comparison" in the subject line and include brief information about the candidates and the competitiveness of the race.

→ **Plain Policy App:** Developed by the League of Women Voters San Francisco Youth Council - a talented group of high school and college students leading voter registration and education efforts across San Francisco - PlainPolicy is a civic technology platform designed to make laws, ballot measures, and legislation easier to understand. Using AI, it turns complex federal, state, and local policies into clear, plain-language summaries. The PlainPolicy app is currently in beta testing as the team continues to refine its accuracy and strengthen the platform. We encourage AAUW members to explore the app and share feedback about your experience at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org. We will pass your feedback along to the PlainPolicy team.

Explore the tool: <https://plainpolicy.app/>



Department of Education's Proposed Rule on Student Loans and Repayment

The U.S. Department of Education opened a public comment period on a proposed rule that would implement major student loan changes scheduled to take effect July 1, 2026. AAUW will be mobilizing our community to submit comments urging the Department to reject these policies which will shut women, especially black and brown women, student parents, and first-generation students, out of graduate and professional pathways. AAUW joined [this letter](#) with the Gender Equity Coalition (GEC). **What can you do? See below!**

- **Please leave a public comment [HERE](#)** by 03/02. See the [Toolkit for resources](#). See Missy's article for additional guidance and more on [how and why public comments matter](#).
- **See AAUW National's public statement** from Gloria L. Blackwell [HERE](#).
- **Learn more** via additional reporting on Department of Education:
 - [Government Accountability Office report](#) on the costs of layoffs and restructuring at the Department of Education (1/29/26)
 - [Democracy Forward press release](#) on recent education win against Trump administration (1/21/26)
 - More reporting about what's happening to the Department of Education: [NPR](#), [AP News](#), and [Center for WorkLife Law](#).



Did you know?

In a major win for proponents of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-discrimination, on [February 18, 2026](#), the Department of Education finally rescinded its Dear Colleague letter from 2025. This major change was met with little fanfare, and sparse coverage in major media outlets. Read more about this positive development in Missy's article [HERE](#).

Public Education Webinar Series Presented by AAUW California and Lift Up Public Schools

This webinar series offers a practical, nonpartisan look at how public education governance works – and why it matters now more than ever. School boards make decisions that affect curriculum, budgets, safety policies, student well-being, equity initiatives, and community stability. Yet many voters feel unsure about how districts function or what trustees are actually responsible for. These webinars are designed to demystify the system and empower community members to engage with confidence.

Lift Up Public Schools (LUPS) is a vibrant coalition rooted in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties, dedicated to championing excellent, safe, and welcoming public education for all students. Founded by two members of the AAUW California Public Policy School Board Project, LUPS shares deep roots with AAUW California and a common commitment to civic engagement, educational equity, and responsible governance.

School Board Trustees: Leadership That Serves Everyone - March 26, 2026 7:00-8:30pm PT. Register [HERE](#). A strong school board trustee understands governance, not just opinions - balancing education, finance, facilities, and student well-being while making decisions that serve the entire community. This webinar breaks down what the role truly requires and how voters can evaluate whether candidates are prepared to lead responsibly.

Why School Boards Matter to Everyone - April 23, 2026 7:00-8:30pm PT.

Register [HERE](#). School boards don't just govern schools - they impact housing markets, local businesses, and the future of our communities. Learn why these often-overlooked elections matter to everyone, and how school board seats frequently serve as stepping stones to higher public office.

Noteworthy National “Say NO” News



Oppose the confirmation of Nominee for U.S. Surgeon General. Casey Means is a problematic candidate given her lack of baseline qualifications and her lack of respect for established medical science, including on contraception. Please reach out to your U.S. Senators to urge them to oppose her confirmation. You can contact your Senators via AAUW California’s Resistbot [HERE](#), or use the petition language to email or call their offices directly.



Get Ready for March No Kings Day. The next No Kings Day is March 28, 2026. Find your local protests [HERE](#). AAUW will again be an official partner.



Read AAUW National’s Statement on ICE Surge in Minnesota. “AAUW stands in solidarity with those impacted by the federal immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota – a situation that has included aggressive raids, community fear, and tragic deaths that have drawn national attention and widespread protest. We are guided by the principle that every person deserves safety, dignity, and fair treatment, and we condemn violence and actions that exacerbate bias or harm the most vulnerable members of our communities.” - Meghan Kissell, AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy

Noteworthy California “Say Yes” News



The City Council Action and Monitoring Project, known as [CCAMP](#), is a special project recently launched by AAUW California Public Policy to provide action-based resources to support local advocacy and relationship-building with city councils and boards of supervisors. The goal of CCAMP is to build and support sustained collaboration between AAUW members/branches and local governments. In 2026, we will focus on local anti-discrimination education and protection.

Through CCAMP we can engage in sustained activism that will advance our Public Policy Priorities locally. Why local? Local and [hyper-local activism](#) is not only accessible, it is [empowering and more immediate](#) than state/federal actions.

CCAMP was officially launched on Friday, February 27, 2026! You can join in on this project in March 2026 by...

- learning more about the project (watch the [launch webinar recording](#) and read through [the toolkit](#)) and
- building a local team.

Please see this [overview document](#) and [toolkit](#) for additional information. Email us at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org with “CCAMP” in the subject line if you have any questions. We’re happy to help you get started!

Women in the Workplace - Equal Pay, Pay Equity, and Women Who Made a Difference

By Claire Noonan, Member AAUW California Public Policy Committee

March brings us the opportunity to celebrate women who break barriers in politics, science, arts, and civil rights via special days, like International Women's Day, and ongoing events throughout Women's History Month.

March also features women in the workforce and highlights an issue that has long plagued women—pay equity (an issue that never equals out). First observed by the National Committee on Pay Equity in 1996, Equal Pay Day 2025 was observed March 25. Equal Pay Day 2026 is March 26.

This March, we're also taking the opportunity to stop and acknowledge some of the women who have raised issues around equal pay and pay equity, and who have carried us forward, even as we are still fighting today.

Who first alerted Congressmen to the 'pay' problem?

Have you heard of Winifred Claire Stanley (1909 - 1996)? Ms. Stanley, highly respected prosecuting attorney from Buffalo, New York, was known for vigorous advocacy for women's rights during World War II. Stanley served only one term in the House of Representatives before her constituency was redistricted. In that brief time, she introduced the first equal pay for equal work bill in June 1944. It amended the National Labor Relations Act, making it unlawful "to discriminate against any employee, in the rate of compensation paid, on account of sex." HR 5056 didn't pass, of course, in the 78th Congressional session.

Since then, who has driven lobbying efforts for equal pay?

Twenty years later Esther Peterson (1906-1997) labored for equal pay in the workplace. She taught, became a paid organizer for the American Federation of Teachers, and in 1944, the first lobbyist for the National Labor Relations Board.

During JFK's presidency, Peterson became the highest ranking woman in his administration as Assistant Secretary of Labor and Director of the United States Women's Bureau. She was the driving force behind the **Equal Pay Act of 1963**, often lobbying for it personally. It successfully amended the Fair Labor Standards Act to "prohibit discrimination on account of sex in the payment of wages by employers." In 1993 Esther Peterson was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Women in the Workplace - Equal Pay, Pay Equity, and Women Who Made a Difference, con.

Note that in 2005, the "Paycheck Fairness Act," still not passed, would amend loopholes in the Equal Pay Act. However, as AAUW members know, in 2009, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act provided that each gender-unequal paycheck is a new violation of the law. So, some progress.

It is at this point that the issue of pay equity surfaces—the types of jobs men and women tend to hold. Within occupations, full-time working men earned more than women across all 15 work categories tracked in 2024. AAUW notes a complex set of reasons for this difference: occupational segregation, career interruptions, unconscious biases, and negotiation practices.

Which prize-winning economist identified reasons for the gender pay gap?

Look forward fifty years since the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Compiling research on 200 years of women's labor market data and the gender gap, Claudia Goldin (1946) is one of the preeminent economists advocating for gender pay equity.

In October 2023, Claudia Goldin won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for having "advanced our understanding of women's labor market outcomes." She was the third woman to win the award and first woman to win the award alone.

Called "Greedy Jobs," Goldin's research shows that high-paying jobs penalize workers with family care responsibilities, disproportionately affecting women. Beyond education, achieving parity requires reforming workplace flexibility and expanding childcare support. Further, her work proves that economic growth alone does not automatically lead to wage equality.

Goldin's other influential papers treat the impact of the contraceptive pill on a women's career and how women's last names after marriage act as a social indicator.

Continuing to challenge issues of equal pay and pay equity

Today, general equal pay numbers are calculated using Census data to find the median salary for all women vs. all men without accounting for job title, experience, or education. The 2025 divide for all women was 83 cents for every dollar a man made. AAUW offers more detailed analyses of pay equity and pay gap data, assessed based on factors like race, ethnicity, sexuality, and location—see the detailed AAUW 2026 report on The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap.

Although sometimes disheartening, we continue to fight.

Challenging the gap and highlighting pay equity's root causes can lead to fairer outcomes for diverse groups. And, it appears that Congresspeople and corporate leaders still need to be educated.



Pay Equity: New Data & Local Tools

Brought to you by AAUW National

The (Not So) Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap (2026 Update) – AAUW’s flagship report and a major credibility-builder for your community conversations, is now available. The report provides a comprehensive view of the state of pay equity, analyzing the most recent Census data, and offers actionable steps towards achieving pay equity.

AAUW has also created state-specific two-pagers with data on the pay gap by congressional districts, which can be used for tabling events, meeting with elected officials, and educating local members. **See the California Congressional District Data [HERE](#).**

On March 11th, AAUW will host a webinar covering key insights from the report and sharing local actions that you can take to raise awareness and advocate for equal pay. Register here: [The Fight for Pay Equity: Turning the Not So Simple Truth into Real Action](#), March 11th, 3:00 to 4:00pm ET

If you would like more ideas for events, media outreach, and advocacy on pay equity, please see the [branch action resource](#) or attend the [03/11 AAUW National webinar!](#)



Equal Pay Dates - 2026

March 26	Equal Pay Day	Sept. 15	NHPI Women’s Equal Pay Day
April 9	AANHPI Women’s Equal Pay Day	October 8	Latina Equal Pay Day
June 17	LGBTQIA+ Equal Pay Awareness Day	October 20	Disabled Women’s Equal Pay Day
July 21	Black Women’s Equal Pay Day	November 19	Native Women’s Equal Pay Day
August 6	Mom’s Equal Pay Day		

[CLICK HERE FOR THE SIMPLE TRUTH ABOUT THE GENDER PAY GAP](#)

Meet the Public Policy Interns!

We think you will be as impressed as we are with this talented team.

SONRISA DHAR

Sonrisa Dhar is a third year Political Science major at California State University, Long Beach. She has worked as a Lobby Corps Representative At-Large for CSULB's Associated Students, Inc. where she has lobbied alongside her peers to legislators regarding bills that would benefit students. She has had a passion for advocacy since 2021, when she empowered communities through protesting at city council meetings. She is committed to continuing her love for fighting for equality during her time as an intern.



SOFIA GURROLA



Sofia Gurrola is a Junior studying Political Science at California State University, Long Beach. She has a strong commitment to community justice, equity, and public service. Sofia previously served as a JusticeCorps intern, where she assisted community members in navigating the court system. Sofia is also a student court observer at the West LA Immigration Courthouse. Additionally, Sofia has been heavily involved in competitive policy debate—judging high school tournaments and teaching at summer debate camps to support civic engagement. These experiences have reinforced her passion for community outreach and advocacy.

JACQUELINE LOPEZ

Jacqueline Lopez is currently obtaining her bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in Psychology as well as a Legal Studies Certificate. Jacqueline is a first generation student, and is passionate about public policy as well as community empowerment. As an AAUW public policy intern, Jacqueline continues this passion for public policy with a specific focus in areas of reproductive justice as well as women's accessibility to higher education of women. Outside of AAUW, Jacqueline has a fellowship with the Long Beach Public Service Corps, and is specifically representing District 7.

