

POLICY AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee engages in advocacy efforts that support our mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Approaching this work with an equity lens, we promote trauma-informed, survivor-centered policies and practices that contribute to community accountability and ending oppression at the intersection of racism, sexism and gender-based violence, including its root causes and symptoms.

YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee's education and legislative advocacy efforts support the people we serve through our domestic violence shelter, school-based programming, and adult and early education programs. We welcome working with like-minded organizations that are aligned with our mission.

Health & Safety

Invest in Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence (DV)

DV occurs among all races, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic classes. While there are obstacles for anyone seeking to leave an abusive relationship, these are even more pronounced for women of color, including immigrants, who face high rates of poverty, poor education, limited job resources, language barriers, and fear of police brutality and/or deportation.¹ These factors make it more difficult to find help and support services.

YWCA will advocate to:

- Increase dedicated and recurring funding for shelter services, case management, children's therapy, and substance use treatment for DV victims;
- Ensure that DV victims have access to qualified attorneys for civil and criminal cases and to judges who are informed about DV;
- Educate all judges in areas of DV, sexual harassment and objectification of women;
- Increase equitable funding for trauma-informed and mental health services for women and families who are traumatized by DV;
- Identify ways to restrict firearms from convicted DV offenders and those who are identified by the courts/law enforcement as imminent threats to their victims; and
- Pass anti-domestic violence legislation that requires all licensed cosmetologists and barbers and students receive up to one hour of training on recognizing and responding to domestic violence, and referring clients to safety.

Ensure Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care for Women, Gender Nonconforming People, and Girls

Quality, affordable health care is critical to everyone, but for many women, gender nonconforming people, children, and people of color, getting the insurance coverage and trauma-informed medical care they need is a struggle. YWCA will advocate to:

- Expand access to Medicaid in Tennessee;
- Advocate for schools to provide comprehensive, medically accurate, non-shaming, and LGBTQ inclusive sexuality education;
- Expand and protect access to quality and affordable reproductive healthcare for all people; and
- Ensure that COVID vaccinations are administered to residents and staff at DV shelters.

Empowerment & Economic Advancement

Support Efforts to Improve Women's Economic Security

Women should never have to choose between their job and their health or family. Every worker deserves a living wage, health insurance, job-protected safe leave, and paid sick and family leave. YWCA will:

- Partner with organizations to expand access to job-protected safe leave, and paid sick and family leave, including accounting for COVID;
- Support efforts to remove childcare barriers to women's workplace participation; and
- Work to eliminate the race and gender wage gaps.

Support Efforts to Increase Affordable Housing

The lack of safe and affordable housing disproportionately impacts women of color and victims of domestic violence. Working with community partners, YWCA will:

- Support efforts that include a comprehensive, inclusive, and adequately funded plan to address the urgent need for affordable housing in our city; and
- Partner with organizations to end evictions, especially due to budgetary impacts of COVID.

Promote Access to Quality Education

Quality education is key to breaking the cycle of poverty. Due to racial and gender bias and through overly punitive school discipline policies, schools disproportionately push black youth out of school and into the criminal justice system.³ In order for all students to thrive, schools not only need to invest in students' academic needs, but districts must also address and discuss the needs of the school community. YWCA will:

- Advance policies that provide educational opportunities for Black children and children of color and Black women and women of color, regardless of real or perceived immigration status or family income;
- Work with educators to reform school discipline policies and practices that disproportionately target girls of color, girls with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth; and
- Support efforts that increase school-based health centers, counselors, social workers, and other programs that help youth access wrap-around services; and

- Work with partner organizations to support teachers, students, and families amid COVID conditions.

Civil & Human Rights

Eliminate institutional racism in government, schools, businesses, healthcare and the courts. Racial profiling, bias and discrimination are woven into every-day practices and policies that systemically benefit white people and harm people of color. YWCA will:

- Support initiatives to eliminate policies and practices within our criminal justice and educational systems that criminalize and disenfranchise women and girls of color and other marginalized communities, including immigrant communities; and
- Update juvenile justice laws so that all youth involved in the juvenile justice system are screened at intake for trauma so they can get the resources and support they need to heal.

Support the Protection and Expansion of Americans' Voting Rights

Tennessee has one of the lowest voter participation rates in America. This can be traced to legislation that heightens the barriers to casting a ballot, particularly disenfranchising black and brown citizens. YWCA will:

- Speak out against voter suppression tactics;
- Support efforts to register voters and restore and expand voting rights – Support the NAACP in their lawsuit against Tennessee over unequal voting rights restoration for people with felony convictions;
- Increase awareness among high schoolers and eligible voters about their voting rights and the importance of voting; and
- Advocate for mail-in ballots to promote voting in a pandemic.

Promote the Protection of Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Tennessee has one of the fastest growing immigrant and refugee populations in the country. This has often been met with a climate of extreme anti-immigrant and anti-refugee policy. YWCA will:

- Support policies and practices that ensure the protection of and equal opportunity for immigrants and refugees; and
- Support in-state tuition for all students graduating from Tennessee high schools, regardless of their immigration status.