

YWCA NASHVILLE & MIDDLE TENNESSEE POLICY & 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. We seek to promote trauma-informed, survivor-centered policies and practices that contribute to community accountability and harm reduction at the intersection of racism, sexism, and gender-based violence.

YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee's education and legislative advocacy efforts support the people we serve through our domestic violence shelter, school-based youth development programming, and adult and early education programs. We see this work as necessarily collaborative and welcome working with like-minded organizations that are aligned with our mission. Below are the issues YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee focuses on, including policies and practices we advocate for and/or support.

Racial Justice | Eliminate Policies and Practices that Criminalize People of Color

YWCA is committed to ensuring that everyone is afforded equal opportunity and equal protection under the law. Regardless of race, skin color, language, place of origin, immigration status, or ethnicity, we believe that people deserve equal access to resources. Too often, however, stereotypes, biases, and racial power dynamics are embedded in our laws and public policies. They are also reflected in the use of racial profiling, heightened surveillance tactics, targeted enforcement strategies, and other policing practices that target and criminalize Black people and people of color. This criminalization is even seen in the overly punitive school discipline policies that disproportionately push Black youth out of school and into the criminal legal system.

What we support:

- Ending racial and religious profiling
- Creating safe, equitable educational environments that support learning for all students, especially those most impacted by school discipline and sexual harassment policies and practices
- Reforming laws, policies, and practices to safeguard people of color from police violence
- Passing laws, resolutions, and ordinances that declare racism to be a public health crisis
- Support policies and practices that ensure the protection of and equal opportunity for immigrants and refugees

Gender-Based Violence | Invest in and Advocate for Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence (DV)

Women and girls of all races, ethnicities, religious affiliations, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socio-economic classes continue to experience violence in the form of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and trafficking. 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, poorly resourced education, limited job resources, language barriers, and fear of police brutality and/or deportation. These factors make it more difficult to find help and support services. It is also important to note that the number of women in prisons has continued to rise in recent years. Many of these women are victims and survivors of abuse. As one of

the largest domestic violence shelters in the state of Tennessee, YWCA seeks to understand root causes and cycles of violence in order to work for practical solutions to protect survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence.

What we support:

- DV victims to have access to qualified attorneys for civil and criminal cases and access to judges who are informed about DV
- Educating all judges/policy makers in areas of DV, sexual harassment and objectification of women
- Restricting firearms from convicted DV offenders and those who are identified by the courts/law enforcement as imminent threats to their victims
- Educating licensed cosmetologists, barbers and students on recognizing and responding to domestic violence and on referring clients to safety
- Increasing dedicated and recurring funding for shelter services, case management, children's therapy, and mental health and substance use treatment for DV victims
- Job-protected safe leave to enable survivors to seek medical and legal support
- Safe, inclusive, and restorative school environments that are free from sexual violence, are supportive of survivors, and respect and affirm gender identity and expression
- Utilization of evidence-based batterer intervention courses and other resources that aid in building transformative and restorative justice practices for those who cause harm and those who are harmed
- Funding programs that teach young boys and men about gender and healthy masculinity and empower them to express their emotions in safe and healthy ways

Civil & Human Rights | Protect the Rights and Safety of Marginalized Communities

YWCA's intersectional mission to eliminate racism and empower women demands that we show up to advocate against the oppression that historically marginalized groups and individuals endure. We recognize the interconnected experiences of discrimination and disadvantage that women face from their overlapping identities. We strive for a society where all people are afforded the rights bestowed upon them not only as citizens but also as human beings. Tennessee has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the United States. This can be traced to legislation that heightens the barriers to casting a ballot, particularly disenfranchising Black and brown people.

What we support:

- Advocating against voter suppression tactics & voter intimidation
- Efforts to register voters and restore and expand voting rights (e.g., YWCA supports the NAACP in their lawsuit against the state of Tennessee's unequal voting rights restoration process for people with felony convictions)
- Advocating for mail-in ballots to promote accessible voting
- Restoration of the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Increasing awareness among high schoolers and eligible voters about their voting rights and the importance of civic engagement
- Access to quality, free public education with honest and accurate teaching of history, social studies, and systems of power to all students

- Legal protections for LGBTQ+ people
- Advocating against criminalizing women on birth outcomes
- Efforts that include a comprehensive, inclusive, and adequately funded plan to address the urgent need for permanent, affordable housing in our city

Health, Safety, & Empowerment | Ensure Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care for Women, Girls, Gender Expansive People, and Marginalized People

Quality, affordable health care is critical to everyone. But for many women, gender expansive people, children, people of color, and trauma survivors, getting the insurance coverage and trauma-informed medical care they need is a struggle due to structural barriers. Moreover, unequal access to healthcare is a driving factor in racial disparities in maternal and other health outcomes in the U.S. Supporting efforts to improve women's economic security

What we support:

- The protection and expansion of quality healthcare, including affordable reproductive healthcare for all people
- Expansion of access to Medicaid in Tennessee
- Trauma-informed care
- Comprehensive, medically accurate, non-shaming, and LGBTQ-inclusive sexuality education and reproductive health services
- Improved maternal health outcomes for Black women and women of color
- Elimination of health disparities and administration of vaccinations
- Addressing racism as a public health crisis
- Supporting efforts to improve women's economic security by advocating for safe leave, paid sick and family leave
- Eliminating the race and gender wage gap
- Supporting efforts to increase affordable housing