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STATE OF BLACK WOMEN  
IN CALIFORNIA  
REPORT

2022 AND BEYOND

*Essays from Black Women*  
THOUGHT LEADERS IN CALIFORNIA

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION • POVERTY & OPPORTUNITY  
HEALTH & WELLNESS • EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS  
WORK & FAMILY • VIOLENCE & SAFETY • AGING

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STATE OF BLACK WOMEN  
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JANUARY 31, 2022

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It humbles and infuses me with pride to write this praise for ***The State of Black Women in California Report 2022 and Beyond-Essays from Black Women Thought Leaders in California***. As a resident for 34 years in the San Fernando Valley and City of Los Angeles, Southern California captured my heart and attention unlike any other place in the world.

This report honors the legacy of the many Black Women who dared to be first such as the Hon. Yvonne Brathwaite-Burke who began the work of breaking down glass ceilings in the State's Legislature in 1966. She opened the door for the Hon. Teresa P. Hughes, Hon. Maxine Waters, Hon. Gwen Moore and Hon. Diane E. Watson to follow. It was shortly after meeting these women, along with the Hon. Marguerite Archie-Hudson, Hon. Barbara Lee and Hon. Juanita Millender McDonald, of the California Black Caucus in 1990 that I too was inspired to get involved and even set my sights on public service and running for public office.

With the zeal of Harriet Tubman, one brilliant and compassionate woman envisioned a multifaceted collective of Black Women organizations and leaders, who would empower, strengthen and uplift Black Women and Black communities. The clarion call-to- action by Kellie Todd Griffin, was answered by 12 women and quickly grew to 1500, creating the California Black Women's Collective (CABWC).

CABWC has successfully convened and leveraged the extraordinary, unique, and exceptional power of California's Black Women. Just as the late Dr. Dorothy I. Height encouraged Black Women to be audacious, excellent, and strong, CABWC has created the space and platform for California Black Women to demand their rightful place at every table where decisions are made that impacts our lives and the lives of all persons in our communities across the State.

Having served for a decade on the Los Angeles County Commission for Women and being one of the six co-founders of the Los Angeles African American Women Public Policy Institute, I have witnessed the barriers being broken that were in place to keep Black Women out of the political process. This Status Report seeks to continue deconstructing the systems of untruths and myths that harm Black Women. The report provides the unquestionable data and information needed for policy makers at the highest levels of government and industry to fulfill their obligations to be fair minded and inclusive in all aspects of their leadership.

The facts, ideas, creativity, and leadership presented in this report, provides evidence of the scholarship and expertise of the women in this collective.

Thank you to the sponsors, the initiator, contributors and members for a job well done!

**Barbara A. Perkins, M.A. PCC**  
Executive Coach, Businesswoman,  
and Author





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# INTRODUCTION



## The State of Black Women in CA – Our Voice Focused on Our Issues

**Kellie Todd Griffin**

Initiator, State of Black Women in CA



Throughout history, Black Women have played a pivotal role in the success of our Black community and addressing systemic barriers for all marginalized communities. Black Women have been at the forefront of change and never-wavering in our commitment to the fight. This holds true as it relates to the work of Black Women in California. From late sista leaders like Hon. Gwen Moore, labor leader Linda Dent, educator Irene B. West, community organizer Brenda Marsh Mitchell to powerbrokers Hon. Maxine Waters, Hon. Barbara Lee, Hon. Karen Bass, Hon. Holly J. Mitchell, Hon. Dezie Woods Jones to Black Women who hold the space in every corner of the state...we have helped move California and many times the country forward.

In 2018, Sistallect, Inc. partnered with Sierra Health Foundation and a coalition of Black Women leaders to take on the task to look at equity for Black Women and Girls in California. This effort represents the first time this type of collective, conscious effort has been done in the state. Although Women of Color are progressing as a whole, Black Women in California are more likely to be single breadwinners, live in poverty and face significant barriers in regard to pathways to success economically, socially and professionally.

More than 60 Black Women gathered in early 2018 in Sacramento, California to review data, exchange best practices and chart out a strategic policy platform and action plan to address the issues impacting Black Women and Girls in California. The all-day event included constructive dialogue around the quality-of-life index gaps that impact the overall health of the Black community and its interdependency on Black Women. The result was the release of the State of Black Women in CA report that highlighted the disparity gaps that Black Women experienced in California. In addition, it outlined legislative and non-legislative proposals.

Since the release of the original State of Black Women in CA report, there has been an increase in organized efforts to increase representation and redress inequity and positive momentum including the election of Californian, Kamala D. Harris to the Vice Presidency. However, in a state where people of color comprise the majority, according to the 2020 Census, Black Californians only represent 5.7% of the state's overall population which many believe (including this author) is an undercount due to the racist policy implemented by the Trump Administration. Black women represent 51%, of the 2.2 million Blacks in California,



which is the fifth largest Black population in the country. These numbers represent only those identified by Black and African American alone category. However, the 2020 Census included for the first time those who choose Black or African American in a mixed-race Combination, which would increase the state population by more than 600,000 representing 7.1%. For the purpose of this report, we are using the 5.7% to ensure consistency with the previous report comparisons and other characteristic data used throughout this report. Yet, it will be included in data where there is a meaningful change.

Southern California has the largest overall population with nearly 794,364 followed by San Bernardino (184,558), Alameda (164,879), Riverside (156,477), San Diego (155,813), and Sacramento (152,795). These are the only counties that have more than 100K Black population. However, even though Los Angeles has the largest overall population, it only represents 7% of Los Angelinos. With Combination, it is 9.4%, bringing the Black population to nearly 944K people. Southern California still maintains the largest Black population with more than 1.4 million, which represents 65%. Los Angeles leads the way with 36%. However, there are Northern California Counties where the Black population is a significant percentage of the overall population including Solano (13.7%), Alameda (9.8%), Sacramento (9.6%), Contra Costa (8.7%) and San Joaquin (7.7%), which yield political, social and economic power.

There are approximately 1.1 million Black Females in California. However, there are more than 75% of Black households headed by single Black mothers and 80% of Black households have Black Women breadwinners. The importance of lifting up the needs of Black women is critical to lifting up our community. The goal of the State of Black Women in California is to approach our work in a strategic and collaborative manner with the main focus on Black Women and Girls in California. With the larger population of Black Females being under the age of 356 , it's imperative to utilize a multigenerational approach.

Even though we have had a tumultuous last couple of years that included a pandemic, racial divide, police murdering our children, men and loved ones, we have also seen a spark ignited in Black Women like never before. The launch of Win With Black Women , a nation-wide coalition of Black Women powerhouse leaders that took this county's democracy on its back, fighting against the racist, anti-female, MAGA agenda and delivered in the 2020 elections. Black Women became the voice of the community, stepping out of the background and took our rightful place at the table. And we made sure we used our microphone to demand change. In California, Black Women took that mantle and ran our own race. A group of multigeneration Black women rallied to demand Governor Newsom appoint the open Senate seat Congressmembers Karen Bass or Barbara Lee. This effort, Save the Seat, created a statewide coalition that conducted social media, call and engagement campaign. There were articles published in the Black newspapers and mainstream press as well as day of actions held. Unfortunately, the Governor did not appoint a Black Women to replace the open seat left by Vice President Kamala Harris, which made the coalition even more determined to stay organized . The result was the formation of the California Black Women's Collective.

CA Black Women's Collective (CABWC) officially launched in February 2021 with 12 members. Today, there are more than 1,500 members. The Collective is a coalition of Black Women throughout California connecting North, South, East, West and Central. The goal is to amplify our powerful voice and show our collective strength in the political process as we project justice gains and build a bench. CABWC is intergenerational sisters who bring a span of expertise in politics, community activism, collaboration, social justice, and beyond. Our efforts are for Black Women only as we come together in our personal capacities to stand powerfully united in support of Black Women in California. We want to make an impact for Black Women and our community.

The Collective collaborates with other Black Women organizations that share our values to:

- Elevate our voice, power, and participation to secure adequate representation and reparations
- Amplify our issues and priorities that are vital to elevate Black Women
- Organize and leverage our extensive talent, influence, networks, and brilliance into areas of collective alignment
- Eliminate the racist and sexist attacks on Black Women and Girls
- Elevate the agenda and collective power of Black Women locally and nationally

In addition, California also saw the creation of three Black Women's democratic clubs in San Diego, Solano and Sacramento. This brought the total to four. The first one, California Black Women's Democratic Club, was launched in 2017. Black Women Organized for Political Action, founded in 1968, expanded to more areas in California including in Southern CA. Los Angeles African American Public Policy Institute has seen record number of Black Women enrolling in its training program. Black Women in San Diego led the charge to create the Black Women Institute for Leadership Development. These efforts capitalize on that change agent spirit and energy to move that needle in a systematic and sustainable manner.

The State of Black Women in California Report 2022 and Beyond – Essays from Black Women Thought Leaders in California explores the way in which we can collectively work on addressing these issues and the impact that Black Women can have when there is an investment of time and resources. This effort is focused on the intersection of gender, race, and location. Bringing together this diverse group of powerhouse Black Women, who represent various industries, helped ensure inclusive perspectives with one common goal... improve our current state by working toward our ideal state. The goal of this report is to lift up our voices and issues in order to engage in meaningful change. We approached this from a multigenerational lens. There are identifiable trends in many of the pieces as well as insights uniquely from the lens of the author. The information shared is data driven from both the qualitative and quantitative perspective.

The essay authors represent the best and brightest minds in our state. These leaders, Black Women from throughout the state of California, are experts in their fields as well as champions for the issues that are important to Black Women and our community. In addition to proposals put forward by the Collective, each author offers legislative and non-legislative solutions that serve as our call to action. You will also find that we have highlighted Black Women focused organizations that are leading the way locally, regionally, statewide and nationally and included guest contributors that are experts in their respective fields.

This Report is not intended to be a stagnant piece of information. The intent is for each of us to use this information to inform, engage and blow systems of oppression up. This is time... we are at the table, and we have the mic.

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



Political Participation - The time is always right to do what is right!

## **LaNiece Jones**

Executive Director of Black Women Organized for Political Action / Training Institute for Leadership Enrichment (BWOPA/TILE)



*We are most powerful when we organize.* As our BWOPA founder the Honorable Dezie Woods Jones always tells us, “Everything in life is political.”

In addition to my volunteer leadership role with BWOPA, I am a social entrepreneur and the CEO of LA Jones & Associates, a marketing public relations firm founded by me more than 20 years ago. Also, I have served as a delegate for the State Democratic Party Assembly District 18 and had the extraordinary honor to serve as one of the 52 electoral college voters in 2020, arguably, the most significant election in this nation’s history.

That experience was especially meaningful for me because it helped to vote into office President Joe Biden, and California’s own, Vice President Kamala Harris. I am grateful to all the Black women leaders whose shoulders I stand on today – in particularly the founders of BWOPA founder and our State President the Honorable Dezie Woods Jones and the sister friends in the struggle to create change in our community illustrating in living color their participation in politics. I have been involved in politics and political movements for quite a long-time. These experiences have allowed me to develop my expertise in community organizing, movement building and political campaigning - overall the expertise in how to get things done, how to move the needle and how to build black power!

It is just as important today as it was several years ago, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement to build black power. We have had a glimpse of what power looks like with the elections of Congressional members Barbara Lee, Karen Bass and Maxine Waters – and major city Mayors, London Breed in San Francisco, Latonya Cantrell in New Orleans, Keisha Lance Bottoms in Atlanta, and Lori Lightfoot in Chicago. These black women have shown us how their leadership and focus on public policy changes can benefit black people to create better communities, living wage jobs, affordable housing, and unbiased public protection.

Political participation and engagement are all what BWOPA stands for. The 12 founders of BWOPA, established in 1968 envisioned a world that we thought would be fair and equitable for Black women and their families.

BWOPA's mission to activate, motivate, promote, support, and educate Black women about the political process, encourage involvement, and to affirm our commitment to solving critical problems affecting the Black community have been its driving force, a force that continues to this day. Now, with ten chapters and networks throughout California and beyond, BWOPA's community comprises well over 10,000 members, partners, allies, sponsors, and collaborators. Our work through our three (3) organizations - BWOPA, Training Institute for Leadership Enrichment and BWOPA-PAC.

Today our call to action is for everyone to take a hard look at what is happening in your local community and examine your role in making meaningful and lasting change that improves the quality of life for you, your family, and the black community? The time is now to move into action!

We were born for this moment and this time. In the words of Shirley Chisholm - Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.

There are diverse ways to think critically, use our voices, our energy, and our passion to make transformative change in America to eliminate and eradicate injustice. We use our voices to recruit, support and elect our leaders. But there is a deeper, more personal calling for change and that is at the local level in the places we frequent and live our lives.

What we see when we walk out of our door are communities in distress:

- We see under performing schools
- We see crumbling health care systems
- We see overcrowded prisons
- We know there is a severe lack of affordable housing and abundant homelessness.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 55 Black people experience homelessness out of every 10,000 individuals — but in California, that number is 194 out of every 10,000 persons.

As we know everything in life is political, following are strategies that can move us into action to create the change we all need to see, first in ourselves, and then in our communities and our world, all to eliminate the injustices we see each day of our lives.

### **Become clear About Your Passion**

For example, my passion is empowering black women to be leaders. When I was in graduate school this passion fueled my studies and my capstone project. I created the DWJ public policy program. Today we have trained over fifty young women since the program was launched. These graduates have gone on to be active in their local communities leading electoral campaigns, heading up civic organizations and serving as elected officials and on boards and commissions.

### **Get Involved**

There are a host of volunteer opportunities to lend your voice on local and regional boards, commissions, and committees. A good place to start is by contacting the office of a black elected official in your area and express your interest to get involved. One of our BWOPA members did just that. She works in transportation and expressed her interest to get involved in the recent redistricting efforts. Through BWOPA's relationship with a statewide organization, we positioned her to join their statewide organizing think tank to share her perspectives in the critical redrawing of the congressional and state geographic jurisdiction lines to maintain the power of the black vote vs. diluting the black vote.

## **Find Your Tribe**

There are a number of civic, social, and community-based organizations that champion and advocate for a host of social issues affecting Black people. Look to your churches and local chapters of organizations like NAACP, BWOPA, Urban League, 100 Black Men and Women, Black Chambers of Commerce, Black Social Workers, Black Nurses Association, and the list goes on. Each of these organizations meet on a regular basis, offer substantial leadership opportunities, life enrichment activities, and could be a great place for you to utilize your skills, passion and agency to create change in local communities and support Black people in their effort to have fulfilling lives.

One of our NAACP colleagues found her niche in the organization to connect local black high school students with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, to strengthen their chances for college acceptance. Prior to this initiative a lot of students did not think it would have been possible to go to college. The time is always right to do what is right!

## **Get Loud, Organize and Share a Call to Action**

Use your voice to be an advocate, publish and share the injustices you see and/or experience, share your winning strategies, celebrate the small wins just as you would the big wins. All wins matter and do not get discouraged - be in it for the long haul. Real change does not happen overnight.

There are various black media outlets that need to hear from you. Build relationships with local black newspapers and radio stations. Volunteer to write a weekly column or public service announcement to share your position and/or your call to action.

For example, in December of last year, a group of concerned citizens organized a press conference in front of the school district office to inform and activate the community about the recommendations to make severe cuts in the local school district's budget by the county office of education. The group engaged elected officials and the black media with the goal of encouraging the county office of education to rescind their punitive recommendations towards the local school district leaders who are trying to do right by the students. See the time is always right to do what is right!

## **Run for Office – We need black women in elected offices**

We as black people - severely underrepresented in local, regional, state, and federal offices. There is a dire need for diverse voices to fight for the injustices at all levels of public policy, including but not limited to - school boards, county boards, community college, transportation, and water boards. You can get started and gain invaluable experience by initially serving on boards and commissions.

BWOPA partners with other civic organizations to host trainings to help individuals explore running for office, our chapters encourage and support individuals to run for office. The county political parties host running for office workshops. Other places to get experience are working in an elected official's office and/or volunteering on an electoral campaign. Overall, we need you and your voice at the table. We are not the same in our experiences, knowledge, and skills, hence the rich perspectives we bring to legislative and policy decisions can greatly enhance our lives.

Another example, one of our BWOPA fellows had a desire to create change in the Richmond school district where she served as a staunch and active parent advocate to support the best learning for her four children - one of which had a learning disability. Her advocacy, experiences and desire led her down a path that culminated in her running for office – and

she won!!!! She became President of the board of education and weighed in on pieces of legislation that benefits the lives of black students to this day.

These are just a few examples of ways you can become involved, foster change and to use your voice to transform this country - one block, neighborhood, city, county, state at a time. This focused effort to eliminate injustice will take each one of us to do something - small or large - to make a difference.

I encourage you to think hard about the change you would like to see in yourself, in your community, all to be the change agent and role model that will inspire future generations.

***The time is always right to do what is right! We are greater together - Let's Go!***

## Unapologetically Building the Bench

CA Senator  
**Sydney Kamlager**



Black women are asked time and time again to step into the gap and fix, solve, heal, confront, manage, save. Our words and presence often provide truth, counsel, and protection to other people and causes. We have proven to have the staying power to make it across the finish line, so now it is time for us to use that force to build a political bench that sees, values and employs us.

My first real campaign was working to elect Holly J. Mitchell to the State Assembly in 2010. I had volunteered on other campaigns, but never had a paid position where I reported directly to the candidate. It helped that I had worked for her and knew her voice, but I was incredibly intimidated about managing a campaign and having that kind of responsibility. At the end of the day, I took a leave of absence from my job to work on the campaign because I knew she deserved to have a Black woman working and fighting for her who had her back.

Oftentimes, I was the only Black person in the room, let alone Black woman. I learned how to craft budgets, read data sheets, and train volunteers. I dropped off laundry, wrote talking points, and scouted locations. I used the chance to learn as much as I could. I made mistakes, but I made even more meaningful contributions. I saw my role as the one who kept people honest, protected the candidate, and made sure the process was led by the candidate's voice. The experience was eye-opening. Working on a campaign and rarely seeing other Black women in my position made me want to continue to work on campaigns and build teams of Black women. I certainly did that for a while. I brought on young women who were interested in politics and trained them to work in government and on campaigns. Eventually, some of them ran for office. Eventually, so did I.

My first race as a candidate was for the Los Angeles Community College Board. I had an incredibly small team, and no Sydney to help me. Local races are not sexy and are often part-time, so I ended up doing most of the campaign work on my own. The experience certainly made me a stronger candidate, but it would have been nice to share the experience with another Black woman.

When I ran for the State Assembly, I made it a point to have a larger and diverse team. Many on my team had never worked on a campaign before and we learned and grew together. The well-worn and slick politicians all started out as the people on my team - hired by someone who was willing to take a chance and try something new.

Oftentimes, the focus is on finding great candidates to run. Yes, Black female candidates are critical and needed AND it is also hard to find Black women who are willing to uproot their lives, families and checkbooks to run for office. It is just as challenging to find women who want to work behind the scenes, even though there are a number of positions in political campaigns that are behind the scenes and waiting for Black women to take them, own and master them.

A campaign and candidate will need the following: campaign consultants, campaign managers, pollsters, treasurers, fundraisers, volunteer coordinators, field coordinators, and digital and communications directors. Real talk: each of the positions gets paid because a candidate raises money to afford them. So, why are we leaving money on the table for someone else? These are opportunities to get paid, be part of a political bench and the future of a state.

Redistricting and retirements have opened up this state to all kinds of new candidates and races. While I certainly hope that Black female candidates will find and hire Black women to work with them on their campaigns, it is more important that we work on any and all campaigns – get that experience, learn from others who have done this and be part of a machine that builds Black women into the continued fabric of this state. We deserve no less.

None of this is easy. It is not easy to run for office nor it is easy to run a campaign for a candidate. However, it is fatal for Black futures to not be part of any of these ventures at all. No one said you can't be scared. You just have to be ready.

It is time to build our bench. It is time to pay ourselves. It is time to take control of our political voices and futures.

## The Power of Next

**Kristin McGuire**

Executive Director, Young Invincibles



Recently, there has been a lot of focus placed on Black women in leadership. Articles from the likes of Forbes and Fortune all share their views on how powerful it is to see Black women lead. It's true. Black women have always been leaders and it is a powerful sight. There is no shortage of examples across history of Black women stepping up to lead. There was, however, a shortage of recognition and visibility. Before powerful women, such as Kamala Harris and Stacey Abrams became household names there were civil rights leaders such as Septima Clark and Dorothy I. Height.

Nevertheless, the hard-fought progress that is enjoyed today would not have been possible without the many Black women pioneers before us. This still holds true today. The many challenges that America faces require a commitment to the next generation of powerful Black women leaders. The unique set of lived experiences that Black women possess inform a leadership and perspective that is progressive, inclusive, and fair.

One need not look for too long before finding the economic, education, health, and electoral barriers confronting Black women. Black women hold 22 percent more debt than white women, earn \$0.63 cents for each dollar paid to non-Hispanic white men, experience the highest rate of maternal mortality in the nation, and continue to be a target in the unrelenting effort to suppress the vote.

Black women had to fight for the right to vote twice over. The ratification of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote did not guarantee access to Black women. It would take another landmark event to secure those rights in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Today, Black women vote at higher rates than other groups. While comprising 7 percent of the population, Black women consistently vote at or above 60 percent over the last five presidential elections. The efforts do not stop at the voting booth. Black women organize communities, register individuals to vote at church, within our families, and with our civic organizations.

Additionally, young Black voters powered Joe Biden's victory. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in battleground states. While white youth supported Biden by a six percent margin (51-45%) nationwide, Black youth support reached 87 percent. In Georgia, 90 percent of Black youth backed the Biden-Harris ticket. In Pennsylvania, 85 percent of youth of color supported Biden. (33% higher than white youth). And in Michigan, 77 percent of young voters of color (19-points higher than white youth). In states like Georgia and Arizona, Black and Latino youth may have single-handedly made Biden competitive.

The next generation of leaders will have led a civil rights' movement (Black Lives Matter), survived an economic downturn, and lived through a global pandemic. These unique experiences will set them up to be able to create policies that will positively impact everyone such as Universal Basic Income, universal medical coverage, increased minimum wage, and



expanded childcare. There is no scarcity of reasons why the next generation of leaders is powerful, only a dearth of opportunity. This is why investing in them is not just a good idea, but a necessary one.

It is incumbent upon those in positions of influence and power to intentionally advance solutions, legislative or otherwise, that will give the opportunity for more Black women and girls to realize their own potential.

### **Recommendations:**

To move forward we must be intentional about developing the power of the next generation. There are a number of ways to unleash the promise of the next generation of Black leaders. It can be policy-focused as well as interpersonal in nature. The following include a set of legislative and cultural recommendations with the potential to improve the lives of Black women in the economy, education system, and civic engagement.

#### **Mentorship**

One of the ways to foster the next generation of Black women leaders is to provide mentorship and uplift them to the opportunities around us. Peer-to-peer mentoring of Black women by Black women is invaluable given the shared lived-experience and unique understanding of the challenges mentees will face as they navigate our society.

#### **Succession Planning**

It is imperative that political and private sector leaders of today prepare for a transition of power. The benefits of successful succession planning go far beyond the obvious result of having a steady pipeline of leaders ready to step into new roles. It creates a sense of stability and fosters confidence in leadership. It's reckless and irresponsible of leaders of today to neglect this very important step in their transitions.

### **Education**

- **Support Ethnic Studies in K-12 education** to build the confidence of the next generation of leaders.
- **Advocate that all California universities suspend standardized testing requirements** which are biased against Black and other students of color.
- **Address student debt and college access and affordability** so that more Black students can graduate college without relying on student debt.
  - ◇ **Broad student loan debt cancellation.**  
Decades of state disinvestment in public higher education has led to more than 43 million Americans bearing a collective total of more than \$1.7 trillion in outstanding student loan debt. Student loan debt is also an intergenerational weight on the economy that disproportionately impacts Black borrowers.
  - ◇ **Revolutionize course delivery and degree program structure.**  
The rapid transition at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic from primarily in-person course delivery on traditional campus settings to sessions facilitated online did not allow faculty the time to adjust teaching methods or to receive professional development on how to make best use of online learning platforms. The expansion of online learning may present an opportunity to expand access to quality programs, moving away from the historic conflation of higher education quality with exclusivity.
  - ◇ **Implement models of support that address student needs beyond tuition.**  
A growing number of states and even some cities are adopting models to cover tuition costs or address student debt for students and encourage more low-income and first-generation students to pursue postsecondary education. While

these programs may increase initial enrollment, students need support beyond tuition payments to ultimately complete their programs. Expanding programs to address housing affordability, food insecurity, mental health challenges, and childcare can help more students get to graduation day.

### **Economic Security**

Stagnant wages and discriminatory policies have excluded many low-income people and Black, Indigenous, and people of color from economic prosperity. It is imperative to take bold legislative action to address racial disparities in pay, unemployment, childcare access, and to overhaul existing policies hindering racial equity.

- **Expand child care access.**

The exorbitant cost of child care represents a major barrier to full participation in our economy. Legislation expanding childcare access and affordability would have an outsized impact on Black single mother-led households. Childcare is infrastructure and our state and federal policies must reflect its importance.

- **Increase the federal minimum wage.**

The federal minimum wage sets a nationwide baseline that protects lower-paid workers. Allowing regional variation would collapse that floor and start a race to the bottom. Currently 21 states have set minimum wage either at or below the federal rate of \$7.25 an hour. Although some states including California and Massachusetts have set minimum wages substantially higher than the federal minimum, workers at the low end of the pay scale struggle to afford housing and, after housing costs, to address other basic needs or save for the future. All work must be valued in America, and an hourly wage that does not provide for even a basic standard of living is a weak foundation upon which to build a sustainable economy. A federal baseline of \$15 an hour by 2025 would still be modest compared to historical levels. In fact, there is no county in America where \$13 an hour can ensure the economic security of a single individual with no children. We should work with our representatives in Congress to increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour and eliminate the subminimum wage. This would provide precedent for California to increase the state minimum wage.

### **Civic Engagement**

Beyond interpersonal solutions to build the bench, we must also focus on broad policy solutions that also must take into account entrenched institutional racism and its role in perpetuating disparate outcomes across the economy, civil society, and our own government. Ultimately, racial disparities are the direct result of centuries of racialized laws and legal exclusion – from the first legal distinctions between white and Black to current voter suppression laws. The fight for a more just, equitable and prosperous society has always been a relay where progress is handed to the next generation upon which to build. Ensuring the next generation of leaders has the opportunity to lead means a continued engagement in our efforts to remove the barriers holding them back. We can begin by:

- **Protect implementation of AB-37 (Berman, 2021)**, which ensures that all registered voters in California receive mail in ballots. California is now the sixth state to require active registered voters to be mailed a ballot before each election. Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and Utah already do so.
- **Expand on-campus voting opportunities** for college students. AB-59 (Kalra, 2019) currently designates college campuses as potential vote centers. We should work to require that college campuses have vote centers.
- **Participate in redistricting processes** at all levels from school district to Congress. Redistricting has historically marginalized Black and other communities of color by gerrymandering. To ensure that there are leadership roles available to the next

generation, we must engage in this process now. Community members are the best representatives in this process. No one can advocate for or talk about your community like you can. As Leah Aden, Deputy Director of Litigation at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund said, "Maps can be drawn to either aid communities of color to have a voice or designed to drown them out." Participation in the process is how we ensure the proper and fair outcome.

While the barriers and racial disparities that we face are significant, they are not insurmountable. We must move decisively towards the appropriate legislative and interpersonal solutions to ensure that we are fully investing the power of the next generation.



The  
Power  
of Next



## Building the Safety Net for Black Women

**Tunua Thrash-Ntuk**  
Executive Director, LA LISC



Black working women are critical breadwinners for their families and communities. Yet all too often they are paid less than their white male and female counterparts and are more likely to be concentrated in low wage jobs. This is important to acknowledge because half of all US households, according to research by the Urban Institute are headed by women.<sup>viii</sup> And Black women are the most likely to head households at a rate of sixty percent. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on women and women of color in the workforce. This underscores that families rely on women's earnings to survive and further demonstrates how important it is for women to participate in the labor force with meaningful employment. Bold action must be pursued to ensure that Black women can access high-quality low-cost childcare, affordable long-term care, living wages, affordable housing and a more equitable economy.

### **Early Education**

Right from the start of life, Black families often have to make difficult choices to ensure that children have access to high quality childcare and preschool. Black households, more often headed by Black women, are two times more likely than white parents to have to quit, turn down, or make a major change in their job due to childcare disruptions. The average annual cost of private preschool is \$8,600, while infant care in California averages \$11,817 a year.<sup>ix</sup> The importance of early childhood care and education are well documented, yet Black families experience financial barriers and are more likely to not enroll their children. In order to expand access to the vast majority of families, policy makers should provide universal access to high quality, free preschool for all 3- and 4-year-old children. Further, to help lower wage workers and families with children under 6, more resources, including tax incentives, should be made available to off-set the cost of childcare. Thereby making early education more accessible for Black families.

### **Care Work and Long-Term Care**

After a lifetime of racial, economic and health inequities, Black women are at risk of spending their last years with declining health, little income and scant savings. While many studies have documented that Black Americans are more likely to be in worse health than their white counterparts, Black women are most likely to be impacted by these circumstances later in life. Health disparities start early for Black women. For example, 45% of Black women aged 20 years and older have high blood pressure, this is a rate that is 60% higher than

white women experience.<sup>x</sup> These poor health conditions often impact Black women's ability to sustain employment, pay into retirement benefits like social security and 401Ks, which are critical to end of life financial support. Further, these poor health outcomes for the Black community often means that Black women have to leave the workforce to care for families, spouses and children. Work disruption during prime working age means Black women will have paid less into Social Security or not have had the ability to participate in company sponsored and supported retirement systems leaving very little in resources in older age. And while our country relies on women of color to care for everyone, they aren't paid well and often live at the poverty line themselves. Of all women of color in the care industry workforce, Black women are most overrepresented. Black women make up 6% of the US Labor force, however, they constitute nearly 30% of all home health care workers.<sup>xi</sup> In order to address this matter, Black women should call upon lawmakers to both decrease and/or subsidize the cost of home-based care and to increase the wages of home care workers. This will go a long way in improving the quality of life for Black women while they are of working age and when they are being cared for later in life.

### **Affordable Housing**

Black communities know first-hand about the critical need for quality, safe and affordable housing. And all too often bear the brunt of lack of access to affordable housing in communities. In California, the Black community is overrepresented in the homeless population. Only 6.5% of California's residents identify as Black but represent nearly 40% of the state's homeless population.<sup>xii</sup> This isn't just a California phenomenon but is consistent with national trends. Nationally, Black people account for 13.4% of the population but are 39.8% of the homeless community.<sup>xiii</sup> Large, meaningful investment in affordable housing is called for from lawmakers to address the disparities experienced by Black people and Black women. The following are two policy solutions to address the lack of affordable housing for Black women and their families.

#### ***Investing in HUD Housing Choice Voucher***

First, invest in resources that make the HUD Housing Choice Voucher a right for all income qualified households. In California more than 40% of households meet the federal definition of "housing cost burdened", meaning rent or mortgage payments take up more than 30% of a residents' income. For Black California's, an even larger portion of their monthly income goes to cover housing costs. Surveys show that nearly 50% of Black Californians live in households that are rent burdened with nearly 25% of families utilizing 50% of their income to support housing costs.<sup>xiv</sup> Increasing the resources to support Housing Choice Vouchers could have a significant impact on Black households. Nearly half (48%) of all Housing Choice Voucher recipients nationally are Black.<sup>xv</sup>

#### ***Eviction Prevention***

Despite Black women gain access to housing they have the hardest time maintaining it. A 2020 analysis<sup>xvi</sup> of national eviction court filings showed that Black women face a disproportionate share of the burden of eviction. Black women renters are doubly impacted with the highest rates of both eviction and serial eviction filings, which is the practice of landlords to file eviction proceeds to collect rent and fees where the tenant is responsible for the covering legal costs. It's time for law makers to recognize the need for and invest in legal resources to support renters who are more often subjected to evictions. The good news is that there are policy options to help families avoid eviction. Chief among them is access to free legal counsel. The chips are stacked against renters and Black women renters especially since over 90% of tenants are not represented by counsel, while 90% of landlords are.<sup>xvii</sup>

The simple solution of providing free, readily available access to counsel to avoid an eviction for renters is a smart investment.<sup>xvii</sup> Evictions are costly for both the tenant and the state. Tenants end up in debt and unable to secure new or future housing solutions which leads to housing instability and potentially homelessness. A Massachusetts statewide study found that for every dollar invested in legal representation for those going to housing court, the State would save a multi-fold of \$2.69 in other services like emergency shelter, health care, foster care and law enforcement. Given the positive outcomes of other programs across the country, California passed the Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act, in 2009 and made it permanent in 2016, designed to address civil matters for low-income families.<sup>xix</sup>

Today, Black women need California policymakers to fully fund the pro bono legal services, such as those under the Shriver Act, with an emphasis on housing representation, to further invest in complimentary social services and to increase the income thresholds so that more working families can access the services.

### **Equitable Economy**

Creating an equitable economy is going to start with investing in Black women. Black women have a jaw-dropping 90% wealth gap (90% less wealth) in comparison to white men.<sup>xx</sup> This fact is not for lack of ingenuity, genius or hard work but years of extractive economic policies and a US tax code that makes it harder for low-income families to save yet easier for rich families to evade and/or avoid paying taxes. In 2019, the 400 richest Americans held more wealth than all 10 million Black households and a quarter of Latino households combined. This leaves a lot of families at the bottom of the economy.<sup>xxi</sup> Today, 22.1% of Black people fall below the poverty line making it difficult to cover basic expenses like housing, food, rent, health and transportation.

Policymakers are encouraged to extend the current Child Tax Credit, which would provide a major tax cut to millions of families, including 3 million Black people. By extending the Child Tax Credit, the US could cut the Black poverty rate by 34.3%. This is especially important to the 85% of Black women who are either sole or co-breadwinners for their families.<sup>xxii</sup> There is more that can be done to use the national and state tax code to support Black low-wage workers.

Years of research have shown that the Earned-Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a strong tool to help lift families out of poverty and in the last year, the EITC was increased from \$543 to \$1,502.<sup>xxiii</sup> If this increase is made permanent, approximately 2.8 million Black low-earner workers such as cashiers, cooks, delivery drivers, food preparation workers, and childcare providers nationally would benefit. In California, there is an opportunity for law makers to make the Golden State Stimulus permanent targeting the state's EITC qualified households.<sup>xxiv</sup> Women of color are much more likely to benefit from such modifications in the tax policy. Twenty-one percent of Black women receive the EITC today, which is more than double the nine percent share of white women who receive the credit. Further Black women tend to achieve the second highest benefit of the credit among all women at \$2,200 just \$100 shy of the top benefitting average achieved by Native women (\$2,300).<sup>xxv</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts on the economic stability of many, not the least of which are Black Women. While the full effects of the crisis are being studied, it's important to note that black women were already experiences the drag of lingering effects of racism and gender bias. Earning only 63 cents to every dollar earned by a white man, Black women's wages and thereby asset accumulation hadn't kept pace with their productivity. The

discussion herein outlines the impacts of years of policies that ignore Black women and their well-being. As the recovery roads are paved in 2022, what is clear is that Black women play a significant financial role in keeping their families and communities afloat. Therefore, we will need to center Black women's needs in order to ensure a successful economic recovery.

## 'Build Black' from the Pandemic by Investing in Black Women

**April Michelle Jean, MSW**



*Black women have suffered vast economic impacts as a result of the novel coronavirus pandemic. This unique time in history requires policy and decision makers to prioritize the needs and interests of Black women by making key investments that will have a profound positive impact on our lives and futures.*

Black women have been the group most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of its myriad impacts on health, economics and raising children. We were already experiencing extreme disparities in economics, housing, health, and wellbeing. Starting in 2020, we were hit with a new health threat that eliminated jobs but continued to call for the services of essential workers – who are largely women of color – putting them at much greater risk of infection. Those factors were compounded with the challenges of finding childcare, managing remote schooling, accessing technology in order to participate in the workforce, and taking care of our mental health.

We have a lot of work to do. And we don't simply need to "build back." We need to "Build Black" from the pandemic by investing in Black women. This means addressing structural racism and inequities by making key investments that will have a profound positive impact on the lives of Black women. Prioritizing the needs and interests of Black women will also support children, families, and the economy, which will in turn transform our communities.

For me, this work is very personal – and not only because I'm a Black woman and a single mother. The roots of my work in social justice and health equity come from growing up in vulnerable and underinvested communities in Sacramento. To make a difference in people's lives in these communities, I became a social worker, working boots-to-the-ground in the very neighborhoods that I grew up in. I went door to door in every neighborhood in

Sacramento County, especially in communities that are under-resourced, under-protected, and overpoliced. I worked with women and children who were extremely vulnerable to public health threats and harms from our healthcare and child welfare systems. Often, visiting those families held up a mirror to struggles from my own youth and challenges I continued to face. Even though I was working, it simply was not enough. I struggled to maintain my household and had to seek out resources from community-based organizations and, at times, apply for public assistance.

As I saw the way that public institutions neglect to deploy their resources to the most vulnerable communities, I entered a new phase in my career where I focused on systems change and systems transformation – as a racial equity consultant for organizations and a public policy advocate. I am grateful to now have an opportunity to impact outcomes for underserved communities, especially Black women, through public policy solutions and targeted strategies.

In 2021, I began serving as Policy Director for California COVID Justice: Recovery, Response, and Repair. This initiative was formed one year ago by Public Health Advocates, an organization that brings a public health lens to the pressing issues of our day. In this role, I get to work with an incredible team and a steering committee – composed primarily of women of color – to support and create policy solutions that will help the most vulnerable people in the most overlooked communities recover from the pandemic and thrive.

### **Research Supports the Need to Invest in Black Women**

Black women have been experiencing financial hardship and poor health outcomes long before COVID-19 emerged. In California, 23 percent of Black women live in poverty, according to the Women's Well-Being Index<sup>xxvi</sup> from the California Budget and Policy Center. The national rate of poverty for Black women is about the same, studies show.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In California, the median income for Black women is \$43,000 a year – compared to \$52,000 for White women and \$69,000 for White men, according to the Status of Black Women report<sup>xxviii</sup> from the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The average cost of childcare for an infant makes up 28 percent of a Black woman's average income in California, according to the same study, and the average cost of housing makes up 37 percent of Black women's income, according to the Women's Well-Being Index. Obviously, that leaves little remaining for food, transportation, childcare, and other necessities for the average Black woman in California.

Furthermore, 81 percent of Black mothers are “breadwinners” who earn at least 40 percent of their household's income, and 74 percent of Black women breadwinners are single mothers, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research's report.

Although Black women have made great gains over the past decade in attaining higher education and opening businesses, a large percentage of Black women work in low-paying service industry jobs which were most impacted by the pandemic. Since the economy has rebounded, Black women of all educational levels and less college educated Americans have the hardest time finding jobs, according to the Washington Post.<sup>xxix</sup>

The overall Black unemployment rate is 8.8 percent – more than double the White unemployment rate, and the US workforce includes 550,000 fewer Black women now than it did in February 2020.



In the Washington Post's interviews with women of color, the biggest barriers to employment were "child-care struggles, health concerns, overlooked and ignored online applications, and too many jobs that pay minimum wage or barely above it." Black women and men were about twice as likely as their White peers to report that they're unable to look for work because they lacked childcare or had other family responsibilities.

Entrepreneurship has been an exciting growth area for Black women, and we need to provide more support now to sustain that growth. Majority Black women-owned firms grew by 50 percent from 2014 to 2019, representing the highest growth rate of any female demographic during that time frame, according to Forbes. Without targeted investments, we could lose many of those businesses. All of this data makes a clear case that we need to Build Black from the pandemic by investing in Black women. Doing so will require concerted efforts at the federal, state, and local levels of government, and from as the private and philanthropic sectors.

### **Policy Solutions and Calls to Action**

At the federal level, the expanded child tax credit and the earned income tax credit<sup>xxx</sup>, which were passed as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), provided significant relief for Black women. They both expired in December 2021, and we need Congress to prioritize making these policies permanent. The child tax credit provided up to 39 million families with monthly payments of up to \$3,600 per child and has the power to reduce child poverty by 40 percent. The expanded earned income tax credit<sup>xxxi</sup> boosted the incomes of up to 17 million low-income working adults.

At the state and local levels, we must continue to raise the minimum wage to levels that reflect our costs of living and create affordable childcare programs. Guaranteed income programs are another great solution that has gained momentum during the pandemic. In addition, we need reparations programs for Black Americans as a small way to recognize the harm that has been done to us and continues to be perpetuated. The city of Evanston, Illinois, provides an example for government bodies to follow with the reparations program<sup>xxxii</sup> it passed in 2021.

To support Black female business owners and entrepreneurs, I want to see more action from government agencies as well as large corporations that have made racial equity pledges. For individuals in a position to donate, groups like fundBLACKwomen.com and Black Girl Ventures<sup>xxxiii</sup> also provide opportunities to make an impact.

At the state and local level in California, several of the projects I'm working on through the California COVID Justice initiative offer great opportunities to invest in Black women and families. Through ARPA, California's cities and counties are receiving \$16 billion in flexible funds as part of the \$362 billion that cities and counties in the US are receiving. This is an unprecedented opportunity to advance equity at the local level. California COVID Justice is mobilizing community advocates across California and making sure they are informed and equipped to impact how their elected officials spend federal COVID relief funds.

Instead of maintaining the status quo, we want elected officials to seek community input and to prioritize health equity and racial justice in their budgeting decisions. That can mean investing in supportive housing and other measures to reduce homelessness, providing hazard pay to essential workers, strengthening community health programs, and numerous other solutions that will benefit Black women.

In 2022, we will begin working with several cities and counties in California to push for

equitable spending of local ARPA funds. Black women show up to vote in elections at higher rates than any other group – not to mention protests, community meetings, and more. By organizing and showing up to the meetings of our city and county governments, we can direct our local institutions on how to make their budgets. Our voices are strong, and we cannot waver now.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen communities of color hit hardest, and at the same time we have seen community-based organizations (CBOs) that have trusted relationships with these communities step up to provide critical services. They have pivoted toward new services, such as food delivery, vaccine administration, informing residents about economic relief, and more, based on the needs of their communities.

Black women make up a large portion of nonprofit employees, especially at the CBOs which most accurately represent the communities they serve. To improve health outcomes for Black women and their families and ensure we are more protected when the next emergency strikes, we need investments in Black-led CBOs. The Stanford Social Innovation Review<sup>xxxiv</sup> found that Black-led nonprofits have on average 76 percent less unrestricted revenue than those with White leaders.

We are part of a coalition supporting the Health Equity and Racial Justice Fund, which would distribute at least \$100 million in annual funding to help community-based CBOs, clinics and tribal organizations reduce health disparities. It was not included in Governor Gavin Newsom's 2022 budget proposal, and we are working with advocacy organizations, CBOs and legislators to put it into the final state budget. We also must avoid another situation where we are unprepared to deal with a pandemic or another type of emergency. That is why we are developing a racial and cultural equity framework for funding during emergencies. We want to create new legislation in California that establishes a framework for who receives funding when a state of emergency is declared, through a lens that actually sees us and doesn't just say it does.

Black women are vital to the sustainability of this country. We lead in voting, in social movements, and in the labor force, despite all of the inequities we face. We are doing the work – we just need the support and resources to sustain our progress. I am excited and grateful to be in a position to help influence policy change in order to help Black women thrive.

Investing in  
**Black Women**



## The Balancing Act and the Support Needed

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For decades women had heard the adage that they can “have it all.” Women can have a career and have a family. That society has progressed to a place where women no longer must choose. Unfortunately, the programs and policies currently in place do not support women’s ability to achieve that goal. For Black women, this balancing act has gone way past the breaking point. With nearly 80% of Black mothers with children under 6 participate in workforce, the highest workforce participation of any racial/ethnic group, the challenges facing their ability to remain in the workforce remain. Addressing the complexities of working families, particularly working Black families with female headed households, is going to require both legislative and non-legislative solutions. Getting the right mix of solutions can truly move the needle and really improve the health, wealth, and quality of life in Black communities all over the state. The original State of Black Women report advocated for the need for culturally competent mental health services and workplace training. Unfortunately, many employers lack the internal will to offer these types of services without legislative mandates. It is important that Black women, and their allies, support legislation that expands culturally sensitive/competent community mental health services.

The California Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) has included in its strategic plan the need to focus on the unique needs of nontraditional workers. Moreover, to effectively offer these services to Black women one must study the needs of Black women specifically. The second strategic goal of MHSOAC is to “advance data and analysis that will better describe desired outcomes; how resources and programs are attempting to improve those outcomes; and elevate opportunities to transform and connect programs to improve results. In the case of Black women, we need to ensure that data collected and analyzed includes enough Black women for effective conclusions to be reached and solutions to be developed. Advocating for resources at the state and local level is made even more difficult when we do not have the proper evaluation data demonstrating the need for services dedicated to and designed for Black women.

In addition, to provide culturally competent mental health services, companies can also create a more family friendly workplace that are inclusive of non-traditional families. The original “State of Black Women” report discussed options such as job sharing, telecommuting, support and protecting caregivers in the workplace. The last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that job productivity and efficiency are not negatively impacted by telecommuting policies. In fact, there is now evidence workers are more productive under this structure.<sup>xxxv</sup> Allowing telecommuting and hybrid work situations for working families,

particularly those that are female headed, allows for the ability to better deal with caregiving responsibilities. Particularly considered that 1/3 of Black women don't have access to paid sick days<sup>xxxvi</sup> and nearly 1/5 black households have a person >15 with a disability living in the home. Often leave policies instituted by employers assume that employee's caregiving responsibility will be short term (i.e., maternity or parental leave). However, caregiving for a disabled or aging family member is often long term and unpredictable (citation).

Employers can do a number of things to improve the quality of life of their employees that are serving as caregivers. First, companies can start with creating a culture of awareness and make their organization much more responsive to the needs of their employees. This can include educating employees and their managers on the challenges caregivers face including the mental and physical impacts as well as how caregiving for a disabled or elderly family member differs from more recognized forms of caregiving including parental leave. Moreover, companies and managers must work diligently to dispel stigma associated with asking for flexible schedules and alternative arrangement in order to handle caregiving responsibilities. Companies can create holistic policies that reflect the different stages of life and increase the likelihood that employees will take advantage of provided family leave benefits. Second, employers can build workplace policies, benefits and programs that provide coaching, wellness, and support services to support caregiver well-being. Additionally, employers can review their current leave policies to ensure that they are meeting the current and future needs of their staff.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that while the previous recommendations are not necessarily specific to Black women, changes to these policies on a large scale will significantly impact the ability of Black women to care for their families and continue to participate in the workforce. It is also important to note that, while encouraging companies and local organizations to voluntarily do the necessary research and expand their policies to meet the needs of their workforce, we must recognize that in order to have a wholesale cultural shift that impacts the majority, legislative actions will be necessary to codify many of these policies as standards.

Research has shown that provided employees some level of paid leave is the single most important aspect of creating a caregiving-friendly workplace.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Legislations at the state and federal level that requires minimum paid sick leave is essential. With 1/3 of Black women not having access to paid sick leave, many women are forced to make untenable decisions between work and caregiving responsibilities that have significant ramifications for their careers and family. The California Employment Development Department offers a paid family leave (PFL) benefit that can be used to care for seriously ill family member, bond with a new child or participate in a qualifying event because of family members military deployment. However, the payment only covers a portion of lost wages and are limited in the time frame covered. And we know that caregiving needs can extend for year. Universal Paid Family and Medical Leave is under Consideration in Congress as part of the Build Back Better Act. The proposal would guarantee 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave every year to all US workers. The leave would be available to those working for private employers, state, local, and federal governments, as well as self-employed and gig workers. This provision would be critical to improving the lives of many Americans including Black women. Regardless of if the Build Back Better Act passes or not, a push to get this provision past is necessary for working families. The US is the only industrialized country without a minimum paid family or medical leave.<sup>xxxix</sup>

On top of the need to push for PFL, state and federal funding is needed for long term care. The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP) provides long term care insurance to federal, US Postal Service employees and active-duty service members. In the state of CA

long term care is primarily funded by Medi-Cal with 25% of Medi-Cal funding going toward long-term care services.<sup>xi</sup> Unfortunately, long term care program and services are incredibly complex and fragmented making it difficult to both apply and receive assistance. It also makes it difficult to obtain data on the impact of the program. Unfortunately, with California's aging population, combined with low wages and benefits for long term care workers, we run the risk of not being able to accommodate the demand for services that will come in the next several decades 70% of people over the age of 65 and 37% under 65<sup>xli</sup> will need long term care at some point in lives.<sup>xlii</sup> Thus, these programs are essential to provide care, premium coverage and respite care for caregivers. Legislation is needed to increase access to both federal and state programs to assist family with long term care. Increasing availability and funding of these programs is essential to improve both the financial, health and mental well-being of working families.

With the pandemic came significant, but temporary, increases in our social safety net that need to be made permanent. Specifically, expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Child and Dependent Care Credit as well as the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) under the American Rescue Plan. The tax credits are offered at the Federal and State level in California and are designed for low and moderate-income working people and their families. The American Rescue Plan has expanded these tax cuts significantly which has had a measurable impact on working families. In a 2021 study,<sup>xliii</sup> nearly 94 percent of parents said they planned to continue working or even work more once receiving the Child Tax Credit. When working families have the resources, they need they can continue working instead of dropping out of the workforce duties. These tax cuts need to remain pertinent. Moreover, increases in the limit for the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) also needs to remain a permanent fixture in our tax code. An FSA allows for tax free contributions that can be used for dependent-care expenses during the year. These funds are available to pay for childcare as well as care of elderly parents or disabled adults (including your spouse) living with you who are physically or mentally incapable of providing their own care. The American Rescue Plan law increased 2021 dependent-care FSA limits to \$10,500 from \$5,000, offering a higher tax incentive and lower tax burden. Again, these programs are essential to improving both financial, health and mental well-being of working families.

Taken together there are several legislative and non-legislative measures that can be taken to improve the lives of Black women. We must be committed to collecting the data we need to measure the impact of the initiatives on the Black families. For Black women and the families, they lead, these issues are critical to continue to meaningfully invest in the Black community.



## Black Women's Health in California

**Sonya Young Aadam**  
President & CEO  
CA Black Women's Health Project



A healthy Black woman generally means a healthy Black family and community. Sadly, the state of health for California's 1.2 million Black women and girls is not good. The physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health of Black women reflect the adverse conditions and gross disparities in their place of birth, and where they live, work, play, pray, and age. There are social and system determinants of health that place Black women's quality-of-life, health outcomes, and their very lives at risk every day. And then came COVID-19, which has proven to be a racialized pandemic that continues to exacerbate longstanding inequities in overall healthcare for Black women, families, and communities. The Black health experience, which is already historically ravaged by disparities in conditions, access, and care, is made even more unsafe in the time of COVID. An examination of 10 Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) before COVID-19 only serves to reveal cracks and gaps that would widen under the weight of the pandemic's impact on Black women and girls.

1. Income/economic stability
2. Social support networks
3. Education quality/access
4. Employment/working conditions
5. Social environments
6. Physical environment/neighborhood
7. Personal health practices and coping skills
8. Health services/access
9. Gender
10. Culture/Race

Gross disparities persist in health outcomes from maternal/infant mortality, depression and anxiety, asthma, preventable hospitalizations, STDs, HIV/AIDS, breast cancer mortality, uterine fibroids, domestic/family violence, and other key indicators that are impacted by social and system determinants. Gaps in care and outcomes are often evident even despite educational attainment, socio-economic status, stable family dynamics, and individual behaviors. Too often, these generally accepted protective factors are overshadowed by racism, healthcare bias, and systemic inequities, especially in larger urban centers where most Black women and girls reside.

Los Angeles County, home to the largest concentration of Black women in California (population ~ 432,312), had some of the worst health outcomes pre-COVID. The county's Department of Public Health - Office of Women's Health and Office of Health Assessment & Epidemiology (Singhal et. al, 2017)<sup>xliv</sup> found that:

- Black women had the highest percentage of families living in poverty for single-headed households with children (60.5% compared to 40% for Latinas, 23% for White women and 18% for Asian women)
- Black women had the highest age-adjusted death rate from all causes and the highest age-adjusted death rate from cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, HIV, suicide, and homicide
- Black women had the lowest average life expectancy at birth at 79.1 years, compared to 83.5 years for White women, 86.1 years for Latinas, and 88.9 years for Asian women)
- Black women had the highest infant death rate per 1,000 live births (10.3 vs. 4.5 for Latinas, 3.0 for White women and 2.5 for Asian women)
- Black women were most likely to have provided care or assistance to an elderly adult living with a long-term illness or disability (31% compared to 24%, 18%, and 15% for Whites women, Latinas, and Asian women, respectively)

The overlay of COVID-19 puts Black women's health at a precipice that begs for the need to shore up and strengthen all protective efforts to safeguard Black women, girls, families, and communities in California from further declines that could be seen for the next 25 years or longer. We must anticipate a significant increase in the need for acute medical and mental health interventions as we cycle through the next 2 years (post-COVID) and endeavor to equip licensed and lay health workers with the knowledge and tools to get ahead of expressions of pandemic-related anxiety, grief, and loss, and the effects of missed or limited health screenings and care experienced by Black women due to the impact and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fallout from the neglect of care is the next healthcare crisis for Black communities.

Post-COVID-Stress-Disorder will likely lead to an inordinate burden on Black women who generally uphold the health and well-being of their families and communities in their sphere of influence. It is critical that we work together to address cultural grief and painful losses, ongoing trauma, and abuse, the 'Strong Black Women' schema, feeling abandoned and isolated during lengthy periods of lock-down, and the struggle making sense of past, current, and projected life stressors. The presence of mental health professional shortage areas, especially in and for Black communities in California, presents ongoing challenges in preparing to address ongoing stress, especially for aging and elderly Black women. The expansion of safe and affirming support spaces for Black women and girls to talk, deal, and heal has the potential to lessen the severity of declining mental health, build on coping techniques, reduce isolation, and identify cultural and gender-sensitive therapeutic care if necessary.

Community-defined interventions developed and implemented by trusted leaders are critically necessary to address the complex factors, leading with systemic racism, which predisposes to, or creates risk for chronic disease, depressive disorders, physical and emotional injury, and other conditions that exacerbate poor health in Black women and girls. Multi-sector collaboration is essential. Established and emerging Black women centered organizations and agencies like California Black Women's Health Project, Black Women Birthing Justice, Black Women for Wellness, UCSF's Black Women's Health & Livelihood Initiative, and numerous others across the state are poised to work collaboratively on prevention and early intervention efforts to fill gaps in healthcare.

## Proposed solutions for consideration

### Increase resources

- Investments in the capacity and stability of Black women-led community-based organizations with an aim to heal and strengthen the Black women who heal and strengthen Black women along their growing, learning, career, perinatal, and aging journeys
- Investments in community-defined evidence practices (CDEPs) and interventions that center Black women, girls, and communities, including integration and alignment of these practices into public and private health care systems
- Investments in racial justice and equity work aimed at dismantling structural and systemic racism in health care
- Strengthen community collaboratives focused on social determinants of health

### Expand training/ scope & sites of practice

- Rapid expansion of training for Black community health workers/advocates/peer counselors
- Conduct specific health screening and care for protocols Black women as an equity approach to address targeted social determinants, protect against provider and system biases, and support a more inviting and healthier clinical experience
- Bring healthcare to the community/ alternative screening sites in Black neighborhoods – in churches, beauty shops, community centers – similar to COVID-19 test and vaccine sites
- Expand group models of care
- Scale up telehealth options where digital resources are strong
- Continue to explore private/public partnerships to enhance care delivery models

### Expand education and community engagement

- Elevate new voices in health advocacy and outreach including non-health focused CBOs
- Train more community members in policy advocacy and, to increase understanding of the political and power structures in health
- Promote the community-private-public partnership model that brings together patient-centered culturally engaged care





# Health Funding and the Health of Black Women

**Elaine Batchlor, MD, MPH**  
President & CEO  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Community  
Health



Access to health involves more than carrying an insurance card, especially if what you have is a public insurance card. In our separate and unequal system of payment for health services, where Medicaid—Medi-Cal in California—ranks a distant third behind Medicare and commercial insurance, black women start at a disadvantage with their health. That's because 61% of Medi-Cal enrollees are black. And a stunning 50% of births in the state of California are covered by Medi-Cal.

If a doctor cannot afford to practice in a community insured by a plan that pays less than fifty cents on the dollar for the cost of care, black women suffer the consequences of that doctor's absence. It means a black woman insured by Medi-Cal cannot find a specialist to help her manage her diabetes. She can't locate an obstetrician for pre-natal care. She can't find a mental health professional to support her through challenges related to pregnancy, child and family care.

## **Community Disparities**

Our community is home to Los Angeles County's most vulnerable population, with poverty rates, employment rates, and metrics of poor health exceeding other regions of the County and State. This underserved population of 1.3 million people is 23% African American. With significant portions of our community designated as health professional shortage areas, medically underserved areas, or both—a direct consequence of poor Medi-Cal funding—community members struggle to access the kinds of essential preventive, primary and specialty care services commonly found in other communities. They use the Emergency Department in place of these services not because they believe it is the best place to get care, but because other options are so limited. Educational opportunities and access to healthy, affordable food, quality housing and green space are equally scarce.

## **Maternal Health**

Every year in the United States, about 700 to 1,200 women die from pregnancy or childbirth complications. Black women are three to four times more likely to die of pregnancy and delivery complications than white women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). This racial divide in maternal deaths has persisted for decades.

While a growing field of research indicates that risk factors for black women include a complex combination of vulnerabilities pointing to the experience of racism, we also know the fundamentals: every healthy pregnancy starts with appropriate pre-natal care. A health care provider—an obstetrician—recognizes and manages risks like diabetes and hypertension early in pregnancy and provides critical follow-up after delivery. Continuous monitoring of

pregnancy prevents and supports treatment of pregnancy-related complications. But if you don't have access to a doctor who can care for you during your pregnancy—if you live in a community dominated by Medi-Cal coverage—your choices are few. You may end up like many of the women admitted for delivery in my hospital, Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital in South LA, with no pre-natal care to prepare for a healthy birth.

Funding matters. Our state-of-the-art facility is funded through supplemental public funding and private philanthropy. This model—unusual for a safety net community—allows us to offer quality care from talented and culturally aligned physicians. That is often not the case for black women delivering in vulnerable communities. A study published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology in 2016 found that 63% of white patients versus 23% of black patients gave birth in the safest hospitals in the study. There is a direct correlation between funding and hospital safety and quality. Black women are at a great disadvantage in this equation.

We recognize this at MLKCH. The need to expand prenatal care and post-delivery support for expectant mothers in our community is a priority. Through our MLK Community Medical Group, funded with a mix of private philanthropy, hospital resources, and Medi-Cal payments, we have increased access to medical specialists in maternal health. Our delivery model includes a 24/7 on-site team of nurse midwives and obstetricians, an approach that supports a healthy birth. Our Baby Friendly program allows us to provide home and community-based post-delivery services for new mothers, including home visits following birth. Our mothers are prepared for their delivery with our First 48 Hours class before delivery, and they receive post-delivery assistance that includes a peer support group for new mothers.

This should be the norm, not the exception.

### **Mental Health**

Suicide is among the leading causes of maternal mortality in many countries, but studies of suicide and suicidal behavior among pregnant women in the United States are only beginning to emerge. Nationwide estimates cite suicidal behavior, identified by The International Classification of Diseases Clinical Modification codes, as nearly doubling from 2006-2012. For suicidal ideation, black women had a higher prevalence than whites. Notably, more than 30% of hospitalizations among these pregnant women were for suicidal behavior without a depression diagnosis.

In California, mental health—suicide—is a major contributor to mortality in the postpartum period, along with drug-related deaths, suicide represents 18% of all maternal deaths in the state. Medicaid-insured women were the most likely to be in this category. Seventy four percent of these women made more than one trip to the emergency department or hospital between their delivery and death. Emergency departments and inpatient hospital visits may serve as a critical point of identification of, and prevention for, women at risk for mental health mortality. Black women who are pregnant need physicians who can recognize early warning signals. They also need access to mental health professionals who can care for them. Mental health and physical health treatment must be integrated for the best outcomes.

A few years ago, our hospital and the MLK Community Medical Group collaborated on an innovative design for the treatment of mental health, physical health and substance abuse disorders. The Integrated Behavioral Health program begins with assessment at the first point of patient contact, establishing potential links between a medical condition and a behavioral health concern. This allows for the early intervention of a behavioral health team, following the patient from inpatient care to appropriate long-term support, care and resources in an

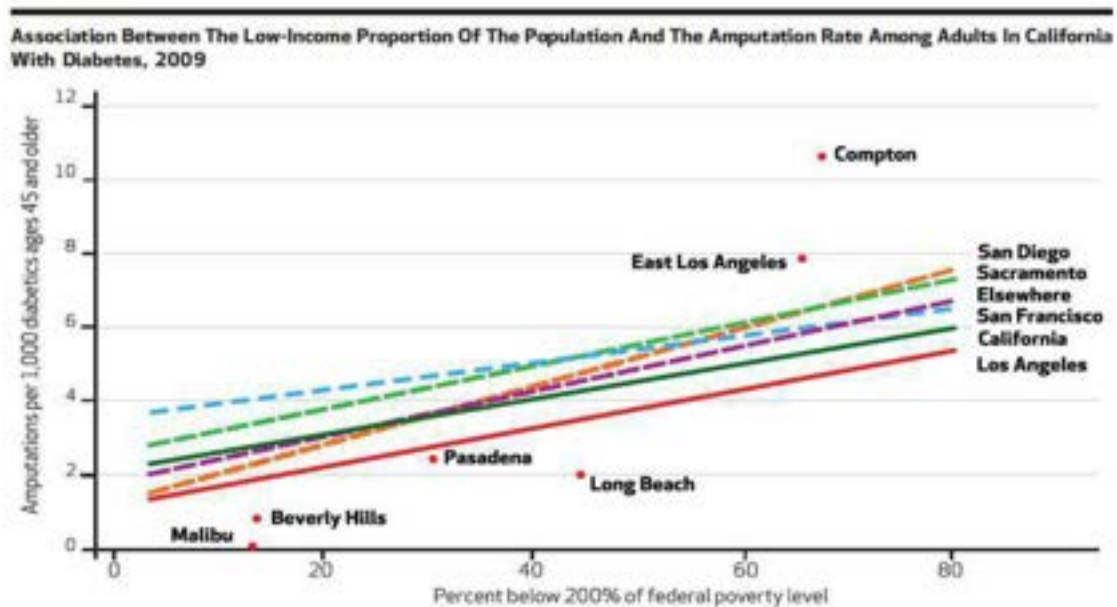
outpatient setting. As we expand our outpatient work in maternal health, an obstetrician in a practice site does early screening for pre-and post-partum depression, connecting the mother to a behavioral health team member for treatment both before and after pregnancy. But funding for this work, from the emergency department to the outpatient practice sites, must grow in order to keep pace with the needs of black women in our community.

### Diabetes: A Chronic Condition Epidemic

Diabetes is a largely preventable disease, yet it has reached epidemic proportions in our nation. A 2006 study published in the National Library of Medicine projected the prevalence of diabetes more than doubling by 2050. Rates are expected to increase more in women than in men. While diabetes is prevalent across racial/ethnic groups, it shows marked health disparities. Half of black women are expected to develop diabetes in their lifetime. Many of them will live in communities like ours, with little access to resources for managing their disease and preventing debilitating complications.

South Los Angeles has a diabetes rate three times the state average and life expectancy ten years lower. According to research by the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, public health data indicate diabetes rates will increase by 49% in this community in the decades ahead.

Data have long shown that lower-income communities have less access to quality diabetes care, even with coverage for primary health care.<sup>xlv,xlvi</sup> This results in unacceptable outcomes: in South Los Angeles, where diabetes mortality rates are 72% higher than the rest of Los Angeles County,<sup>xlvii</sup> outcomes are extreme.<sup>xlviii</sup> As one example, the following graph illustrates the disproportionate diabetes-related amputation rates across Los Angeles communities:



Data like the above are borne out in the lives of patients. In 2020, patients facing complications from diabetes made up 36% (8,413) of MLKCH hospitalizations. Amputations and wound care remain among the hospital's most commonly performed surgical procedures, with an average of 1,100 patients treated annually – and 2-3 amputations performed weekly.

The Covid pandemic made starkly clear the vulnerability of our community—diabetes was one of the most common co-morbidities among MLKCH COVID patients. Yet, diabetes is – or should be – a manageable chronic condition. Poor or absent medical care and lack of support predict the tragic outcomes we see daily in South Los Angeles.<sup>xlix</sup> Proactive, team-based care, enabled by sufficient health funding, can significantly improve this picture.<sup>li</sup>

Amputation rates spell a “shameful metric” of inadequate care.<sup>lii</sup> Black diabetics are more than twice as likely as white diabetics to undergo diabetes-related amputations.<sup>liii</sup> Poverty is a key factor in risk for amputations and their consequences, among them loss of life. More than three quarters of people with lower limb amputations die within five years of the operation.<sup>liiv</sup>

Like maternal and mental health care, we know that early and consistent care for a black woman with diabetes is vital for good outcomes. However, access to services, from screening to preventive care and disease management, is limited for the publicly insured. The results for black women are dire.

### **Solutions**

Funding impacts all the dimensions of health, from direct services to the social determinants of health. But health funding in particular—the payments offered to physicians for the care they provide—has a profound impact on the lives of black women. Inadequate funding leads to inadequate and inaccessible care, poorly managed conditions, disability, and shortened life spans. Payments must be adequate enough to support the specialists and infrastructure black women need for their health, from maternity and mental health to chronic conditions.

In addition to improved provider payments, we need data collected by race, specifically for the conditions we need to monitor, like black maternal and infant mortality. We need healthcare professionals who are culturally aligned, who look like us and share our experiences, and who treat us with respect. In summary we need:

- Parity for coverage and provider payments across health insurance programs, especially for Medicaid. At the very least, Medicaid provider payments should be on par with Medicare provider payments.
- Investment in development of the healthcare infrastructure that is lacking in underserved communities. This includes community-based provider practice sites, pharmacies, and skilled nursing facilities.
- Funding for training black doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. Funding should reduce financial barriers to healthcare education and help black students enroll in the large number of excellent academic programs across the country, not limiting students to a small number of historically black institutions. Funding should support medical residency programs in underserved communities that can train physicians in needed specialties, like obstetrics and psychiatry.
- Passage of the Preventing Maternal Deaths Act of 2017, a bipartisan bill introduced in Congress to support data collection and research to identify solutions for improving health care quality for mothers.

Implementation of these funding and policy recommendations would bring significant improvements to the health of black women in California.

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

## Pandemic Lessons Learned: Health Communication Is Suffering From Lack Of Relevant Community Engagement

**Lisa Fitzpatrick, MD, MPH, MPA**  
(Originally published on Forbes.com)



Throughout the pandemic, most of my work has involved listening to the community—on the street, virtually during Ask the Doc sessions, on Clubhouse, through hearsay and even reading text messages. Most recently, a mother sitting in a clinic waiting for her son's vaccination texted me for reassurance that she was making the right decision to have him vaccinated. Encounters like this provide instructive and humbling insights about how and why, despite nearly two years of multi-media communication campaigns and messaging, efforts to communicate complex health information are failing. Stories and observations from our community outreach can guide us toward more responsive and relevant health communication strategies for the community.

The scientific community missed a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build trust and communicate the global relevance of science and research. We have arrived at a moment in which the world is now more attuned to health, science and medicine than ever before. But our health communication failures have deeply eroded trust in science, scientists and health policymakers. Conflicting expert opinions and evolving information with inadequate explanations have led to doubt and distrust in the community. For example, we heard CDC masking and social distancing recommendations were perceived as arbitrary rather than based on scientifically credible information. Last year when I asked a group about sources of trusted health information, a woman spoke derisively about CDC shifting the social distancing policy from "six to three feet overnight." Her comment reflects community perspectives on what feels like sudden and baseless policy decisions by decision-makers and how effective communication is not reaching the community. Consequently, people are tuning out.

The feedback from the community also suggests a need for humility in communicating science. Although epidemiology is rooted in data, we have failed to help people understand that science is not always exact and that this does not preclude our ability to devise and implement credible policies and recommendations. Several people have related their disinterest in the graphical presentation of pandemic data. This approach is impactful for academics but often woefully inadequate to reach the community.

People crave access to trusted health information and in its absence, rely on the grapevine and social media. When I am out on the street having casual conversations, people freely

share their sources of health information. The two most common sources appear to be grandmothers, meaning someone senior to them, and 'they,' as in "'they' say the vaccines are tracking you." The identification of 'they' is often elusive, but probing concludes that both are proxies for hearsay.

A young man who was vaccinated at his grandmother's insistence had not heard of the Omicron variant. He admitted to never watching or reading news and relied solely on Instagram, YouTube and his grandmother for his health information. Many others had also not heard about Omicron, and when asked about sources of trusted health information, they cited social media and YouTube. It is not surprising that people lost amidst a sea of conflicting health information will turn to personal, relatable and informal but trusted sources of information.

As for how people decide whose word is trustworthy, for many, it is about 'likes.' One woman said, "We go with whoever sounds like they know what they are talking about, and if it makes sense to me, I will go with them." These reactions suggest that in addition to traditional channels, we must also deliver science and health information through non-traditional media channels like social media and trusted community messengers.

People are often deeply confused by science and its processes and do their best to assimilate complex health and scientific information. During an Ask the Doctor session a woman asked, "Why do I need to be vaccinated if my Covid test was negative?" The question and countless others like it provide insight into how our health communication is not effectively reaching or educating many communities about the basics of science, research and medicine.

Therefore, we must deliver health information that is nuanced and tailored by context to help people understand the 'how' and 'why' of science and medicine. Often, I have described vaccine mechanisms as a club bouncer deflecting an unwanted patron or a dress rehearsal preparing for the actual event. In responding to a question about breakthrough infections, I recently watched another scientist describe Covid vaccines as a bulletproof vest protecting from severe injury rather than contact with a bullet. His analogy strongly resonated with the audience and led to additional discussion and even a few people accepting vaccination.

Finally, because health communicators too often take the listener's knowledge for granted, people express a need to conduct their "own research." This process requires sifting through online medical and scientific jargon, leaving them to draw conclusions that may be incorrect. A man who told me he does his own research described his process as google first, followed by reading abstracts from Medline searches and consulting an online medical dictionary for words he does not understand. Afterward, he socializes his conclusions among people he believes are more intelligent than he is. His health decisions are ultimately based upon whatever seems most logical for him. His process conjured images of a courtroom with lawyers battling for the jury's attention. It validates the need for delivery of credible health information that is more relatable, simplified and jargon-free.

Covid information fatigue is increasing, and attention is reverting to non-Covid health conditions and social issues. A few weeks ago, when I was on the street, I approached a woman to ask her about Covid vaccinations, and she responded, "No thanks. I am tired of talking about Covid. Can you help me with housing?" Many others have avoided questions about Covid and pivoted to obtain convenient, non-judgmental information to better understand if they should worry about a symptom, ask 'why' or get intel about their medical conditions. One man walked by uninterested in a Covid-related conversation and a few seconds later returned to ask if we could help him find a good orthopedic surgeon. On another day, a woman

hospitalized with pulmonary embolism was discharged and immediately approached me on the street to review her discharge paperwork. She asked for help to understand her next steps.

More than ever before, there is a glaring need to address the community's health information and social support needs, especially the vulnerable. Covid news may be predominating on the airwaves but as interest in Covid information fades, our outreach shows us people struggle with health and social issues pre-dating the pandemic, only with fewer and less accessible health support and resources.

How can we respond to this information?

We are losing misinformation and disinformation wars and leaving the community vulnerable to misinformation. This is partially because credible science messengers are not as abundant and relentless as purveyors of misinformation in conveying health information through non-traditional or new media information channels. But also, because we do not consistently dialogue with communities to understand their fears, concerns and misperceptions about science.

Therefore, we must commit to adapting our health communication strategies to align with longstanding and urgent community health information and engagement needs. We can start by consistently listening to the community to deeply understand the experiences that inform their beliefs and acceptance or rejection of credible health information. The more we understand how and why we fail to deliver impactful health and science information, the better we can respond.

To more effectively reach the community with credible, data-driven health information, we must disrupt the culture of judgment and bias against communicating through more relatable and engaging strategies. I am talking to myself as much as anyone. Those of us professionally reared in academia and national policy environments are steeped in a culture and processes that create barriers to delivering relatable and engaging communication. Academics and policymakers often speak in jargon void of concrete, actionable information and generally talk to each other rather than the community. In addition, although many people, particularly in underserved communities, rely on social and digital media engagement for health information, these information sources are generally viewed as less credible and authoritative as if educating and engaging through these channels is beneath us.

We have to change this and bridge communication gaps between scientists, policymakers and the community. This includes showing up in the community with authenticity, humility, openness and humanity. We can do this directly or through partnerships. Either way, unless we heed these lessons, when the next pandemic happens upon us, the trust deficit will remain, and we will see we have made no progress at all.

# EMPLOYMENT & EARNINGS



## Building Together

**Angela Reddock-Wright, Esq.**  
Mediator, Arbitrator, Investigator



***If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far go together. – African Proverb***

We are all fully aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for women across the board – from blue collar working women to women in executive leadership and corporate boardrooms. The impact has been particularly pronounced among Black women. In fact, it's been well documented that Black women have been hit the hardest by the global health crisis, as it continues to unfold all around the world, with no immediate end in sight and potentially, no ultimate “cure all” for the problem.

According to Forbes, the prolonged pandemic has imposed additional burdens on working Black women exacerbating the already existing challenges in the workplace. Evidence suggests, 52% of Black women report being the “only” of their gender and race at work which may lead to a certain degree of discomfort, anxiety, and a sense of alienation. Furthermore, 42% feel reluctant to reveal their thoughts and perspectives on racial disparities, and 22% don't feel comfortable discussing the impact of the current events on their lives, careers, families, and communities.

Sadly, Black women generally continue to be at a disadvantage in many aspects of our economy, working hard but often not seeing the benefits of their labor in return. As reported by the U.S. Census, Black women face a wider-than-average pay gap despite the fact they participate in the workforce at much higher rates than most other women. Most strikingly, some of their colleagues may be unaware of the deeply ingrained inequalities still prevalent in our society and may remain insensitive to the issues confronting Black women and other racial minorities

While the pandemic continues to spread rapidly, upending our plans to put the global disaster behind us, there is hope that change is coming. After all, there is a silver lining in every dark cloud and something good can come out of every bad situation.

I believe we are at a pivotal moment in the American workplace. Now is the time to rise to the challenge and lay the foundation for a better, safer, and fairer workplace allowing intelligent, driven, and talented Black women to achieve their full potential, get to the top of the game, and thrive.



So, what specific steps do we need to take to bring about change and lift each other up in the process?

### **From Multiple Challenges and Systemic Disadvantages to Powerful Solutions and New Opportunities**

We all realize that the list of problems outlined above is just the tip of the iceberg and doesn't fully reveal the myriad of challenges Black women face. But fortunately for us all, there are quite a few positive changes emerging on the horizon, giving us hope for a better tomorrow.

The highly charged events of 2020 inspired many business leaders to embrace an uncomfortable truth – that, issues of race, gender and other forms of discrimination are still alive and well and increasingly, employees are challenging their employers to implement policy changes that substantially move the needle when it comes to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In other words, employees are challenging employers to put their words into action and to demonstrate – by their actions – their commitment to their mission and values statements.

While there is no easy path to change, I am convinced that 2020 marked a significant shift for ALL Black workers and, hopefully, more will be done to elevate Black talent. For example, the **Partnering for Racial Justice in Business Initiative** is a global coalition comprised of major companies like Google, EY and Bank of America and designed to build equitable workplaces. In addition, Starbucks committed to have 30% of its corporate workforce identify as a minority by 2025. Morgan Stanley and many other big companies started conducting extensive studies to better understand the experiences of Black women at work.

Does it mean the tide is turning and we are finally moving in the right direction? As big corporations are striving to implement much needed changes, let's hope that smaller companies will follow suit in an effort to stay competitive, increase credibility and attract more talent. At the legislative level, the Crown Act (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act), which prohibits race-based hair discrimination in the workplace, serves as a shining example of the type of policy that levels the playing field for Black women.

Considering the myriad of challenges Black women face in navigating the workplace, the following articles, written by a group of amazing women and thought leaders, provide invaluable insights as to what it will take to establish more equitable and inclusive workplaces; to build generational wealth within our community; to grow our presence at all levels of corporate America; and unveil new pathways to wealth. Combined, these four pillars provide the groundwork for a better, brighter, and more prosperous future for Black women in the workforce.

### **Stepping up the Game in Pursuit of Equity**

Gone are the days of only focusing on diversity in the workplace; inclusion and equity are the two missing pieces to the puzzle. While diversity means including people from a wide range of racial, social ethnic backgrounds as well as genders and sexual orientations, equity is about giving every single employee all the resources she/he needs to gain access to opportunities, and to excel once those opportunities have been provided.

To achieve true equity in the workplace for Black women, organizations must:

- Ensure Black women have all the sponsorship, mentorship, and support they need to achieve success. In other words, both women and men should take steps to ensure that Black women gain equal access to opportunities.

- Ensure fair and equitable pay and benefits for Black women. According to the U.S. Census, on average, Black women were paid 63% of what non-Hispanic white men were paid in 2019. That means that it takes a typical Black woman up to 19 months to be paid what the average white man takes home in 12 months. That's even worse than the national earnings ratio for all women, which stands at 83%, as stated in the report provided by AAUW.org
- Implement ZERO tolerance policies and practices that limit instances of discrimination and harassment against Black women, in particular in the growing area of micro-aggressive behavior which often goes unnoticed.
- Develop flexible, remote workplace and family friendly policies that provide Black women the opportunity to be successful at work, while also not being frowned upon or held back for taking necessary time to care for their spouses, children, aging parents and/or to deal with other personal family matters. Statistics show that many Black women are the primary caregivers for their families; yet they must balance caregiving with work, finances, childcare, social life, personal well-being, and living up to cultural expectations, as stated on Multiculturalcaregiving.net. While 23.1% of whites are caregivers compared to 24.3% of African Americans, more than 67% of caregivers are females. As suggested by AmericanProgress.org, 84.3% of Black mothers are more likely to be a primary or co-breadwinner in their families.

### **Black Women and Generational Wealth: Education, Equitable Pay, & Entrepreneurship Are Key**

Building generational wealth among Black women involves at least three critical components, with financial education and literacy being at the top of the list. In good times or bad, financial literacy is at the core of financial growth and is more likely to result in financial independence.

The growing Crypto Currency industry serves as a great example of this concept. By many accounts, those who did not recognize this powerful investment tool and opportunity early on, have already missed the boat, which once again reminds us about the importance of education. By the way, as suggested by CNBC, just 19% of Crypto Currency investors are white women and only 4% are Black women.

Generational wealth building also requires a focus on equalizing pay and salaries for Black women in the workplace. According to HerMoney.com, Black women make just 61 cents for every dollar a man earns, compared to 82 cents per dollar wage gap for women of all races combined. As stated above, this involves companies updating their policies and practices to ensure that all employees are paid equally based on their skills, background, and qualifications.

California has advanced this principle with the passage of the California Equal Pay Act, an amendment to the existing California labor laws, which took effect on January 1, 2016. This law ensures that employees who perform "substantially similar work" get equally compensated for their input. In addition, under this law, an employer cannot pay anyone less than the rates paid to employees of the opposite sex, or another race /ethnicity for "substantially similar work" performed under similar working conditions. We remain hopeful that this legislature combined with similar laws and policy changes will create equal opportunities for Black women at work.

### **View from the Top: Conquering the Corporate World**

When it comes to Black women in Corporate America, while there have been strides, statistics show the numbers still remain low, particularly in the C-Suite and on Corporate Boards.

According to USA today, in 2018, nearly 30% of public company boards in California consisted of men alone, and that figure has now gone down to less than 3%.

As reported by the Observer, African Americans make up only 2% of women on California corporate boards. According to California Partners Project, women now hold 26.5% of CA's public company board seats, with only 6.6% by women of color who make up 32% of CA's population.

Again, the California legislature has led the way with the passage of SB 826 in 2018 which requires all public companies headquartered in California to appoint a certain number of women to their boards beginning January 1, 2022. Corporate boards with four to nine people must have at least two women board members, or board members from underrepresented communities, and boards with nine or more people must have at least three. A company's failure to meet these requirements can result in stiff penalties.

### **Tapping into the New Economy**

What exactly is the New Economy? According to Investopedia, it's a relatively novel a concept encompassing new, high-growth industries that are on the cutting edge of technology. In fact, these rapidly growing fields are believed to be the driving force of economic progress.

When it comes to pathways to prosperity, we have to ensure that:

- Black women do not get excluded or feel excluded from new opportunities invariably arising in this new economy
- Gain access to education, training and upskilling and develop the most crucial skills to get into high growth industries

Armed with all the necessary tools to move forward, Black women known for their ambition and drive, will be ready to compete and get ahead as the highly competitive marketplace continues to evolve.

### **Final Thoughts**

As the saying goes, no person is an island, and no one makes it alone. As Black women, we are here for each other. Yes, there is so much that remains to be done, but when we look back on our amazing history, we realize that we, empowered by the work of our foremothers, have already done so much to advance the cause of Black women in the workplace. Let us not be weary in well doing and let's continue to forge new paths for the women who are in the trenches with us now and who will come after us when we are gone.

Most of all, let us remember that there is power in numbers and power in our working together to achieve change – each one of us bringing our own unique talents and experiences to the table. I have no doubt in my mind that collectively, we can overcome any hurdle, maximize our potential, and make this world a better place. Not only for each other, but for everyone else!

Remember ladies – We are strong. We are powerful. We are fierce. We are compassionate. We are magic.

Our time to shine is NOW!

# Black Women in an Equitable and Inclusive Workforce

**April Verrett**  
President of SEIU 2015



Black women have for years faced systemic challenges that stand in the way of an equitable and inclusive workforce. In no industry is this more explicit than in home care, where almost 400,000 of our members work. The home care industry is 86% women,<sup>iv</sup> with more than half identifying as Black, Latina and Asian women. The median income for these women is less than \$19,000 – one of the lowest average wages in the country – and benefits are sparse,<sup>vi</sup> if available at all. In-home caregivers also face major obstacles to unionization, which makes it even more difficult for them to improve their circumstances. But despite these challenges, these women show up every day to support our families and keep our communities running.

SEIU Local 2015 member Tracy Mills Jones<sup>vii</sup> is one of many working women whose story sheds light on the need for an equitable and inclusive workforce for Black women. Tracy has been an IHSS (in-home supportive services) provider for more than twenty years. When her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and declined quickly, Tracy had to give up her stable job in the cosmetics industry to care for her 24 hours a day until her mother tragically passed. Around the same time, Tracy's husband began to suffer from his first of many cancers—he passed away in 2018 and Tracy's resulting financial struggle meant that for a time her family was homeless, her children staying with other family members. Now, Tracy cares for her brother—who has suffered from a massive stroke, requires dialysis three times a week, and has undergone many surgeries—and a family friend who is legally blind. Tracy commutes hours a day, costing both time and money, to care for her loved ones and her community. The services that Tracy and other IHSS workers provide are undeniably vital—increasingly so with our burgeoning aging population and an ongoing pandemic—yet their compensation, and the value that we as a society place on them, does not reflect this. Despite her critical and highly demanding job, Tracy is essentially living in poverty.

Over the last two years, Covid has done a lot to expose these problems, but has also made many of them worse. We have seen how governments declared in-home care workers “essential,” yet it feels like lip service when no real-world changes have been instituted. Beyond that, dealing with a highly transmissible virus has made the job more stressful, more dangerous, and in many cases altered the way we provide care. Caregivers are front-line workers putting their lives on the line daily to do their jobs, but because they are overwhelmingly women of color, they are treated as expendable. There are a number of solutions we are working towards to create an equitable and inclusive workforce that enables Black women to succeed and better their lives. Passing the Build Back Better act is one of the best places to start. Working women and their families have waited long enough—they can't afford any more delays to historic investments in our care infrastructure.

The investment in home and community-based care proposed by President Biden would be a game changer for the Black women who make up the majority of this workforce, and have

been underpaid, lack benefits, and historically written out of labor laws. Yet the legislation—and the investment in care workers within it—is still being deprioritized, as it has been for decades. In a recent poll,<sup>lviii</sup> up to 78% of voters across a number of states expressed support for this significant investment, acknowledging that investing in caregiving will promote national economic growth.

An equitable and inclusive workforce for Black women must make home care jobs good union jobs with living wages, paid sick leave, and other benefits. There should be national and statewide incentives to improve these jobs by raising wages and making it easier for workers to join unions. The industry faces dire workforce shortages, which means that our vulnerable seniors and people who are sick or live with disabilities often can't find the support they need. Investing in care workers, giving them good wages and treating them like the essential workers that they are, can help solve these retention issues.

That's why Tracy and other long-term care providers, both in-home and in nursing homes and other private agency home care facilities across California, have spearheaded the "Time for \$20"<sup>lix</sup> campaign to establish a living wage floor in their industry. This increase in wages would be life changing for many Black women in the workforce—allowing them to pay their bills and sit comfortably in the middle class. Care work is a cornerstone of our economy—investing in home care has the potential to create jobs across the country, in cities and suburbs, as well as in rural communities where care can be hardest to access. One study here in Los Angeles County estimates that a \$20 wage for IHSS care providers in the county would result in an additional \$2.1 billion in economic output in the county, support nearly 12,000 more jobs, generate an additional \$700+ million in labor income, and result in \$293 million more in state and federal tax revenue.

The long-term care industry has been shaped by long-standing racist and sexist policies. But with caregiving now one of the fastest growing jobs in the nation and more essential to our economy than ever, we have to do better. There is a lot of talk about the work that should be done to create equitable environments and push back against racist policy, but we must also walk the walk. If we are serious about creating change, then we, as a nation, can no longer afford to ignore this workforce. We must recognize not only the essential, but the valuable nature of these jobs, and that the people doing them—largely women of color—are fundamental members of our society.

As our new First Vice President of Homecare Industry Carmen Roberts says, "We need to make sure these jobs are true life-sustaining careers. We need young people to say, 'I want to go into long-term care work' like others choose engineering, medicine, and law."

# POVERTY & OPPORTUNITIES



The Opportunity for Change is  
Now

**Crystal D. Crawford, Esq.**



As many people worldwide continue to experience some degree of pandemic burnout, COVID-19 and its economic effects have not impacted everyone equally. People who were systematically marginalized before the pandemic are being hit particularly hard, especially women of color with low incomes. Although Black women are often the economic bedrock of our families and communities, our health, safety, financial and overall well-being are not being prioritized. Prior to the pandemic, Black women faced substantial barriers to economic well-being. A legacy of discriminatory policies and practices rooted in white supremacy is inextricably linked to an economy that limits economic opportunity for Black women in California. Moreover, Black women's work is often undervalued and under paid and the safety net is insufficient to support our needs.

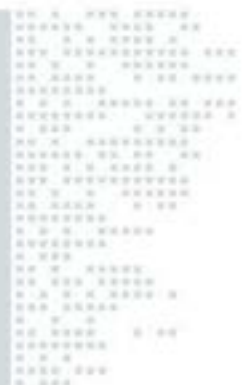
As a result of the policies and systems that have limited the economic opportunities and resources available to Black women, we are overrepresented in jobs that pay low wages and do not provide upward mobility. Racial and gender discrimination and occupational segregation often limit Black women's opportunities to advance in the labor market. Despite facing structural inequalities that leave us disproportionately vulnerable to poverty, Black women are creating and pursuing opportunities for economic advancement. One approach used to reduce the concentration of Black women in low-paying jobs is to increase training and recruitment of Black women for well-paid occupations facing shortages of workers. Education and workforce development systems can make it a priority to recruit and train Black women to fill these jobs and enable Black women to enter occupations with better salaries and benefits.

Public benefits and supports are critically important to help make ends meet during times of financial hardship. The public programs that comprise the social safety net are critically important to Black women and other women who experience disproportionately high poverty rates. Programs such as CalWORKs (the California Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), Medi-Cal (the California Medicaid program that provides health care coverage), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (a refundable tax credit that offsets income taxes for low-income working families and individuals) can help lessen the financial hardship faced by women and their families. However, these programs often fail to reach many of the vulnerable women and families who could benefit from their assistance. Limited access stems partly from complicated application and eligibility determination processes, as well as lack of transportation and information on how to enroll in these programs.

Black women have substantial caregiving responsibilities for our children, elders and family members living with disabilities and the lack of a strong work-family support structure in the United States makes it extremely difficult for many Black women to balance work and family responsibilities. Reliable childcare, which is often prohibitively expensive, is an essential support for working women. Black women who do not have access to affordable childcare (or elder care) are often forced to choose between keeping their jobs and caring for their loved ones. Many women turn to part-time employment because of the dearth of affordable childcare and elder care.

Health, housing and food justice are also gender and racial justice issues. We need to ensure that Black women can maintain a home and economic security for ourselves and our families. The lack of healthy food sources, quality health care and affordable housing in low-income communities is a human rights issue. Consequently, addressing the eviction crisis for Black women is crucial and requires policies that improve access to affordable rental housing. This is especially critical because evictions disproportionately impact Black women renters who already grapple with a gender and racial wage gap.

Policymakers need to advance an economic policy agenda with an intersectional lens centering race and gender that also incorporates narrative change. Although we are relied on to play critical roles in the workforce and our communities, Black women's labor is often undervalued. We must end the stereotypes that assault the dignity of Black women and address occupational segregation, as well as gender and racial pay and wealth gaps. Black women continue to experience structural barriers to progress that have roots in the nation's legacy of racial and gender discrimination and exploitation. Centering Black women and women of color in our policy agendas and decisions is the only way to create a truly equitable California.



# Bridging the Pay Gap to Economic Security for Black Women

**Lauren Babb**

Chair, The California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls



## Know the Facts

**80%**

of Black mothers are key breadwinners for their families

**55%**

of Black women surveyed reported gender/racial obstacles to opportunity at work.

**91%**

of Black women surveyed feel strongly that Congress should pass paid family and medical leave legislation

Source: National Women's Law Center: Black Women and the Wage Gap State by State, Payscale: The State of the Gender Pay Gap in 2021, CWWG Research Guide – A Tool To Measure Wealth Inequality

***“Women of color, and Black women in particular, cannot afford for the wage gap to remain so devastatingly large. Its elimination must be a priority.”***

– Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly M. Mitchell

For 55 years, federal law has required that male and female employees receive equal pay for equal work. Yet women in the United States who work full time are paid only 82 cents for every dollar paid to men — and for women of color that wage gap is significantly larger. It is this foundation of inequity on which the ravages of the current COVID-19 pandemic are taking effect. For the first time in recorded American history women have lost more jobs than men during the 2020 “she-cession.” This job loss has had considerable impact on women of color.

More than **6 in 10 Black and Latinx women in California** live in households that lost earnings during the pandemic.<sup>ix</sup> In addition, **58%** of Black women report losing a job or income during the pandemic.<sup>xi</sup> Black women are nearly twice as likely as White men to say they've been laid off, furloughed, or had their hours or pay reduced because of the pandemic. More than half of Black women report experiencing one of these crises, compared to 31% of White men.

The Equal Pay Act , as well as California's Fair Pay Act and other civil rights laws and legislative efforts, have helped narrow the gender wage gap, but have not yet eliminated it. The COVID-19 recession is hitting those already drastically impacted by racial, gender, and



income inequalities in California and the U.S., thereby deepening inequities and destabilizing communities statewide. Addressing the significant pay gap for Black women in the workforce is critical to securing the economic security of all women and their families.

The most recent data reveals the average Black woman in California takes home just **\$34,724** in median wages compared to **\$61,600** median wages for White, non-Hispanic men.<sup>lxii</sup> **\$41,466.06** is the cumulative debt on Black women's undergraduate loans, including principal and interest, one year after graduation, which leaves Black women with the most substantial amount of student debt.<sup>lxiii</sup> **21.1%** of California Black women reported living in poverty between 2014-2018, a number higher than any other race category and significantly higher than the average Californian at 14.1%.<sup>lxiv</sup> This is a crisis in every sense of the word, and it won't be solved with good will, or awareness. This level of inequity demands policy solutions.

### Systemic Racism and the Gender Pay Gap

California has the strongest equal pay laws in the nation, but the pay gap persists. In 2019 California, compared to White men, for every dollar: White women earned 79 cents, Asian American women 75 cents, Black women earned 61 cents, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander women 54 cents, Native American women earned 49 cents, and Latinas just 42 cents. The pay gap is fueled by career, decision to parent, wage discrimination, occupation segregation, work culture and access to retirement. Trusaic, a regulatory compliance software company focused on human resource issues found that California women in 2020 lost \$46 billion due to the gender pay gap and that people of color in the state lost \$61 billion due to the race pay gap.



The California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls proposes the following policy-based solutions to increase access, protect against bias, increase access, and close the wage gaps that consistently impact lifetime wealth-building and retirement.

### Policy-Based Solutions

- Establish an Office of Health Equity to offer state grants for community-based organizations to address racial gaps to equitable health access.
- Strengthen and enforce protections against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation and provide education on the resources provided by the California Department of Fair Employment & Housing.
- Ensure fair pay and job training including upskilling and transitional occupation opportunities for Black women
- Expand access to programs like "CalSavers Retirement Savings."

### Student Debt Entanglement

Many women of color and their families are burdened by a cycle of debt disrupting their ability to build wealth. Women with limited incomes who are also impacted by the pay gap must spend their limited resources on things like childcare, housing, food, or other loans, making it challenging to pay down their student debt. Moreover, the compounding interest rates

on many student loans mean that even those able to pay off the initial amount borrowed, may struggle to repay the loans due to the rate of increase on the interest. According to the National Partnership for Women & Families, if the wage gap for Black women were eliminated, on average, a Black woman working full time, year-round, would have enough money to pay off student loan debt in just over one year.<sup>lxv</sup> **The solution to the systemic entanglement is the cancellation of student debt.**

Members in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have signaled publicly their support for legislation, not yet introduced, that would forgive up to \$50,000 in student loans. In the early days of the ongoing pandemic, the suspension of student loan payments providing critical relief in a spiraling economy while further stimulating local economies. Recent research suggests that debt cancellation in the \$50,000- \$75,000 range targeted at households making no more than \$150,000 would cancel about half of all student debt and reduce the wealth gap between White and Black households.<sup>lxvi</sup> The State of New York State's Get on Your Feet Forgiveness Program covers two years of federal loan payments for students with an adjusted gross income of \$50,000 or less.<sup>lxvii</sup> Adopting a similar program in California could provide support for women of color concentrated in essential industries. The State of California also offers loan repayment programs to assist with repayment of education loans for primary health care professionals. A model should be considered for "essential workers" in non-medical settings. A model of interest forgiveness after the original principal loan has been repaid could also provide significant economic stimulus in middle-aged populations that are still saddled with debt, often while also managing the expenses of child and elder care.

### **Policy-Based Solutions**

- Support Federal Loan Forgiveness up to \$50,000.
- Implement a California based forgiveness program to cover two years of federal loan payments for students with an adjusted gross income.
- Expand access to California Student Loan Forgiveness Programs to "essential workers" and care-providers.
- Offer the Employer Student Loan Repayment Program which will offer a tax credit to employers who pay down student loans on behalf of their employee.

### **Black Families**

Black women are more likely than White women to be sole income providers and single parents. **Black mothers are typically paid only 35 cents for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic fathers.**<sup>lxviii</sup> Women experience the "motherhood penalty" a woman's salary declines 4 percent, on average, for each child she has, whereas a man's salary increases by 6 percent for each child.<sup>lxix</sup> Nearly 80% of Black mothers are key breadwinners, which means their households rely on their wages to make ends meet and get ahead.<sup>lxx</sup> On the whole, women are more likely to work in jobs classified as essential, and on the front lines of response to COVID-19. According to the National Women's Law Center, 93% of childcare workers, 66 percent of grocery store cashiers/salespeople, 70 percent of waiters and waitresses, and 77 percent of clothing/shoe stores cashiers/salespeople are women. Girls and young women, especially Black women, were hit hard by the crisis, with many dropping out of school and the workforce entirely.<sup>lxxi</sup>

In addition to the effort of trying to maintain a job that is more likely to disappear in the current economic climate, women are bearing the brunt of added unpaid labor in the form of housework, childcare, education and more. Women of color are specifically overrepresented in industries where jobs are rapidly disappearing because of this crisis, such as restaurants,

retail, and hotels. These occupations are often low paid and fail to provide critical supports such as childcare, paid family leave, or health insurance and the consequences have been devastating. Lost earnings due to the gender wage gap further compound these issues.

Black families also need a balance between caregiving responsibilities and careers. The pandemic taught us that paid care work must be recognized as essential and compensated. It is time to modernize paid leave in California, so the lowest-wage earners see the highest benefit. The Public Policy Institute of California found that 80% of poor Californians live in families with at least one working adult. When Black mothers are paid less, they have less to save and less to invest in education or career development opportunities.<sup>lxxii</sup> Basic economic security should allow all people the ability to meet their basic needs.

The Federal government is currently considering four weeks of paid family and medical leave and is awaiting a Senate vote. President Biden initially proposed twelve weeks of paid leave annually to all workers in the U.S. The state must continue to invest in a public infrastructure that values the importance of the care economy, such as paid leave, flexible employment policies, affordable childcare, and universal child tax credits. Governments should consider permanent access to paid family leave, guaranteed income, crisis-based cancellation of rent, mortgage, and utility payments. These policies have been proven to build an economy that creates jobs to address care deficits and places women of color at the center of economic recovery.<sup>lxxiii</sup> As we grapple with the long-term consequences of this pandemic, we must reexamine what women's work is worth, and adjust accordingly. As states and economic drivers eventually recover, it is imperative that embedded in the rebuilding is a renewed focus on parity, implementation of paid family leave policies, childcare and health insurance opportunities for employees, and a strict attention to salary differences for substantially similar work.

### **Policy-Based Solutions**

- Modernize Paid Family Leave in CA and ensure workers can easily access benefits utilizing the states 'Paid Family Leave (PFL) program and receive 100 percent wage replacement during the period of their leave.
- Remove barriers and burdensome or inequitable participation requirements. For example, temporary changes were adopted for supports such as CalWORKs (or TANF), CalFresh (or SNAP), and Medi-Cal (or Medicaid) that reduced required paperwork and office visits and removed work requirements to facilitate access to needed assistance.
- Advocate for guaranteed basic income, increasing minimum wage to a living wage, cancel student debt, pause payments on rent, mortgage, and utility items during a crisis to alleviate the financial impact on families of color.

### **Build with State and Local Commissions**

The California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CCSWG) works closely with local women's commissions as the state entity tasked with assessing gender equity across multiple issue areas. Through recent state funding, CCSWG is working with local women's commissions to grow the representation of all women's voices and provide immediate relief to women by increasing access to direct grant funding designed to improve the economic recovery of women and their families. The California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls offers multiple avenues for direct engagement at the state level. Local commissions and organizations can:

- Apply for the Women's Recovery Response Grants and other state funding.
- Get involved with a local Women's Commission or create a local commission:  
<https://women.ca.gov/local-womens-commissions/>
- Nominate a young woman to serve on the CA Youth Advisory Council.

As we confront the systemic racism baked into the fabric of our society and institutions, we must continue to put Black women and women of color at the center of policy solutions. The economic recovery for women is long overdue and addressing the disparity will continue to move us towards a California for all.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SPOTLIGHT



### Pass The Health Status of Black Women in California

By  
**Black Women for Wellness**



Black Women for Wellness, (BWW) is a non-profit organization located in South Los Angeles that is committed to the health and well-being of Black women and girls. We work on healing, supporting, and educating Black women and girls through health education, empowerment, and advocacy. We believe that good health is physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, and financial well-being.

Although our work has statewide impact, we primarily focus on serving individuals who reside in Los Angeles County. The majority of our target community is located in the pockets of Service Planning Areas (SPA) 6 and 8, as designated by the county's public health department. SPAs 6 and 8 are home to 60% Los Angeles County Black residents, with more than 287,000 (33%) in SPA-6 and a slightly smaller number of 234,300 (27%) in SPA-8 (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Service Planning Area 6, 2017).<sup>lxxiv</sup> Accessibility to grocery stores and fresh food sources are a serious public health concern, especially within the Service Planning Areas Black Women for Wellness primarily serve. The lack of healthy food options exacerbates the incidences of obesity, heart disease, and other diet-related illnesses that the communities of color face.

Our organization works to bring our community together to positively change individual attitudes toward fresh food and increase fresh food consumption. Ultimately, we believe this will aid in the adoption of better dietary practices, as well as educate the community about food waste reduction. It is our goal to bring awareness to these issues and offer better management systems for mitigating food insecurity.

The problem of fresh and quality food inaccessibility is not unique to South LA. Nationwide, we can quite easily find geographic areas characterized by high rates of poverty in which the population lives more than one mile away from a supermarket. These zones are coined “food deserts” in the public health sphere. A closer analysis of urban specific areas reveals there is a contrasting abundance of fast food, liquor stores, and convenience stores in these vulnerable areas, in addition to the prevalent drought of fresh food. The new buzz phrase in community health research and media for such dichotomous conditions is “food swamps”.

If we consider the zoning of food options surrounding our organizing office as an example of this phenomenon, the closest full-service grocery store is a little over a mile away, which fits the previously stated definition of a food desert (Google, n.d.-a).<sup>lxxv</sup> However, there is a Pizza Hut, a Pollo Loco, and several other fast-food restaurants within an approximate 0.5-mile radius (Google, n.d.-b; Google, n.d.-c).<sup>lxxvi</sup> Hence, our office and its surrounding residences fit the criteria of a food swamp. No matter the term used, the bottom line is the compounded issue of lack of access to healthy fresh food and the overabundance of unhealthy processed food which creates a major public health threat to vulnerable communities of color, specifically the Black women in the South Los Angeles area.

Since 2020, Black Women for Wellness has consistently provided fresh produce to over 100 households in our community. Over half of our produce recipients have self-reported earning less than \$50,000 a year, with about a quarter of our recipients making less than \$30,000/year. Additionally, over one-third of our recipients self-reported being unemployed and over two-thirds reported their income adversely impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

While circumstances may seem to be returning to a new normal, there are still individuals in Los Angeles County living with the uncertainty of when their next meal will come and access to quality foods. During the height of the pandemic, our Sisters in Motion Program, a division of BWW developed a food distribution program to address the varying concerns of food insecurity. The food distribution provides healthy and fresh organic produce along with a warm plant-based meal once a month, and recipes for community members. We also work with food distribution participants to introduce fresh, locally grown produce and provide food items that reduce carbon footprint.

Our food distribution program allows families in South Los Angeles an opportunity to experience food as medicine. By providing high quality produce and recipes that show how healthy food can be created in the kitchen, we are aiding in the overall well-being of our community. Our most recent poll results from December 2021, indicate that over 80% of our participants experience an increase in their vegetable consumption, and 70% experience an increase in fruit consumption. We have over 60% of our participants self-reporting an overall improvement in their health. Hence, it appears our food distribution is becoming a healing ground where physical transformations are possible.

We realize we can no longer afford to address the necessity of high-quality produce and access without looking at food and diets from a holistic perspective. As an organization, we believe one's diet is more than simply what they eat. It is what they listen to, where they spend their time, how they tend to their bodies, what they feed their souls and how they nourish their mental health. We observe every facet of our diet and how we feed ourselves in efforts to determine how we can experience health and wellness. It is important to observe feeding the Black Family by looking at all of the many ways in which we find nourishment or are prohibited from doing so. We have a hunger for a higher frequency of life that extends well beyond the food we eat, yet our food and food access is a wise place to start.

Overall, the lack of quality fresh food in areas densely populated by Black Americans has detrimental effects on the health and well-being of Black women. Specifically, living in an area with low accessibility to healthy food options and being a low-income household increases one's chances of developing diet-related illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease (Galea et al., 2019; Kelli et al., 2017).<sup>lxvii</sup> Data from our food distribution program indicates our efforts are helping to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in low-income households. Considering that our program only helps about 100 families, there is a wider need for access to fresh foods to serve the 500,000 plus residents that make up our community, let alone Black women across the state of California. Moreover, increasing access to fresh foods to California's Black women will undoubtedly increase their intake of the same and ultimately lower their risk of developing diet-related conditions, support financially intact households and lead towards healthier communities.



“The kind of beauty I want most is the hard-to-get kind that comes from within – strength, courage, dignity”

– Ruby Dee



## TALL as a CYPRESS: Reimagining Education for Black Girls

**Robyn Fisher, Ed.D.**



Recently I served as a facilitator in an African American affinity group in a predominantly White school District. A Black mother was describing her decision to move her family from a predominantly Black and Latinx urban community to a predominantly White, suburban community because her high school-aged daughter was not “thriving”. Her daughter was getting into “trouble” and had been suspended; hanging with the “wrong” crowd (“them fass girls”); getting bullied and, at times, was being a bully; and her grades were not like they were in middle school. She felt she needed to do something drastic to save her only child. So, she moved. In her new school, the young sister is one of ten students of color and just one of a handful of Black students. She is either the only Black student and/or the only Black girl in ALL six of her classes. Her mother explained that although she is no longer getting “jumped” and being suspended for protecting herself; she has twice been called a “Nigger” ; a white male teacher asked, in front of the class, if her braided hair was “hers” and asked if he could touch it; and she has been accused of stealing a white classmate’s cell phone. As this mother describes this scenario, she is in tears -- totally at her wits’ end. She asked me and the other folks in the affinity group meeting, *“What do I do? Did I do the right thing? How can I help her? I feel so guilty. Sometimes I’m so tired and overwhelmed that I tell her to just to suck it up – words can’t hurt you – get over it and get this “good” education and at the same time, she’s now so isolated, so sad and has completely withdrawn from me, the family, school... everything! I’m so worried for her.”*

Regrettably, this mother’s story is not the first that I have heard. On the contrary, I have heard this story all too often. Unfortunately, even as schools currently wrestle with deeply rooted, historical, and systemic racial inequities brought into razor-sharp focus by recent cases of police brutality and a global pandemic, one glaring problem stands out: Black girls, more than any other student subgroup, face both racial and gender bias in this state’s and in this nation’s classrooms.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

California’s schools are now among the most racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse schools in the nation (US Census, 2010). However, while the state is diverse, individual districts and schools are highly segregated.<sup>lxxix</sup> Issues of racial and linguistic segregation in schools continue to raise issues for access to resources and opportunities. Black scholars in California are “unambiguously among the state’s most spatially isolated and geographically secluded people, suffering extreme segregation across multiple dimensions simultaneously” (Teranishi, 1997).<sup>lxxx</sup> In this context, Black students, and Black girls, specifically, face challenges unique

to them as students in American schools at all levels by virtue of their social identity as African Americans and the way that identity can be a source of devaluation in contemporary American society (Fisher, 2015).<sup>lxxxix</sup>

For example, according to an analysis of national U.S. Department of Education 2015-16 civil rights data, the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) and the Education Trust, Black girls are five times more likely than White girls to be suspended, expelled, referred to law enforcement and arrested on school campuses. The causes of this disproportionate treatment range from unfair dress code and hair policies to a lack of understanding of the historical, social and economic inequities such as poverty, trauma, hunger, and violence that often impact student behavior. As a result, these exclusionary school discipline policies have long-term harmful effects upon the safety, wellbeing, and academic success of Black girls (Morris, 2016).<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The unequal education of Black students, with a specific lens on Black girls, generates and is evidenced by system-wide low expectations; ongoing and widening "gaps" in opportunity, resources, and teacher preparation; under-involvement in school activities other than sports; underrepresentation in accelerated enrichment programs; over-representation in special education programs; and disproportionate discipline referrals, resulting in suspension and expulsion (Ed-Trust West, 2015).<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

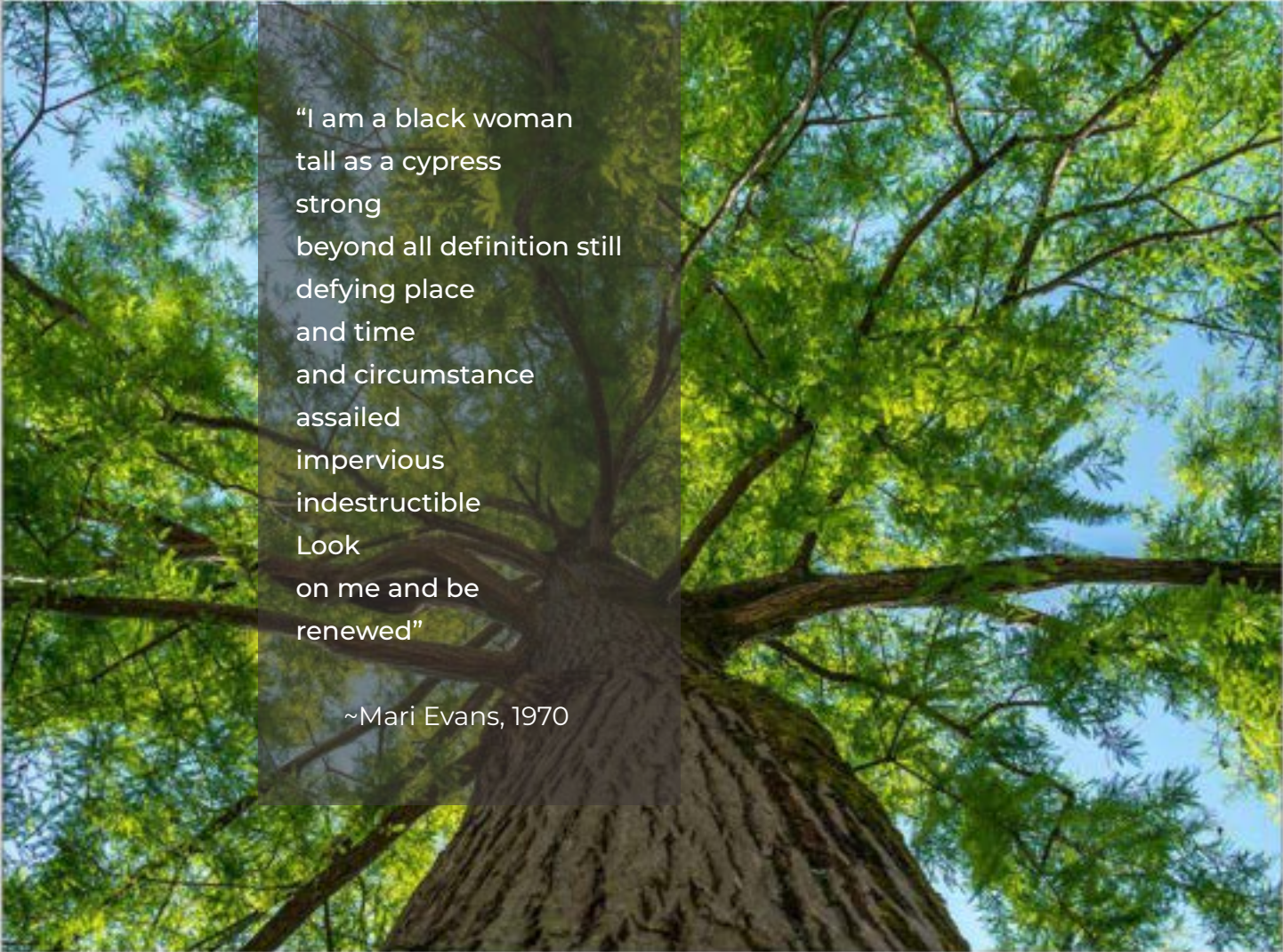
These resource, teacher preparation and opportunity gaps are primarily caused by the following: inequitable distribution of skilled, experienced teachers; insufficient and inequitable school funding; inequitable access to demanding, rigorous pre-college coursework; institutional racism; and lack of cultural competence among teachers, school staff, administrators, curriculum and assessment developers and the school system itself; families/communities not able (and often not welcomed by the education system) to support or advocate for children; a lack of supplemental services such as mentoring and tutoring to young people whose backgrounds subject them to the inequities and risk factors (Fisher, 2015).

What our scholarship tells us is that what works for Black student academic success is exactly what works for all students. Black girls need teachers and school leaders who have high expectations of them. They need rigorous and relevant curriculum that engages, challenges, and helps them make connections between the world they know and the world they need to know. They need more math and science, more access to Advanced Placement and other programs for the highly capable, and more of the supports that would help them succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1994).<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Black girls need skilled, confident, and effective teachers and school leaders with the subject matter mastery and expertise to teach them well.

Based upon this research, it is clear that if you create stimulating and supportive learning environments that intentionally blend the cultural, social, emotional, spiritual, and historical facets of Black experiences within an enriched classroom construct—meaning a contextualized, hands-on, interdisciplinary, interactive, rigorous, and enrichment-focused setting—Black girls will be more successful within this enriched classroom environment than within a traditional classroom structure – there's no way they cannot. While there has been some movement toward natural hair equity as evidenced by the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Act (SB 48 signed into law in 2011) and the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act (SB 188 signed into law in 2019), these actions are merely a small step toward the enriched classroom environment described above. To create conditions for Black girls to survive, thrive, and flourish in schools, I believe that we must move beyond the rhetoric toward action. As educators and legislators continue to grapple with staggering achievement gaps among our students, serious consideration should be given to



what researchers identify as effective and sustainable approaches to education. Furthermore, WE - the collective kinfolk of mommas, grand mommas, God mommas, aunties, big sisters, sister-friends, sorors, and mentors – also know what our Black girls need. They need US to use our “magic,” our resilience, and brilliance to speak on behalf of our Black girls. Members of the Black community must have candid discussions with policymakers about the barriers and challenges that face Black girls. In addition, we must use the power of the pen such as legislation, advocacy and ultimately voting to create educational policies that are solely and unapologetically focused on fulfilling the academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs of our Black girls. When this happens, our young “sistahs” will be able to hold their heads high and proudly proclaim:



“I am a black woman  
tall as a cypress  
strong  
beyond all definition still  
defying place  
and time  
and circumstance  
assailed  
impervious  
indestructible  
Look  
on me and be  
renewed”

~Mari Evans, 1970

# The Disruption of Success for Black Women in Higher Education

Nina Richardson, Ed.D.



The constructs of post-secondary institutions were built on exclusion. The founding colleges were reserved and designed for elite White males (Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2010).<sup>lxxxv</sup> For centuries, federal education policies prohibited students of color from achieving a high-quality education, which oppressed racial minorities (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012).<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Historically, Black Colleges were also not created equally. Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, influenced by the Rockefellers, were viewed as inferior; where students initially received training, not diplomas (Willie, 1981).<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Despite systemic barriers, Black women are undoubtedly represented in higher education. According to the United States Census Bureau, from 2000 to 2015, Black women were either second to Asian males or third to Asian males and Asian females in their proportion of those enrolled in college in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2016).<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Yet, the path to success comes with several barriers stemming from a foundation of systematic injustice.

In many ways, evidence of exclusion is still prevalent in the fabric of higher education, and it directly impacts Black women. This segment of the report will discuss longstanding and current fundamental issues within the higher education system that disrupts the success of Black women throughout several phases of their educational journey. Furthermore, recommendations for non-legislative and legislative solutions to eliminate barriers to success will be addressed to help repair this defragmented structure.

## **Barriers at Point of Entry**

### ***Admissions***

“Disruption is defined by problems that can interrupt a process” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, n.d.).<sup>lxxxix</sup> The process of accessing higher education can be the first of many hurdles Black women have to overcome. Since the formation and adoption of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in 1926, testing requirements have traditionally been the primary criteria for college admission decisions and have been a significant barrier for students of color (Smith & Reeves, 2020).<sup>xc</sup> However, as a silver lining of the Covid 19 pandemic, in May 2020, the University of California Regents unanimously voted to suspend the SAT and American College Test (ACT) testing requirements through 2024 and eliminate them for California students by 2025 (Schroeder, 2021).<sup>xci</sup> While this policy has the potential to create a more equitable admissions process for Black women, not all universities have clarity and consensus on this admission policy.

Some universities have only temporarily removed the SAT and ACT as a part of their admissions requirement. Furthermore, some universities in California are still using a testing optional requirement, leaving prospective students with the decision of whether to include

their standardized test scores in order to be considered for review. This policy continues to create a biased and inequitable admission standard, as well as uncertainty, for Black women preparing for college.

## **Barriers During College**

### ***Lack of faculty representation***

Hiring ethnically diverse faculty in higher education is a critical step towards being more inclusive (Carver-Thomas, 2018).<sup>xcii</sup> Faculty members are not only mentors and allies for Black women, but they also help shape the campus culture and curriculum. Navigating through a Eurocentric design of academia as a Black woman has its challenges. Dealing with “microaggressions” and “imposter syndrome” in the classroom are common occurrences for Black students; coupled with a lack of Black faculty representation (Manongson & Ghosh, 2021).<sup>xciii</sup>

According to the American Association of University Professors, less than 6% of the faculty at colleges across the US are Black, and just 2% are tenured Black women professors (Colby & Fowler, 2020).<sup>xciv</sup> In the nation’s largest college system, California’s Community College District, the homogenous nature of the faculty is startling; 60% of the faculty members are White while 71% of the student population are students of color (Peele & Willis, 2021).<sup>xcv</sup>

These staggering statistics are ultimately leading to a lack of support for Black women at a time when they need it most.

## **Barriers Post-College**

### ***Financial Burden***

According to a report from The American Association of University Women, Black women carry about 20% more student debt than White women (Hess, 2021) . In California, Black borrowers with bachelor’s degrees have nearly 50% more student debt than their white peers, four years after graduating (Krupnick, 2021).<sup>xcvii</sup>

One can argue that the current student debt crisis is a case of economic injustice. Attaining a degree in higher education was intended to provide upward mobility. However, institutions have shifted rising costs to their constituents with the federal government lending students money to pay for it, which creates a vicious cycle.

According to Nicole Smith, a chief economist at the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, “[w]omen with master’s degrees make on average what a man with a bachelor’s degree makes, and a woman with a bachelor’s degree would make on average what a man with an associate degree makes. So, in terms of repayment of those loans, you have women who are taking out higher and higher loans and their ability to repay is influenced by their lower wages” (Good,2001).<sup>xcviii</sup>

If lifelong debt is a cost of attending college, higher education is failing Black women. A college degree is intended to help students ascend to the next level with higher paying jobs and a better quality of life, not a permanent financial burden.

## **Recommendations**

There are several policies that universities and the federal government can implement to make the college experience better for Black women in the areas mentioned above.

### ***Adopt Test- Blind Admission Policies***

Test-blind policies occur when the university decides that the SAT or ACT will not be

considered as a part of the application evaluation. As it relates to admissions policies, having a test-blind campus will significantly change the landscape of higher education, making the playing field more equitable. Although approximately 130 California colleges and universities have committed to being test-blind for Fall 2022, there are still several private institutions who have test-optional requirements (Schroeder, 2021).<sup>xcix</sup> Consensus amongst all universities, both private and public, should focus on an impartial, holistic approach to admission requirements, which would help provide Black women an equal opportunity for access into college.

### ***Incentives to Hire and Retain Diverse Faculty***

The current model to increase the hiring of diverse faculty at institutions is not working. In order to recruit and retain new faculty members, it is vital to ensure the institution fully understands that the status quo is no longer acceptable; and every effort should be made, including reallocating resources, to ensure faculty represents the diverse student body. Some recommendations include:

- *Creating a pipeline between graduate and doctoral programs to full-time professor positions with incentives at institutions.* Upon graduating with a master or doctoral degree, students of color should be aggressively recruited by universities into full-time professorships with enticing benefits that include housing stipends, tuition reimbursement/loan forgiveness, and a competitive salary.
- *Professional Development and Mentorship Opportunities-* A study of 27 colleges and universities funded by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that the turnover rate for ethnically and racially diverse faculty is significantly higher than among majority faculty (Reis, 2013).<sup>c</sup> In order to increase retention of the faculty hired, it is important to have a strategic plan to shift the culture at institutions and invest more in mentoring and professional development. Diverse faculty should be fully supported not only financially, but professionally.

### ***Mandatory Cultural Sensitivity and Social Justice Certification Course***

Trainings are a routine requirement of faculty and staff in higher education. These trainings are often mandated by the university and tend to include subjects like include sexual harassment and new health mandates. While trainings can prove to be useful, experiencing an actual class that includes dialog with other colleagues could prove to be powerful and beneficial when addressing the subject of cultural competencies and social justice. Faculty and staff should be required to complete certification courses on complex issues such as racial microaggressions and implicit bias. To combat this cycle of exclusion in higher education, institutions should require educators to learn how to effectively engage with students and peers from diverse backgrounds.

### ***Cancel Student Loan Debt***

While major strides have recently been taken by the Biden Administration towards student debt relief efforts, such as payment and interest delays, more can be done. The total amount of student debt in the United States is approximately \$1.7 trillion (Hanson, 2021).<sup>ci</sup> At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused historic levels of unemployment and economic hardship, effecting many minority communities. Fully cancelling student loan debt will not only have an instrumental impact on closing the racial wealth gap, but it will also help to stimulate the economy (Mckay & Kingsbury, 2018).<sup>cii</sup>

### ***Free Tuition at Public Undergraduate Institutions***

To prevent the student debt crisis from reoccurring, strategic plans should be implemented to fund free education at four-year undergraduate public institutions. The California College Promise Program only provides free tuition at two-year institutions for students who qualify,

and the California College Promise Grant only waives \$46 for enrollment fees (Kuncaitis,2021).<sup>ciii</sup>

Despite this subsidy, students are still struggling to meet the financial demands of college. Eliminating tuition for four years at all public colleges and universities for all students would cost taxpayers approximately \$79 billion a year (US Department of Education, 2018).<sup>civ</sup> However, the long-term benefits would far outweigh this cost. Many studies show the positive effects this plan would have on college outcomes and future earnings of students without debt; ultimately benefitting society as a whole (Harris 2021).<sup>cv</sup>

## Education's Part in the Disruption of Success For Black Women

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Encouraged by her father, as a child Queenessa (fictitious Black woman) dreamt about being an astronaut and exploring galaxies far beyond the solar system. Introduced to astronauts in the fourth grade, Queenessa had never heard of Mae Jemison, Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson or other Black women of note whose contributions were critical to the success National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Queenessa's dreams were deferred by an inadequate education system that poorly prepared her for college access. Today, Queenessa works in a job where she struggles to make ends meet, and she dreams of returning to college to advance in her career and earn a higher salary.

### **The Reality of Black Girls' and Women's Education**

In 2014 nationwide studies exalted Black women as the most educated group in America (HBCU Editors, 2014).<sup>cvi</sup> At that time, enrollment and completion statistics also indicated that although Black women only made up 12.7% of the female population in the US, they consistently comprised over 50% of the number of Black people who received postsecondary degrees (Guerra, 2013) . Today, when we dig deeper into the statistics of Black girls' and women's educational attainment in California, another story unfolds. In California, Black women account for 2.9% of the population and 39.8% of college degree attainment (Anthony, Nichols & Pilar, 2021).<sup>cvii</sup>

Black students receive the illusion of education without the critical components of a quality education. A critical analysis approach to structurally denying Black students a quality education resulted in inequities in high school graduation, college enrollment, graduation rates and degree attainment. In fact, educational attainment for Black adults in this country today is the same rate it was for White adults in 1990. There are also vast disparities by gender. Black women are roughly 10 percentage points more likely than Black men to hold a college degree (Reddy & Siqueiros, 2021).<sup>cix</sup>

The California Community College system is the largest education system in the nation. In a 2017 report, school executives recognized that it must do better to increase the graduation and transfer rate for students of color (Vision for Success, 2017).<sup>cx</sup> In California, 64% of Black undergraduates attend a community college (Reddy & Siqueiros, 2021). However, courses required by the California State University (CSU) system (the “A-G requirements”) are often not offered at high schools with a predominately Black population, or these courses are not taken in high school. This limits Black students’ ability to apply to and be accepted by California State Universities. Accordingly, for many Black students in California, Community Colleges are the predominate path of access to higher education. Only six percent of Black men and seven percent of Black women who enrolled in the California Community Colleges in 2017-2018 earned an award or degree within three years (Reddy & Siqueiros, 2021).

The CSU system is the nation’s largest four-year public university system, but CSUs enroll only nine percent (19,298) of Black undergraduates in the state. While Black women have higher completion rates than Black men by 11 percent, the graduation gap between Black women and White women is even wider, by 20 percentage points. More Black women transferred from a California community college to a private, for-profit institution (44 percent) than to a CSU (32 percent). This leads to higher education costs. (Reddy & Siqueiros, 2021) For Black women, the longer it takes to graduate from college, the longer it takes to obtain a job that requires a four-year degree and, therefore, the more earnings are potentially negatively impacted.

### **The Mythical Journey to College for Black Girls**

The journey to college is mythical for most Black girls in California. Our Nation has a long history of racial trauma and discriminatory behavior toward Black students). The urgency of closing the pay and wealth gap makes Black girls’ path to college particularly alarming due to the role Black women often play in being the primary breadwinner in Black households. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, disparities in California higher education attainment were reported, but the 2019 Campaign for College Opportunities State of Higher Education for Black California report tells a mixed scenario of bleak outlooks and favorable points of hope. Racial trauma as a result of “adultification” and inequitable access to advanced coursework and pathways that lead to postsecondary educational opportunities are real (IDRA,2021).<sup>cxii</sup> Researchers tout that there is good news to celebrate, but Black students still face significant barriers to educational success. Nearly half of California’s Black families live just above or in poverty (Fox & Burns, 2020; US Census, 2020).<sup>cxiii</sup> High schools that predominately serve Black students are more likely to be overcrowded, segregated, offer fewer college preparation courses, and have a stronger school-to-prison pipeline than a school-to-college trajectory .

Further complicating the path to college is the disproportionate punishment rates that Black students receive during their education. Black students are being criminalized from as early as preschool. Wood, Harris and Howard (2018) initially focused on the suspension of Black boys but sent the warning call that suspension and school disruption for Black girls warranted study as well. Their subsequent work entitled “Capital of Suspensions II” (Wood,

Harris & Qas, 2020)<sup>cxiv</sup> again alarmingly reports high levels of suspension of Black boys in Sacramento City Unified School District, but also details a startling level of suspensions for Black girls. For Black girls, the highest suspension disparity was also in early childhood education where they are 3.56 times more likely to be suspended than the statewide average for this age demographic.<sup>cxv</sup> Based on 2018-2019 data, there were nine SCUSD schools that suspended 15% or more of their Black female students. Further disturbing demonstrations of Black girls suspended and criminalized is highlighted in the book and later documentary “Pushout” (Morris, 2015; Morris & Atlas, 2016).<sup>cxvi</sup>

Pre-pandemic high school graduation rates showed that high school graduation rates had improved, but access to college and preparation for college varied. More research is needed to fully understand the full effects of racial trauma on remote learning, but it should be noted that, across all systems of CA education, more Black students have dropped out of school due the pandemic and reliance on remote learning.

### **Anti-Racism in Education’s impact on Black Women**

In addition to the issues generated by the COVID-19 outbreak, concerns about the safety of college campuses emerged as a result of the racial tensions centered around Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory. These concerns became reality as Black students across America returned to schools to face racial harassment, discrimination and what some view as racial trauma (Hamilton, 2021). This is particularly true in California, which prides itself on racial equality fails to confront or dismantle the realities of structural racism impacting educational attainment, which exists on all levels of education from elementary through post-secondary education. Finally, he rushes to return to the office and face-to-face instruction enlarge already existing racial problems of success for Black women and girls.

The confluence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, effects of disproportionate COVID-19 pandemic cases and deaths, and the murder of George Floyd led many California college campuses to adopt Anti-Racist and Black Lives Matter statements. Yet, Black women were already feeling the brunt of the impact of deterrents of their success in the classroom. Although each California education system is making efforts to address racism on campuses, of note is the effort of California Community College leaders. To address racism on community college campuses, 60 of the 116 Community College Campuses entered an “Alliance” with the University of Southern California’s Race & Equity Center that directly confronts racism on their campuses. Each college will develop a “12-dimensional strategic racial equity action plan.”

Participation in the Alliance focuses on hiring and retaining faculty of color, confronting acts of racism on campus, using survey data to improve the campus racial climate, addressing tensions between faculty of color, and closing racial gaps in student transfer rates, among other topics. In each learning module, instructors will also spend an hour on how staff can teach what they’ve learned to their colleagues.

### **Education’s Role in Success for Black Women**

Higher education attainment, based on California workforce projection requirements, generally leads to higher paying jobs and more opportunities for success. However, Black women continue to earn 63 cents to the dollar that White men make. Education attainment is only painting a partial picture of education’s role in success for Black women. Despite gains in educational achievement, the translation into workplace success is complicated. Katz (2020) astutely considers, “Black women are more likely than other groups of women nationally to work in the lowest-paying occupations—sectors such as the service industry, health care, and education—and are less likely to work in the higher-paying fields such as

engineering or to hold managerial positions.”

The dearth of Black women in the education field as a whole and the lack of Black women in the pipeline for positions in education is unconscionable. Research suggests that seeing people of color (Black women) in positions of leadership leads to higher education attainment of Black girls and women. California’s three higher education systems are led by three men of color: Michael Drake, President of the University of California System, Juan Castro, Chancellor of the California State University System and Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community College System. Michael Drake is the first Black man to hold this position in the 152-year history of the UC system. The pipeline for Black women administrators in higher education is woefully low and the experience of Black women in the academy tell a mirroring story of racially discriminatory and traumatic experiences similar to that of Black girls in high school and in higher education (Alcalde & Subramaniam, 2020).<sup>cxvii</sup>

### **Education’s Influence on African American Women in the Workplace**

California is home to 2.2 million Black residents and has long benefited from significant contributions by Black Californians who have made the state more equitable, prosperous, and entrepreneurial. However, growing racial equity gaps in education mean that too many talented Black students do not earn the degrees and credentials they need to be upwardly mobile and that the state needs for its economy (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Black equity pay gaps exist across all educational attainment levels but attaining a bachelor’s degree should lead to higher wages and better workplace opportunities. In fact, during the pandemic, those with a bachelor’s degree were more likely to retain their job and successfully transition to remote learning or work. This positive prognostication is still murky for Black women.

Lifetime wage gaps are wide across the nation, but California ranks 43rd out of 50 states with the wage gap for Black women exceeding 1.2 million dollars over a lifetime. Black women would have to work until they were 82 to make the same amount of money a White man would at 60 (NWLC, 2021).<sup>cxviii</sup> The impact of this wage gap has broad and sweeping implications in the areas of children’s and parent’s education, the ability to buy a house (afford housing in general) or move to a more affluent area. While more Black women are earning college degrees, their economic outlook is still overly impacted by racism and sexism and they’re less likely to reap the full economic rewards of having a degree.

While research shows that most degrees improve earnings, we know that bachelor’s degree attainment is vital, because it provides more job security and higher wages. What’s more, amid the pandemic and other recent national economic slowdowns, unemployment rates have been lowest for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher. (Anthony, Nichols & Pilar, 2021) However, as noted above, for Black women degree attainment is not the sole variable impacting job security and higher earnings.

The higher cost of homes and living has been experienced by lower-income California residents of all races as people living in Sacramento County need to make nearly \$27 an hour to afford the average rent.<sup>cxix</sup> However, a disparity exists among Black residents in the Sacramento region who hold the second-highest rent burden in the U.S., based on a study by Zillow.

Black households spend 52.2% of their income on rent compared to 37.4% for Hispanic renters, 32.5% for Asian renters and 30.5% for White renters. California’s poverty rate has added impacts to Black women across educational attainment (Weller, 2019). The pandemic exacerbated these effects.



Meanwhile, the return to in-person school instruction has coincided with an alarming increase in Black women exiting the labor force. Between October and November, the labor force participation rate for Black women dropped to 60.3%, concerning economists which looked to trends for returning workforce. This 1.5 percentage point dip represents a weakening attachment to the workforce for Black women in recent months: 181,000 of them have exited the workforce since September, with more than half (91,000) exiting in November alone. This reversal in labor force reentry is unique to Black women, as women in other racial-ethnic groups continued to regain their footing in the workforce (Barr, Henry-Nickie, & Broady, 2021).<sup>cxix</sup> A sizable portion of workforce decision-making for some Black women is access to good-paying jobs, availability of quality childcare, and expenses associated with often being the head of household.

More Black women are entering educational institutions, particularly community college, but many do not finish. Not finishing college or taking an extended amount of time to do so effects earning potential and advancement opportunities, in some cases. This ultimately complicates the success of Black women and their earning potential.

Some of the same issues for Black girls and women in educational systems are more pronounced in the workplace. But the reality on a nationwide level Black women still experience hostile work environments and discriminatory practices across all sectors including STEM and Tech (Katz, 2020). In addition, being the only person of color, and discriminatory perceptions of one's competency or ability to perform at elevated levels, can be stressful and traumatizing.

According to the National Partnership report, more than 80% of Black mothers are the main breadwinners for their households.<sup>cxix</sup> Earning power due to completed education and pay equity impacts families' ability to buy groceries, pay for childcare, invest in their children's education, and more. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened long-standing racial inequalities in America that are rooted in systemic racism. During the first three months of the downturn, employment for Black and Latinx women fell by over 20% – more than three times the decline in employment for White men.

Education is the key to being in the room and having a seat at the corporate table. Black women are underrepresented in the workplace for many reasons. One factor to being promoted to manager is having the education “required” for certain positions. For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 58 Black women are promoted, despite the fact that Black women ask for promotions at the same rate as men. And for every 100 men hired into manager roles, only 64 Black women are hired. That means there are fewer Black women to promote at every next level, and the representation gap keeps getting wider. (LEAN IN, 2020).<sup>cxixii</sup>

Today, the wage gap for Black women compared to non-Hispanic white men is \$0.63. This inequity affects everything from the ability to save for retirement, pay off student loans, manage household expenses, access to quality housing, healthcare, food offerings and other aspects of Black women's livelihood. According to the National Women's Law Center (NWLC), more than 1 in 3 Black women were on the front lines of the pandemic in 2020, many in low-paid jobs and at high-risk of exposure to COVID-19, exacerbating existing inequities (Black Women's Equal Pay Day, 2021).

Similar to the educational trauma detailed, Wingfield (2020) details that despite being 7% of the U.S. population, Black women are 3% of medical doctors today. Wingfield also details the pay disparities in the healthcare and tech industry. Education's emphasis on the tech industry being more inclusive for women has not been realized for Black women. For those who achieve the necessary educational requirements, there is still structural racism and

sexism that clouds the tech workplace.

Despite Google's efforts to hire more Black women with "required" educational backgrounds and experience requirements, last year seven Black women filed complaints against Google's parent company Alphabet, Inc. An investigation was launched December 2021 so the effects of alleged racial discrimination on high-wage tech earners are still being determined. One effect or "flower of hope" is that two ex-Google Artificial Intelligence researchers started their own AI companies asking questions about the responsible use of AI. These Black women are broadening the dialogue regarding AI and offering insights that would not come from a homogenous workforce of researchers.

### **Flowers of Hope-Redefining the Role of Education in Success**

Education attainment for Black women was powering forward, though not perfect in its impact on Black women's success, and then the pandemic hit in 2020. March of 2020 the world came to a halt and all education and work environment became primarily remote. Remote learning revealed larger cracks to an already gaping chasm in a "colonized" system of education not designed for Black students. Education's role in the disruption of success for Black Women post-pandemic includes a lack of access to adequate childcare, the reality of the digital divide, the complications of remote education for children and women participating in remote education and educational affordability.

Remote learning and the ability to work from home have both negative and positive impacts on Black women. The ability to earn a degree online opens opportunities for programs more conducive to a Black woman's schedule and may save time to degree completion. There are opportunities for Black girls to reimagine education through dual enrollment in high school/college and a refocus on education's impact for future direction. Learning outside of the classroom may reduce racial discrimination or open up new cyber targeting. Either way, the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the way we educate our Black girls and the way Black women work. The flowers of hope are in the ability of Black women to reimagine this education and workplace landscape. There is a reemphasis on Black California Community College students fulfilling transfers to Historically Black Colleges or Universities. There is also renewed interest in retaining Black students across all education systems as educational institutions face lower enrollment. This renewed interest is also due to California realizing that workplace shortages cannot be met without marginalized groups, such as Black women, achieving degree completion.



# VIOLENCE & SAFETY



## Keeping Black Women & Girls Safe

**Karen Earl**  
President & CEO, Jenesse



### **VIOLENCE AND SAFETY -- EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS**

This chapter is a response to the invisibility of domestic violence and intimate partner violence as policy priorities in movements to uplift and improve outcomes for Black women and girls. It grounds the conversation in the concept of structural violence and examines how the prevalence of structural violence within families, communities, and greater society impacts the lives of Black women and girls in California. Structural violence refers to the multiple ways in which social, economic, and political systems harm certain groups of people and exposes them to risks and vulnerabilities that lead to morbidity and death. Examples of systems include income inequality, racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, and other means of social exclusion leading to vulnerabilities, such as poverty, stress, trauma, crime, incarceration, and domestic violence.<sup>cxiii</sup> While California has led the nation on several reforms to the criminal justice system and increased funding to address broad statewide issues like homelessness, data reveals that Black women and girls experience acts of structural violence at a disparate rate compared to women of other racial and ethnic groups. This prompts the question of what statewide strategies are protecting Black women and girls?

Society's culture of silence on the topic of structural violence has led to widespread misinformed assumptions about the root causes of such violence, often blaming the victim and discouraging many from ever coming forward to report the abuse or seek culturally competent intervention services to heal the harm). Too often responses to systems that create the nexus of structural violence are siloed, creating single-issue coalitions for reform and reimagining with little cross-over to ensure the unique needs of targeted populations, such as Black women and girls, are surfaced and understood. We must broaden the lens of awareness on the intersectionality between personal acts of violence (i.e., domestic violence), system involvement (i.e., foster care), and forms of community violence (i.e., human trafficking, homelessness) to disrupt the normalization of acts of violence and their consequences on the lives of Black women and girls across the state, and inspire non-traditional allies to come together to respond. We must also redefine the meaning of domestic violence to encompass comprehensive intersectional experiences of economic exploitation, marginalization, and violence that occurs in the lives of many Black women and girls and centers solutions reflective of Black cultural values.

This section is organized through a trifecta approach to highlight risk-factors that make Black women and girls vulnerable to individual and community acts of violence, the various

forms of violence most often experienced, and the linkage of violent experiences with justice involvement. The availability of data on the rate of Black women and girls in each section varied and was not always available. Data collection for this section includes available near real-time data disaggregated by race and gender, proxy data, and literature review of statewide and national studies. Its information is presented to educate and inform the development of a rapid response intentionally designed to increase protections of Black women and girls throughout the state through comprehensive policy creation, program design, and resource.

## **CHILDHOOD TRAUMA**

### ***Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)***

The long-term wellbeing of Black woman and girls is impacted by their exposure to forms of structural violence as early as childhood. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study assessed the relationship between early childhood trauma from three categories: 1) Abuse: physical, emotional, or sexual, 2) Neglect: physical or emotional, and 3) Household challenges: growing up with household incarceration, mental illness, substance dependence, parental separation or divorce, intimate partner violence, and chronic diseases such as heart, lung and kidney disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes in adulthood.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

A statewide ACE survey among randomized adults aged 18 and over conducted between 2011 and 2017 revealed that 49.3% of Black respondents has experienced 3 or more ACEs and 20.6% of Black respondents had experienced 4 or more.<sup>cxxv</sup> Early childhood trauma places Black girls at-risk of a lifetime of system involvement including child welfare, foster care, school discipline/expulsion, incarceration, and housing instability or homelessness.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

### ***Child Welfare and the Foster Care System***

Black children are in foster care across the state at nearly five times the rate of white children.<sup>cxxvii</sup> Sixty-three percent of all children remain in foster care after one year in placement.<sup>cxxviii</sup> One in four emancipated youth in the state are homeless.<sup>cxxix</sup>

Children placed in foster care often transition into adulthood before having an opportunity to be part of a stable home. A parent may have her parental rights terminated if her child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months and cannot legally or physically receive her child(ren).<sup>cxix</sup> This practice significantly disrupts the possibility of a return home for too many Black youth leaving them to age out of foster care due to limited opportunities for adoption.

Half of all Black children in California will at some point be investigated by child protective services.<sup>cxix</sup> Incidents of domestic violence increase the risks of child separation when the survivor parent calls the police or seeks help at her child's school due to mandatory reporting guidelines and policies. Studies show that Black and families of color, and low-income families have greater exposure to mandatory reporters compared to upper income white families.<sup>cxixii</sup> In Los Angeles County, 51.6% of all open child welfare cases involve allegations of domestic violence.<sup>cxixiii</sup>

### ***School Discipline Disparities***

Public schools across the state are failing Black students. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated historic racial and economic inequalities in the education system as many households of students of color have fallen further behind, lacking adequate resources and knowledge to navigate online learning.<sup>cxixiv,cxixv</sup> Representation and mentorship also matter. The statewide ratio of Black teachers to Black students is only 3.6 per 100 compared to 13.3 per 100 for white teachers to white students. Statewide graduation rates for Black students are

only 78.7% and absenteeism among Black students is five times the rate of Asian students who have the lowest rate.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Black students experience the highest rate of suspensions at 8.8 per 100 students.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Black girls experienced the highest number of suspensions among girls of all racial groups at a rate of 4.5% and had the highest rate of multiple suspensions out of all racial groups, 29.4%.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Black girls were also expelled at a rate of .07% during the 2019-2020 school year: higher than the state average of .02%.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

## **SEXUAL TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE**

Sexual violence is defined as any “sexual activity when consent is not obtained or not freely given.”<sup>cxl</sup> Sexual violence can occur in person, online, or through technology (e.g., posting or sharing sexual pictures of someone without their consent, or non-consensual sexting). Sexual violence impacts women of all ages, income status, and ability levels; an estimated 2 in 5 (39%) female victims of rape had a disability at the time of the rape.<sup>cxli</sup> Most survivors know their perpetrator.<sup>cxlii</sup>

One-in-four Black girls will experience sexual abuse before the age of 18, and one-in-five Black women is a rape survivor.<sup>cxliii</sup> Marital rape is a form of sexual violence. Children in foster care are ten times more likely to be sexually abused than their counterparts including abuse occurring post-placement.<sup>cxliiv</sup> In California, 86% of women reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime.<sup>cxliv</sup> Within this population, 81% experienced verbal sexual harassment; 54% experienced physically aggressive forms of sexual harassment (including being followed, unwanted touching, and having genitals flashed); 39% experienced cyber sexual harassment.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

An historical memory of the weaponization of false-rape claims against members of the Black community throughout the periods of slavery and Jim Crow; stereotypical images such as the “strong Black woman”; and religious gender expectations has discouraged many survivors of sexual violence from speaking up. One study found that for every Black woman that reports rape, there are fifteen Black women who will never tell.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic Violence, commonly known as battering, is a pattern of hurtful or harmful behaviors used to establish control over an intimate partner through fear and intimidation.<sup>cxlviii</sup> The behavior is abusive and usually takes the form of threats or use of violence such as controlling behavior, jealousy, blames others for problems, stalking, and social isolation. Abuse can take many forms including, but not limited to: psychological/emotional, physical, economic and sexual abuse.

In California, 40% of women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime; 58% of residents have been touched by domestic violence, either as a victim, abuser, or through a close friend or relative; 10% of homicides are linked to intimate partner violence; 40% of female homicide victims were killed by their current or former male intimate partner.<sup>cxlix</sup> Children represent the greatest cohort of domestic violence survivors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents of domestic violence increased by 8.1% after cities implemented stay-at-home public health orders.<sup>cl</sup> Conditions that increase risk for domestic violence to occur may have been exacerbated including increased male unemployment, stress associated with children and home schooling, increased use of alcohol and other substances to cope, and social isolation that prevented family members or other neutral parties to observe the abuse.<sup>cli</sup>

Addressing domestic violence requires an intersectional approach. Los Angeles based Jenesse Center, Inc., a domestic violence intervention program, provides survivors with comprehensive culturally relevant programs including interim and permanent housing, counseling, mental health services, legal resources, workforce development, and supports women entrepreneurship opportunities.

## **COMMUNITY VIOLENCE**

### ***Homelessness***

Homelessness is a national human crisis. In California, 248,130 persons received homeless services in 2020. An unprecedented amount of public investment has been made by local jurisdictions and the state enabling the scaling of a cohesive response strategy that includes outreach, interim and permanent housing, and supportive services such as mental health and substance use, workforce development opportunities, and social integration.

Black people are disproportionately represented in the state homelessness system (31% or 72,258 people); how Black people are benefiting from these new investments is still to be determined. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Report and Recommendations by the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness was the first community-driven effort to document this disparity in the state. The efforts of other jurisdictions will soon help increase accountability to ensure Black people experiencing homelessness are being tended to.<sup>clii</sup>

Gender specific data by race from Los Angeles, the most populous region for people experiencing homelessness in the state, reported that 37% of its total female population (7,702 persons) were Black/African American.<sup>cliii</sup> The women self-reported that 46% had experienced domestic violence/ intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and 14% self-reported this experience as the direct cause of their homeless episode.<sup>cliv</sup> Eighty percent of mothers with children experiencing homelessness have had a history of domestic violence.<sup>clv</sup>

### ***Human Trafficking***

Human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, is a \$150 billion dollar a year global industry.<sup>clvi</sup> It includes sex trafficking (not prostitution or sex work), labor trafficking (mainly targeting recent immigrants as a form of involuntary servitude) and involves controlling a person through force, fraud, or coercion to exploit the victim for forced labor, sexual exploitation, or both.<sup>clvii</sup> Nationwide, approximately 40% of survivors of suspected human trafficking cases are Black women.<sup>clviii</sup>

California is one of the nation's top destination states for trafficking human beings. There were 1,334 cases reported in California in 2020.<sup>clix</sup> Most trafficking is conducted by transnational criminal organizations and domestic gangs who have transitioned from the sale of drugs and firearms to the sale of human beings. Large events such as the Super Bowl are magnets for the sale of human beings from hotel labor to sexual exploitation.<sup>clx</sup>

Black women, girls, and transwomen are at greatest risk of human trafficking due to historical and economic causes. These include the widespread myths of Black women and girls hypersexuality and the adultification bias<sup>clxi</sup> which treats Black girls older than their age.<sup>clxii</sup> Economic and social risk factors include low socioeconomic status, child welfare involvement, detachment from education, criminal justice involvement, and history of physical/sexual abuse, and anti-trans bias.<sup>clxiii</sup> Survivors of domestic violence are also at greater risk. A study found that 36.9% of women who called the National Hotline were trafficked by their partners.<sup>clxiv</sup>

## ***Incarceration and Supervision***

Nationwide, there are more than 230,000 incarcerated women and girls, a 700% increase since the 1980's when the movement towards mass-incarceration began.<sup>clxv</sup> One in fifteen women are sentenced to extreme punishment including death and life without parole.<sup>clxvi</sup> Most incarcerated women and girls have long histories of trauma. Black women are particularly vulnerable to violent crimes due to systemic lack of access to community-based and culturally relevant crisis intervention and mental health services; increased presence of weapons; and historical distrust in engaging the police to effectively respond to complaints of intimate partner violence.<sup>clxvii</sup>

California has the highest rates of incarceration in the country. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's 2021 New Year's Eve population included 8,167 women and 278 nonbinary persons. The total in-custody included 4,200 women and 253 nonbinary persons, while 3,064 women were on parole.<sup>clxxiii</sup> In California, there are 21 women on death row and 179 sentenced to life without parole.<sup>clxix</sup> Even as overall prison population numbers have decreased since statewide reforms, racial disparities continue to exist.<sup>clxx</sup> Black Californians have the highest incarceration rates (920.4 per 100,000 persons). This is nearly two times the next highest group, American Indians/Alaskan Natives (497.2 per 100,000 persons).<sup>clxxi</sup> African American women are incarcerated at the highest rate of 171 per 100,000 persons, representing an estimated 25% of the entire population, although only making up approximately 5% of the state's total population.<sup>clxxii</sup>

## ***Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls***

People are considered missing when a person voluntarily or involuntarily disappears yet is best understood as the noticing of their absence from their "accustomed network of social and personal relationships" and responsibilities to the extent that people within that network begin to search for them.<sup>clxxiii</sup> Adults and children "go missing" for a variety of reasons including cognitive conditions like Dementia/Alzheimer's, escaping violence (including domestic and intimate partner violence), sexual abuse, and abduction.<sup>clxxiv</sup> The disappearance of Black women and girls is the collective lack of response and sense of urgency to their disappearance.<sup>clxxv,clxxvi</sup> In 2020, 34% of all women and girls reported missing nationwide - 90,333 persons - were Black.<sup>clxxvii,clxxviii</sup>

Most women who died by gun violence were victims of domestic and/or intimate partner violence. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an estimated 51.3% of black adult female homicides are related to intimate partner violence.<sup>clxxix</sup> Fifty-five percent of intimate partner homicides are by a gun.<sup>clxxx</sup>

Black women and girls are also victims of police violence, including homicide, while seeking safety. When police respond to calls for help by Black woman and girls, they are far too often treated like the "aggressor" and arrested and even prosecuted. Black women and girls are also more likely to be killed by police responding to crisis calls (i.e., mental health, domestic violence). On average, it is expected that between 2.4 and 5.4 Black women and girls per 100,000 will be killed by police over the course of their lifetime and Black women are killed by police 1.4 times more than white women.<sup>clxxxi</sup>

## ***Key Recommendations***

There is hope. Governor Newsom and the state legislature have allocated unprecedented resources to address statewide inequities and system reform to reduce racial and gender inequities. There has also been an increase in conversation about domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of structural violence due to high profile cases in the media. Finally, there are many great on-the-ground organizations making transformative change,

and new state policies that are shape-shifting cultural norms on how public sector partners should respond to crisis. However, most investments are one-time funding, and many efforts continue to advance in siloes, creating a fragmented crisis response system where most survivors are presented with complex and multiple needs.

Below are a few recommendations and promising practices offered to strengthen the state's response to protecting the safety of Black women and girls and create new opportunities for cross-sector partnerships and investment opportunities:

- ***Facilitate a cross-sector approach that engages survivors, families, community leaders, organizations, business, and public sector partners to address the intersectional needs of Black women and girls to protect them from ongoing exposure to structural violence.*** The Blue Shield Foundation's Culturally Responsive Domestic Violence Network<sup>clxxxii</sup> is one example of a statewide collaborative effort that brings together a cohort of over 20 culturally focused domestic violence organizations to strengthen cultural competency among domestic violence providers; share best practices with system-adjacent partners; and advocate for policy changes and resources. Similar coalitions could be created with philanthropic support to expand participation to include the local business community and leadership from intersecting systems such as foster care, criminal justice, education, and public health.
- ***Establish a statewide annual public safety dashboard that measures the rate in which Black women and girls experience structural violence in the domains of individual violence, community violence, and system involvement.*** This recommendation would require data collection practices to report data disaggregated by race and gender combinations to increase visibility of progress. The state's Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency's dashboard on racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness<sup>clxxxiii</sup> is a model example that could be expanded to include key indicators to monitor the progress of the wellbeing for Black women and girls.
- ***Increase public investments in economic security and workforce development. Jenesse Center found that access to its workforce development and social entrepreneurship programs has increased family stability, housing retention rates and created a renewed sense of purpose among survivors of domestic violence.***  
<sup>clxxxiv</sup> AB 628/Garcia (Chapter 323, Status of 2021) expanded the eligibility for the states' \$30M workforce development grants to include "Persons who are victims of domestic violence or community violence." State funding for workforce development however is not enough and should be increased to accommodate the needs of this additional vulnerable population.
- ***Increase diversity among the leadership of public sector divisions and private nonprofits that influence policymaking, direct funding, has oversight of programs where Black women and girls are overrepresented, and create a diverse workforce pipeline feeding into human services careers, including intentional recruitment and integration of people with lifetime experience.*** Funded by the Hilton Foundation, Social Justice Partners LA launched the Racial Equity in Homelessness Fellowship to increase diversity in the leadership pipeline for the regional homelessness system.<sup>clxxxv</sup>



- *Increase investments in community-based solutions that reduce dependence on law enforcement responses to victims of violence.* This includes additional funding and/or technical assistance to help community-based organizations build capacity to become competitive for state funding while also reviewing current funding eligibility criteria to make it more accessible to a broader range of service providers.
- *The Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (CRISES) piloted grant initiative has potential promise.* This initiative, which went into effect on January 1, 2022, will allow community-based organizations to apply for up to \$250,000 to provide community-based response programs as an alternative to law enforcement. Examples include a mobile crisis response team or para-medical programs composing of clinical social workers, mental health and substance use counselors, peer support specialists, etc.
- *Celebrate incremental, measurable progress and community-based organizations providing great work to institutionalize promising practices and program guidelines for increased state funding dedicated to reducing structural violence against Black women and girls.* Continue to update this chapter each year as part of the State of Black Women in California Report in addition to uplifting and recognizing exceptional sector leaders during the CA Black Women's Collective Empowerment Conference.

# BLACK WOMEN AND AGING



## Enhancing the Experience of Growing Older in the Golden State for Black Women

**Kiara Pruitt & Carlene Davis**  
**Sistahs Aging with Grace and Elegance (SAGE)**



### Introduction

Born out of the lived experiences of its co-founders, Kiara Pruitt and Carlene Davis, Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance (SageSistahs) was created to provide Black women with knowledge, strategies, tools, resources, and sister support to live fully empowered lives as older and aging women. Through participatory research, policy and advocacy, community education and engagement, information-sharing, and action-planning, Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance seeks to address the social, economic, health, and housing disparities that impact Black women as they age. The vision of Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance is to create a dynamic and connected network of Black women in their fabulous 40s, phenomenal 50s, sensuous 60s, sensational 70s, elegant 80s, and beyond who are flourishing at every stage of the aging journey.

### Conditions Facing Older Black Women In California

While California is often thought of as a “youthful” state, in actuality, the population aged 60 years and over is growing at three times the rate of the population overall and, by 2026, the number of Californians over the age of 65 is expected to increase by 2.1 million (as compared to an increase of approximately 500,000 for those 25-64 years old).<sup>clxxxvi</sup> According to 2019-2020 statistics from the Suburban Stats website, the table below provides a population breakdown of Black/African-American households in California:<sup>clxxxvii</sup>

Black/African American Population Profile (CA)	
<b>Total Black/African American Population</b>	<b>2,299,072</b>
<i>Female Population</i>	<b>1,162,687</b>
<i>Male Population</i>	<b>1,136,385</b>
<b>Total Black/African American Population (50-64)</b>	
<i>Female Population (50-64)</i>	<b>209,979</b>
<i>Male Population (50-64)</i>	<b>181,628</b>
<b>Total Black/African American Population (65-84)</b>	
<i>Female Population (65-84)</i>	<b>109,404</b>
<i>Male Population (65-84)</i>	<b>72,091</b>

Currently, there is no centralized source of publicly available, easily accessible, comprehensive, and disaggregated data on the overall health, social, and economic well-being of older Black women in California. Nevertheless, the data we do have highlights significant inequities that impact the aging experience for Black women, including, but not limited to:

- Prior to COVID, life expectancy for Blacks in California was the lowest of all the major racial/ethnic groups and almost six years less than the state average (75.1 vs 80.8) and the age-adjusted per capita death rate per 100,000 for Blacks in California was the highest of the major racial/ethnic groups and 40% higher than the state average (865.4 vs 618.7)<sup>clxxxviii</sup>
- According to the newly adopted California Master Plan for Aging, over 45% of Black Women aged 60 and over are “Poor” or “Near Poor” -- living somewhere between 0 and 100% of the Federal Poverty Level<sup>clxxxix</sup>
- A senior profile showed that Black women aged 65 and over are the least likely of the four major racial groups (Asian, Black, Latino, and White) to live with a spouse (24%) and the most likely to live alone (43%)<sup>cxc</sup>
- While African Americans represent only 13% of the U.S. population and less than 7% of California’s population, Black people comprise 40% of the homeless population in both California and the nation<sup>cxc</sup>

Housing accessibility and affordability is also a major concern for African American households in California. As it stands, African-American seniors 60+ in California have the lowest rates of homeownership (41% of Black seniors are renters, compared to 33% for Latinos, 30% for Asians, and 19% for Whites).<sup>cxcii</sup> With Black California households already disproportionately more likely to have high rent burden (48%),<sup>cxciii</sup> tenants’ rights groups fear a wave of evictions from missed rent payments could be coming as expanded Covid-19 related benefits expire. In the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey for the week of September 29, 2021, 25% of the Black-renter households surveyed indicated that they were not at all confident in their ability to make next month’s rent as compared to 6% of White-renter households surveyed.<sup>cxciv</sup> These are all driving factors that contribute to the high rates of homelessness for Black people as noted above.

From a health perspective, in addition to the myriad of ways in which COVID-19 has and continues to ravage the Black community, it is important to note that Black women are also disproportionately impacted by the intersectional issues of Alzheimer’s/other dementias and family caregiving. Report projections from the California Department of Public Health indicates that the number of Black/African Americans living with Alzheimer’s/other dementias (AD) will increase from 34,591 to 91,071, a nearly three-fold increase.<sup>cxcv</sup> The report further highlights that almost 63% of older Californians (55+) living with AD were women and that nearly 60% of those providing family caregiving are women.<sup>cxcvi</sup>

## **Where Do We Go From Here? Recommendations to the California State Legislature and to our SageSistahs**

**Data Collection** - On September 30, 2021, Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance released its report, *“Sankofa Stories – Black Women Reflect on Aging in Place and Community: A Narrative on Policy.”* Amongst the policy recommendations outlined in the report, one of the most important is a recommendation that **data collection specifically related to older women be disaggregated by race, gender, and sexual identity in all data collection related to California’s senior population.**

**Master Plan on Aging Legislation** - Also on the policy front, we are also encouraged to see that there are currently thirty-seven pieces of legislation related to California's Master Plan on Aging pending before the legislature. For a detailed listing of the legislation, please refer to a summary by Justice in Aging. However, in particular we would like to highlight the following four pieces of legislation that provide additional financial, caregiving, nutrition, health care and well-being supports for California's elders:

**AB123 (Gonzales)**

- Increase Paid Family Leave benefits to 90% of wages starting Jan. 1, 2022.

**AB 1041 (Wicks)**

- Expand definition of family member for purposes of worker protection and Paid Family Leave Program.

**SB 107 (Weiner)**

- Simplify Cal Fresh applications for older adults 60 or over and people with disabilities.

**Culturally Specific Aging in Place** - The housing and homelessness statistics discussed above underscores the need for affordable, culturally affirming senior housing for Black women in the State of California. Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance calls on SageSistahs, nonprofit housing developers, the faith community, financial institutions, and health care advocates to work collaboratively to establish senior living communities in California focused on the health, well-being, and cultural needs and values of older African American women. We know this will not be easy to accomplish but there is already acknowledgement of how important identity is to the well-being of older people, as evidenced by the existing Asian, Latino and Gay/Lesbian senior housing communities in the Los Angeles, Oakland/San Francisco, Inland Empire, San Diego and Central Valley regions.

**Emergency Care Planning** - Finally, the pandemic is just the most recent indicator of why it is essential to create an **Emergency Care Plan**. While this is especially true for single women, regardless of relationship status, every Sage Sistah should be able to answer a series of questions about their care support "team" such as:

Who can you rely on as your team of family members, friends, neighbors, and others to call on for care and support if you found yourself in a situation of need where you were dependent on others?

What guidance have you provided to potential care partners about your wishes?

What financial and legal preparations have you made to protect yourself, your family, and your assets?

Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance encourages all Black women to have a conversation with family and friends to ask care support questions in advance of an emergency so that you can have peace of mind and an action plan in place should an emergency arise.

*Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance wants to stay connected with you!* We invite you to join our community and subscribe to our newsletter: [www.sagesistahs.org](http://www.sagesistahs.org)

# CA BLACK WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS



Moving our agenda forward requires us to address these issues that are uniquely ours. And since Black Women do not have the option on whether or not to participate in the workforce, the following recommendations were created to focus on bridging the most significant gaps. These recommendations include short-term and long-term effort. They outline the work that is necessary for us to move our community forward. We are all in this together and the Collective will be working with all our partners to make change happen.

## **Political Participation Recommendations**

- Support Black Women running for office including raising funds for candidates
- Train Black Women in every aspect of the political process
- Prepare Black Women for higher office by focusing on development and training those currently in office and planning to run using existing programs and supplementing with mentorship programs (e.g., Los Angeles African American Women for Political Action Institute, Black Women Organized for Political Action (BWOPA) and BWILD)
- Join statewide and local fundraising, educational and organizing organizations that provide support for Black Women candidates and those focused on issues impacting our community (e.g., BWOPA, Black Women Democratic Club, Black Women Institute of Leadership Development)
- Hold elected officials accountable on every level
  - ◊ Produce annual score/report card
  - ◊ Secure inclusive riders, which is an agreement to hire Black women in critical leadership positions in their office if elected
- Increase the number of Black Women delegates, commissioners and appointees
- Collaborate with Black elected officials on policy development, support and advocacy to ensure our collective voice and needs are elevated
- Conduct voter awareness and engagement campaigns to support Black Women candidates and those who support issues important to our community
- Establish a statewide Commission on the Status of Black Women and Girls to serve as resource to organizations, individuals, entities and agencies
- Advocate for more public and private funding to address disparity gaps on quality-of-life indexes
- Issue annual policy platform locally and statewide
- Continue to support advocacy efforts that address social determinants of health, disparity gaps, social justice reform, and wealth building
- Create annual Black Women lobby day at every level of government to get maximum participation
- Connect California efforts with national efforts
- Create Policy Think Tank to study the issues impacting the Black Community including the intersection of gender

## **Employment & Earnings Recommendations**

- Support policies that bridge the gap between the living wage and the cost of living in California
- Develop a statewide land trust specifically focused on opportunities for single mothers to purchase home to alleviate the barriers that many Black Women experience especially in high cost of living that have a high Black population or percentage of the population.
- Work with industry partners to develop and implement tools to bridge success gaps
  - ◊ Plug and play internships
  - ◊ Career planning and mapping programs
  - ◊ Information sharing tools
  - ◊ Mentorship and Sponsorship programs
  - ◊ Market analysis on positions annually that includes its impact on Women
- Call on state and county entities to track employment trends of Black Women
- Participate in Board development training programs
- Create a survey to assess California companies on their efforts to hire, retain and promote Black Women and issue best places to work for Black Women report
- Work with the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls to prepare, identify and place Black Women on Board of Directors on public corporations located in California

## **Poverty and Opportunities Recommendations**

- Require policymakers and workforce development leaders to adopt strategies that promote gender and racial/ethnic equity in access to higher-paid career training opportunities
- Push for economic development investments at every level
- Develop workforce development programs that recruit and train Black Women in specific skills to help them gain access to career ladders and services
- Push for equitable investment to address broadband access in communities in urban areas with large Black populations and/or percentage (not just a rural issue)
- Support equitable access to affordable and high-quality early learning opportunities (e.g., universal preschool)
- Advocate for breaking the relationship between ZIP code and school performance through public private partnerships and policy change
- Push for more public resources to provide economic literacy in targeted communities and for groups
- Establish partnerships to implement Independent Development Account programs
- Support efforts to increasing access to down payment assistance, increasing access to affordable credit, investing in affordable homeownership and re targeting the mortgage interest deduction.
- Push for investments in distressed, racially segregated communities by providing tax credits to rehabilitate distressed homes in communities with low home values, to expand affordable homeownership opportunities for residents, such as the Neighborhood Homes Improvement Act
- Work with public and private entities to support in rental affordability
- Minimize the damage of COVID-19 on Black households particularly single parent households

## **Work and Family Recommendations**

- Establish a Black Women's Oath
- Advocate for mental health services and training in the workplace that are culturally relevant to meet the unique needs of Black Women
- Continue to support paid family and medical leave and paid sick days as well as identify area of improvement for current policies that uniquely address single parents, sole providers and caregivers
- Develop a statewide workgroup with Black Women Human Resource leaders to review best practices and create cultural competency training toolkits for employers who are sole providers, single parents and caregivers
- Focus on early education and addressing the achievement gaps to ensure girls are graduating prepared to compete in the emerging career options as well as prepared for college level courses are imperative
- Develop policies and identify a funding source to address the cost and availability of quality day care and after school programs
- Obtain funding to redefine the narrative of Black Women and Girls through a multilevel marketing campaign as well as funding for a statewide wealth building training program
- Create a statewide professional mentorship program for Black Women and Girls

## **Health and Well-Being Recommendation**

- Change policy to make Racism a Public Health Crisis
- Track data on Black Women and Girls health care disparities to show funding and policy needs
- Identify state and local funding for community garden programs in designated food deserts and use as a micro enterprise opportunity for income generator for Black Women
- Explore private/public partnerships to enhance care delivery models
- Create innovative programs like Food Pharmacies that link together community resources to address public health issues
- Push for racism to be designated as a public health crisis locally and statewide
- Garner more funding for educating communities with high rates of STDs
- Participate in community collaboratives focused on social determinants of health
- Elevate the conversation on racial and implicit bias in the health care industry and its impact on health care delivery
- Work with health care entities to develop materials and opportunities to educate the Black community on health care and navigating the system including Black immigrants
- Utilize the California Health Care Foundation's In Their Own Words: Black Californians on Racism and Health Care to develop policy support focus, advocacy efforts, initiatives and partnerships

## **Violence and Safety Recommendations**

- Continue to push for bail reform...focusing on the impact it has on the family particularly when a single, Black mother is involved
- Fight for public funds to support trauma centers and resources for those who experience trauma
- Focus on getting the Victims of Crime Act funds out to the community
- Establish statewide resource database for victims of domestic violence (e.g., App, call center) and secure an ongoing state funding source
- Push the state to allocate funding for public awareness campaign on violence among youth
- Support effort on reductions in mandatory sentencing policies and prison terms
- Commission a report on school to prison pipeline specifically for Black Women and girls in foster care
- Require mandatory domestic violence and sexual harassment training for middle school students
- Elevate Black Women survival stories



- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.sobwca.com/>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/california-population-change-between-census-decade.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://suburbanstats.org/race/california/how-many-black-or-african-american-people-live-in-california>
- <sup>iv</sup> <https://linktr.ee/winwithblackwomen>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.essence.com/news/black-women-and-redistricting/>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://californianewstimes.com/activists-dissappointed-to-not-keep-the-seat-in-a-black-womans-hands/95945/>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://endhomelessness.org/state-of-homelessness-a-look-at-race-and-ethnicity>
- <sup>viii</sup> More Women Have Become Homeowners and Heads of Household. Could the Pandemic Undo That Progress? | Urban Institute
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://archive.kpcc.org/news/2016/04/13/59477/childcare-costs-more-than-college-tuition-in-calif/>
- <sup>x</sup> African American Health Disparities | Cigna
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://cepr.net/home-health-care-latinx-and-black-women-are-overrepresented-but-all-women-face-heightened-risk-of-poverty/>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2019/10/black-people-disproportionately-homeless-in-california/>
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MEET THE  
*Authors*





## Kellie Todd Griffin

Senior Vice President, Communications & External Affairs, California Health Medical Reserve Corps; Founder: Sistallect, Inc., Crenshaw Chick, LLC., #BlackWomenGive and CA Black Women's Collective; Co-Founder: California Black Women and Girls Social and Economic Impact Fund; Author, SistaGirl@Work; Initiator, State of Black Women in CA Report

Kellie Todd Griffin, the Senior Vice President of Communications and External Affairs for California Health Medical Reserve Corps, has worked in health care for over a decade on the payer, provider, and policy sides of the industry. She was recently the Sr. Director, Community and Provider Engagement at Blue Shield of CA responsible for strategic growth, health equity, profit & loss, and external affairs for the Medicaid line of business. Todd Griffin worked as the marketing, communication, and growth lead for Centene's California Health and Wellness and the Strategic Community Engagement lead for its California Medicaid plan. She was part of the executive leadership team that developed and designed Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Hospital in South Los Angeles as a high-touch, high-tech, high-quality care delivery model. She served as the Communications Director for former California Assembly Speaker and current Congresswoman Karen Bass. In addition, Todd Griffin was part of the corporate strategy team for St. Joseph Health System that implemented Obamacare throughout the system; led Marketing and Communications for CalOptima, a county organized Medicaid plan and led American Honda Motor Company, Inc.'s nation-wide diversity and philanthropy communications. In addition, she launched CA African Americans for Obama, which was co-chaired by Hon. Karen Bass and Hon. Kamala Harris while serving as a member of the 7-person team that set up California's Obama campaign's successful 2008 presidential run.

Todd Griffin was part of the corporate strategy team for St. Joseph Health System that implemented Obamacare throughout the system; led Marketing and Communications for CalOptima and led American Honda Motor Company, Inc.'s nation-wide diversity and philanthropy communications. She founded Sistallect, Inc., a non-profit organization focused on empowering Black Women and Girls; Crenshaw Chick, LLC, a social impact company; CA Black Women's Collective, a statewide collaborative that lifts the voices and issues of Black Women; and the California Black Women and Girls Social and Economic Impact Fund. She authored SistaGirl@Work as well as produced the State of Black Women in CA and Blacks in California reports. She serves on the board of the International Black Women's Public Policy Institute and was appointed to the Los Angeles County Commission for Women. She is a former board member of CA Black Health Network, Sacramento Urban



## LaNiece Jones

Founder, lajones&associates  
State Executive Director, Black Women  
Organized for Political Action (BWOPA)



LaNiece Jones spent over 15 years working in corporate sales and marketing roles at Businessland, Citicorp, IBM, AT&T/Comcast. In 1991, she founded *lajones&associates*, a marketing public relations and events firm, which specializes in organizational strategy, electoral campaigns and community organizing. The Oakland native attended Oakland public schools, earned her Bachelor's degree from CSU Hayward and Master's degree from Pepperdine University in Los Angeles in Social Entrepreneurship & Change.

Jones is passionate about designing programs, events and initiatives to increase the efficiency and productivity for social business, social enterprises and community organizations. Her particular interest is supporting black women to be authentic leaders and building coalitions to empower the community-at-large for economic success.

Jones serves as the Executive Director of Peralta Colleges Foundation where she is charged with raising student scholarship funds for deserving students of Laney College, Merritt College, College of Alameda and Berkeley City College. Since 1995, Jones has served in the volunteer capacity as BWOPA/TILE's statewide Executive Director and the BWOPA Oakland/Berkeley Chapter President. She held the role of President of Metropolitan Greater Oakland Democratic Club (MGO) for three years, is an appointed member on the KQED Community Advisory Panel and a proud member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Xi Gamma Omega Chapter (Oakland). Jones serves as a presiding co-chair of Congresswoman Barbara Lee's political advisory committee and appointed by Congresswoman Lee, LaNiece was one of California's 55 Presidential electoral college voters this past December 2020.



## Hon. Sydney Kamlager-Dove

State Senator  
30th Senate District

Senator Sydney K. Kamlager-Dove represents the 30th Senate District, ranging from Century City to South Los Angeles and taking in Culver City, Cheviot Hills, Crenshaw District, USC, downtown L.A. and a portion of Inglewood. Elected to the California State Senate in the March 2021 special election, Senator Kamlager-Dove has spent her career prioritizing equity and access for

Californians, especially for Angelenos. She has authored landmark legislation in the areas of criminal justice reform, health care equity, environmental protection, and affordable housing — including the most transformative probation reform law in the country and legislation requiring implicit bias training for health care professionals, law enforcement, and court employees. Prior to being elected to the California State Assembly in 2018, Kamlager-Dove served as District Director for California State Senator Holly J. Mitchell while also serving as President of the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). Senator Kamlager-Dove lives in View Park with her husband, Austin Dove, her two step-children, and their dog Kush and cat Kisi Whitepaws.

## Kristin McGuire

Executive Director  
Young Invincibles



Kristin McGuire is the Executive Director for Young Invincibles. Kristin assumes this role having most recently served as YI West Regional Director, where she has spent the last five years empowering young adults to advocate for higher education, health care, and economic policies.

McGuire brings years of community organizing and policy change expertise to her role as Executive Director. As a first-generation college student from a single-parent household — she is driven by a deep understanding of the needs of under-resourced communities and has helped shift power to young adults from these communities over the last decade.

McGuire's recent successes include shaping policies that will protect the financial health of young Californians as they enter adulthood such as the California Student Borrowers' Bill of Rights 2019 (AB 376), the Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act of 2019, and the College Student Hunger Relief Act 2016 (AB 1747). But her most prized accomplishment is not her own, it is her mother's, who integrated her school at the age of seven.

Previously, through her work with the LA County Department of Public Health's Project TRUST, McGuire organized residents to demand that the City Council mandate smoke-free housing and curb secondhand smoke at parks in communities like Compton, California. She's also worked to reduce recidivism of young parolees in Los Angeles.

An active member of her community, McGuire is the first Black American elected to her local school board (November 2020). Her upbringing, family values, and commitment to the community ensure educational success for youth at every level and from diverse backgrounds. "I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for those who blazed the trail before me. Unsung heroes like my mom truly inspire me to continue to work for generations who will come after me."

Kristin is the wife of a military veteran and mother to two daughters – a 14-year-old aspiring chemical engineer and a 19-year-old rising Sophomore at UCLA who studies neuroscience – dog mom to Blue, and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., the best sorority in the world.



## Tunua Thrash-Ntuk

Executive Director  
LA LISC

A native Angeleno, Tunua Thrash-Ntuk is the Executive Director of Los Angeles Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LA LISC). She is a seasoned community and economic development practitioner of more than 15-years with both non-profit and private sector experiences. Her strengths range from community advocacy to asset and real estate development around neighborhood revitalization. She has already led a number of important urban initiatives in Los Angeles focused on affordable housing and commercial development as well as transit-oriented projects. Prior to joining LISC, Tunua served as Executive Director of West Angeles Community Development Corporation, during her tenure she was responsible for the asset management and oversight of the WACDC real estate portfolio valued at \$150 million. Tunua led the growth of WACDC's real estate portfolio,

in part by brokering a breakthrough in the development, construction and opening of West Angeles Plaza, a 24,000 square foot commercial office project.

Tunua was named LA's 2021 Impact Makers to Watch by Stratiscope and received the Wells Fargo Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Award by Los Angeles Business Journal. She serves as a board member or advisory board member to many entities, including Federal Home Loan Bank San Francisco's Affordable Housing Council, Housing California, City of LA Measure HHH Citizens Oversight Commission, Southern California Edison's Consumer Advisory Panel, Greenlining Institute, Union Bank's Community Advisory Board, Frontier Communications Community Advisory Board and the Los Angeles Development Fund, which is the City of Los Angeles' New Market Tax Credit implementation group. Tunua is a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where she earned her Master's in City Planning as well as an alumna of UC Berkeley where she received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies.

## April Michelle Jean, MSW



April Michelle Jean is a racial justice trainer, consultant, community organizer, and systems change strategist whose 18-year career has focused on illuminating the impacts of race and racism on systems, institutions, organizations, communities, and individuals; with a specific focus on mitigating disparate outcomes for individuals who identify as Black/African American. In her training and consulting, she examines the impact of race in systemic outcomes to promote liberation and justice for historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Her specific niche is in training organizational leaders on Cultural Competency/Responsiveness, Equity, Racial Justice, and Systems Thinking Approaches.

Ms. Jean is also the owner of Pure Jeanius Consulting; and co-founder of Racial Justice Advocates, a newly formed women-led consulting effort focused on reimagining a comprehensive systems approach to improve outcomes for communities of color in the Sacramento region and beyond.

Ms. Jean currently holds a position with Public Health Advocates as The Policy Director for the California COVID Justice: Recovery, Response, & Repair Coalition. IN this position, she will oversee the statewide Steering Committee and lead an integrated campaign calling for public health, health care, economic, housing, food, and water access, and other protections

and interventions to protect the health of the public and support historically underinvested communities during and beyond the COVID pandemic.

Before this, she recently held a position as the Cultural Responsiveness Program Director at Impact Foundry, Sacramento's Nonprofit Resource Center. In this role, Ms. Jean designed and developed a culturally responsive capacity building program that provides transformational technical support and training services for businesses and organizations, and communities in their unique cultural contexts based on knowledge, experience, and sensitivity to the issues of race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and religion.

She is highly requested as a speaker and community advisor on issues related to structural racism and systems change; she has held positions as a committee member with the following organizations: Black Women Organized for Political Action, Sacramento- Leadership Team Member (Former Vice President 2018-2020); Public Health Advocates Statewide COVID Equity Steering Committee; Public Health Advocates First Response Transformation Campaign Committee; Healthy Sacramento Steering Committee; and the Social Justice NOW Political Action Committee.

April identifies as an African American Womxn whose pronouns are she/her/hers.



## Dr. Joni Ricks-Oddie, PhD, MPH

Director, UCI Center for Statistical Consulting  
Director, Biostatistics, Epidemiology &  
Research Design Unit  
University of California, Irvine

Dr. Ricks-Oddie serves as the Director of the UCI Center for Statistical Consulting where she facilitates connections between campus researchers and UCI staff to collect and analyze data in order to develop new opportunities to improve public health. She has also played an instrumental role in helping university faculty and staff diversify their lecture materials to include authors of color, create new opportunities for community engagement, and root out other forms of institutional racism. She also oversees general operations and strategic planning for the Center and its consulting activities. Dr. Ricks-Oddie's current affiliations also include the UC Irvine Institute for Clinical and Translational Science where she serves as the Director of the Biostatistics, Epidemiology and Research Design (BERD) Unit.

She graduated with honors from the University of Iowa with her Bachelor of Science in Microbiology, her Master's in Public Health/Epidemiology from the University of Michigan, and her Ph.D. from UCLA in Epidemiology. She is a mom of two kids under 5, a public health

expert, a community leader, and Long Beach Planning Commissioner. Throughout her public health career, she has worked with underserved and disenfranchised communities conducting research and delivering concrete plans to improve health outcomes. She has worked with the LGBTQ community on STI/HIV outreach, communities of color with kidney disease, and women experiencing domestic violence and food insecurity.

Dr. Ricks-Oddie has served as a steering committee member of Long Beach's first Participatory Budget process where she was able to engage thousands of residents throughout North Long Beach to vote on the projects they wanted to see completed. She selected to serve on the Uptown Business Improvement District Board of Directors where she has helped to revitalize business corridors in Uptown. And, as Chair of the Planning Commission, she has worked to cut red tape to ensure the Uptown Renaissance became a reality with new investments in North Long Beach.

## Sonya Young Aadam

CEO  
California Black Women's Health Project



Sonya Young Aadam (CEO), a University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business graduate, brings more than 20 years of comprehensive experience in strategic planning, financial analysis, and management with corporations like Barclays Bank, The Walt Disney Company and Viacom/MTV Networks to her most important work in the past 10 years -- supporting transformative intervention in underserved, urban communities - particularly in South Los Angeles where she was born and raised.

In October 2014, Sonya joined the California Black Women's Health Project as Chief Executive Officer after serving as Director of Strategy & Development with the Los Angeles Urban League, and as Strategy & Community Relations Officer with BTL Health, Inc. In addition to strong technical skills, Sonya's deep passion for the overall health and uplifting of Black Women and families is driven by her rearing as a woman of faith, committed to education, and the heartfelt sentiment that "...we lift as we climb".

Sonya, a strategist and trained facilitator, is currently serving a second term on the LA County Community Prevention and Population Health Task Force, sits on the Governor's Behavioral Health Task Force, and was a Fellow in the Blue Shield CA Foundation Reimagine Design Lab working on innovative strategies in domestic violence prevention. Additionally, she serves on multiple advisory boards and steering committees addressing Black maternal and infant health, domestic/family violence prevention, and mental health.



## Dr. Elaine Batchlor, MD, MPH

President & CEO  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Health



Elaine Batchlor, MD, MPH, is the Chief Executive Officer of MLK Community Healthcare, a health system that includes a state-of-the-art private safety-net hospital, the MLK Community Medical Group, community and population health programs, and a fundraising foundation. Dr. Batchlor's innovative work to increase

access to quality healthcare for underserved populations has been recognized nationally, earning her membership in the prestigious National Academy of Medicine, an academy committed to advancing science and health equity. In 2019, she was recognized as an Irvine Foundation California Leader.

Before assuming leadership of MLK Community Healthcare, Dr. Batchlor served as Chief Medical Officer of L.A. Care Health Plan, the nation's largest public health plan providing care for a safety net population. She has also served as Vice President at the California Health Care Foundation, where she developed and oversaw research, policy analysis, and programs aimed at improving health care financing and delivery in California. Early in her career, Dr. Batchlor served as Medical Director for the Los Angeles County Office of Managed Care and as a Chief Medical Officer for Prudential Health Care.

As a thought leader in the healthcare industry, Dr. Batchlor is a member of the Zetema Project, a group of national health experts focused on improving policy and business decisions in the US healthcare system. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the California Hospital Association and the Hospital Association of Southern California, as well as The Integrated Healthcare Association and Insure the Uninsured Project. She serves on the Health Affairs Editorial Board and is an Advisory Board member for the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and the Hospital Quality Institute, among others. A Harvard alumna, Dr. Batchlor serves the university as an interviewer for the Los Angeles area.

Dr. Batchlor holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University, a Masters of Public Health from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a Doctorate of Medicine from Case Western Reserve University. She is board-certified in both internal medicine and rheumatology.

Dr. Batchlor is the proud mother of twin sons who are freshmen in college, and she is married to a criminal defense attorney who works for the Los Angeles County Public Defender. In her spare time, Dr. Batchlor is an avid reader of fiction and nonfiction, enjoys cooking for her family, walking, and playing bridge.

## Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick, MD, MPH, MPA

Special Contributor  
Founder and CEO, Grapevine Health



Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick, MD, MPH is a CDC-trained medical epidemiologist and board-certified infectious diseases physician with both domestic and global experience in public health. She was recently named as a member of the Institute of Medicine/National Academy of Sciences Roundtable on Health Literacy. She is the founder and CEO of Grapevine Health.

Although Dr. Fitzpatrick's career has traversed clinical medicine, research and public health program implementation, she is most passionate about improving the nation's health literacy and demystifying health information. Her goal is to inspire greater and more effective disease prevention and health promotion action in communities by making practical and useable health information more accessible to ordinary citizens.

Dr. Fitzpatrick's skills and experiences are diverse. She is a medical doctor who began her public health career in 1998 as a medical epidemiologist at the nation's premier public health agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a member of the CDC's elite Epidemic Intelligence Service. She has served a foreign diplomat in the Caribbean while representing the US government CDC Global AIDS Program under PEPFAR .

Her decision to leave federal government service was largely based on a personal desire to work in the community to ensure her expertise and professional experiences would directly benefit people. She has worked as a consultant to health departments, US government agencies and community-based organizations and is available for public health consulting.

Dr. Fitzpatrick was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She earned a BA/MD, a six-year accelerated program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, completed infectious diseases fellowship training at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, Colorado and completed a master's in public health from the University of California-Berkeley School of Public Health after which she served as an epidemiologist in the San Francisco Department of Health Office of AIDS. She is a professorial lecturer for the George Washington School of Public Health and Health Services and an adjunct faculty member in the Howard University School of Medicine, Department of Community Medicine.

Dr. Fitzpatrick has authored peer-reviewed journal articles, has been interviewed by journalists for the Washington Post, New York Times and PBS and is a guest blogger for Huffington Post. Outside her daily practice, she frequently volunteers time at church and community events to demystify complex health information because she believes informed citizens make healthier citizens.





## Angela Reddock-Wright, Esq.

Mediator, Arbitrator, Investigator



Angela Reddock-Wright, Esq., AWI-CH is known as the “workplace guru” and the go-to expert for all things dealing with the workplace. She is a seasoned workplace and employment and labor law attorney (former litigator), mediator, arbitrator, workplace and Title IX sexual assault investigator, human resources, workplace, hazing and bullying expert. She has earned

numerous distinctions, including The Best Lawyers in America® for 2020 in labor and employment, a “Top California Employment and Woman Lawyer” by the Daily Journal, and one of Los Angeles’ “Most Influential Minority and Women Attorneys” by the Los Angeles Business Journal.

Reddock-Wright has been an employment law attorney for nearly 25 years, and began her career as a legal analyst on employment law, workplace and other issues of public interest nearly 20 years ago when she was the lead attorney representing plaintiffs in a noted wrongful death and sorority hazing case. Since then, she has delivered, and continues to deliver, expertise, thoughtful and practical insights on some of America’s most prominent legal cases including, Coronavirus and the implications for the workplace, the Harvey Weinstein, Hollywood, and #MeToo cases, the presidential impeachment and whistleblower hearings, the college admissions scandals, the Brett Kavanaugh supreme court hearings and other legal cases of note. She also helps educate audiences on topical issues and the latest trends involving the workplace, including returnships, March Madness in the workplace, Love Contracts, and workcations.

Reddock-Wright is the host of “Legal Lens with Angela Reddock-Wright,” on KBLA-AM Radio. She is a regular legal and media commentator and analyst and has appeared on such media outlets as Good Morning America, Entertainment Tonight, Law and Crime with Brian Ross, Court TV, CNN, NewsNation, ABC News, CBS News, Fox 11 News, KTLA-5, the Black News Channel, Fox Soul – The Black Report, NPR, KPCC, Airtalk-89.3, KJLH Front Page with Dominique DiPrima, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the LA Times, Forbes.com, Yahoo! Entertainment, People Magazine, Essence Magazine, the Los Angeles Sentinel, LA Focus, Daily Journal, Our Weekly and the Wave Newspapers.

## April Verrett

President  
SEIU Local 2015



April Verrett serves as President of SEIU Local 2015, California's largest local union, and the nation's largest long-term care union, representing more than 400,000 long-term care providers, working in both nursing homes and private homes throughout California. Although now based in Los Angeles, April's story begins proudly on the South Side of Chicago. She was raised by her grandmother who worked as a locker room attendant for the Chicago Park District.

April's exposure to Union activism started right there in childhood. When her grandmother's Union elected its first Black president, something about seeing herself reflected in that leader made her want to get involved in her Union. This grandmother—who grew up in the Jim Crow south, didn't have a high school diploma, had been a teenage mom—was the smartest woman April's ever known. She knew every question on Jeopardy, always had a book in her hand, and her leadership blossomed as a Union Steward for SEIU Local 46. Watching this, April learned early on the values of perseverance, collective action, and community.

Prior to joining SEIU Local 2015, April served as Executive Vice President of SEIU Healthcare Illinois and Indiana (HCII), where she played an instrumental role in holding corporations accountable and advocating for them to pay their fair share in taxes. She helped start United Working Families (UWF), an organization that connects grassroots organizations to build political power and hold elected officials accountable.

April also leads nationally for SEIU International. She is an International Vice President, chairs the union's National Home Care Council, co-chairs the National Organizing Committee, and is a member of the Finance Committee.


She has been tapped twice by Governor Newsom, first in 2019 to serve on the Alzheimer's Prevention and Preparedness Task Force. In 2020, he selected her for his Taskforce on Business and Jobs Recovery. April is a member of the Committee for Greater L.A., a coalition of diverse leaders who came together to understand the impact of COVID-19 on different populations. In September of 2020, the committee released its No Going Back report, which called for an analysis of the multifaceted lives of Black people in Los Angeles. In order to address the generational inequalities Black communities face, the Black Experience Action Team was assembled, with April appointed as chair. With her leadership, a follow-up plan—which serves as a necessary roadmap to improve the material conditions and outcomes of all Black Angelinos throughout the County—was release in August 2021. This roadmap is a love letter to Black Los Angeles: *The Path to Justice Runs through Equity: Ending Anti-Black Racism in Los Angeles* lays out specific action items for lawmakers, philanthropists, business owners, and community leaders to achieve meaningful progress in issues ranging from housing and homelessness, poverty, lack of political power, policing and mass incarceration, education

and our children, physical and mental health, and environmental justice.

In 2021 April was elected as controller of the California Democratic Party. April is also an advisory board member of Advancement Project California, a leading racial justice organizations that utilizes research and data to expand and shift public investments toward programs that benefit all Californians. She also serves on the board of Smart Justice California, which educates and emboldens policymakers who support meaningful criminal justice reforms that promote safety, fairness and healthy communities.



## Crystal D. Crawford, Esq.



A seasoned leader with more than 20 years of senior management experience in the legal, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, Crawford has played a pivotal role in advancing the health and economic security of low-income Californians, women of color and communities of color.

In addition to serving as the current Executive Director of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, Crawford previously was a program director at The California Wellness Foundation, where she developed and led the organization's groundbreaking Women's Initiatives, a multi-million dollar program that amplifies the voices of women of color and provides philanthropy and policymakers with a vision for how to advance the health and economic security of women of color. She also helmed Cal Wellness' legacy portfolio, Increasing Diversity in the Health Professions, which has supported community-based organizations, academic institutions and countless people of color pursuing and sustaining health professions careers. Prior to leaving the foundation, she helmed the development of the Leading for Power and Change portfolio which was created to amplify the voices, leadership and power of people of color.

Prior to her work with Cal Wellness, Crawford was CEO of the California Black Women's Health Project, the only statewide organization devoted to improving the health of California's Black women and girls through policy, advocacy, education and outreach. Prior to her tenure as CEO, she served as Director of Public Policy for CABWHP and Legal Director for the Alliance for Children's Rights. Before working in the nonprofit, public interest sector, Crawford was a litigation associate at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips and a summer associate with major corporate law firms in Los Angeles, Boston and New York. She began her post-collegiate career as a public school teacher in Harlem.

Crawford is active in the leadership of numerous civic and community organizations. She sits on the five-member Los Angeles County Public Health Commission and serves on the boards of the Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association, the Black Women Lawyers Association

of Los Angeles Foundation, Health Access California, California Budget and Policy Center, Grand Performances and California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. She previously served on the boards of Dartmouth College's Rockefeller Center for Public Policy, the Tucker Foundation at Dartmouth College, SisterSong, and on the advisory council for the California Breast Cancer Research Program.

Crawford is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2009 Advocates' Award from Western Center, the 2012 PowerPAC Award from the Los Angeles African American Women's Political Action Committee, the 2015 Outstanding Women of the City Club Award and the 2021 APABA Trailblazer in the Law Award.

Originally from Harlem, New York and Teaneck, New Jersey, Crawford earned her bachelor's degree in history from Dartmouth College and law degree from the New York University School of Law, where she was an Arthur Garfield Hays Civil Liberties Fellow, Chairperson of the Black Allied Law Student Association and served on the editorial staff of the Journal of International Law & Politics. She is admitted to the bar in California, New York and New Jersey.

## Lauren Babb

Chair  
The California Commission on the Status  
of Women and Girls



Lauren Babb is a community leader, Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, and former Public Affairs Director for Planned Parenthood Northern California. She is the former Assistant Director of the Office Legislation and Regulations for the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Lauren helped pass SB-639 (Durazo), which prohibits paying workers with disabilities less than minimum wage. She was a 2020 Women's Policy Institute- State Fellow (SPI) on the reproductive health, rights, and justice team and helped pass SB 1237: The Justice & Equity in Maternity Care Act.

Lauren is a graduate of American University, the George Washington University School of Political Management, and the 2019 Class of Emerge California. She serves on the board of directors for Contra Costa STAND! for Families Free of Violence and is the youngest serving chair of the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. She is a local mentor with the She Shares program in Sacramento and was recently named 4 Black Policy Movers & Shakers You Should Know by the Women's Foundation California.



## Dr. Kimberly Mayfield, EdD

Dr. Kimberly Mayfield is the first African American tenured associate professor and dean of the School of Education at Holy Names University. She is a former special education teacher and has taught and supervised teachers in urban and suburban districts since 2001. She is a proud alumna of the University of San Francisco where she earned her master's and doctoral degrees. Dr. Mayfield served as the convener of the Effective Teachers for Oakland Taskforce from

2006-2011 under Mayor Ronald V. Dellums. She is a published author. The following titles are examples of her work: *Standing on the Rock: An African American Educator's Professional Development in "Racial and Cultural Competence in the Urban Classroom"*, *Reflections of and Activist in "Organizing to Change a City"* and, *"Teach Tomorrow in Oakland: History, Teacher Profiles and Lessons Learned"* in *"Diversifying The Teacher Workforce: Preparing and Retaining Highly Effective Teachers"* and *"The Making of a Black Public Intellectual: A Progressive in the Academy."* Her research interests and activism include creating a permanent diverse teaching force, reducing the overrepresentation of African American males in special education and preserving public education. She is a proud lifetime BWOPA member, past president of the Oakland Berkeley chapter and currently serves on the state board as an education policy adviser. Dr. Mayfield is also president of Xi Gamma Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. in Oakland CA.

## Dr. Robyn Fisher, Ed.D

Founder, President & CEO  
RT Fisher Educational Enterprises, Inc.




Since founding RTF in 1999, Dr. Fisher has subsequently co-founded and chaired an umbrella of initiatives directed towards academic excellence in California's communities of color, including both The African American Regional Educational Alliance, Inc. (AAREA), and The Choose College Educational Foundation, Inc. (CCEF). She currently serves as the Project Director for the California Academic Partnership Program, Intervention Specialist Certification Program (CAPP ISC).

Dr. Fisher's educational consultancy and ever-evolving curriculum and programming models target students' college readiness through the lens of cultural responsiveness and relevance, presently culminating in the RTF network's STEM S.T.E.P.S. (Strategies to Empower and Prepare Students for Success) program, which is currently in its eighth year following years of rigorous field research.

As an independent consultant, Dr. Fisher has lent her expertise to several federal, state, and local educational programs and is currently the Governor's appointee to the California Reading and Literature Advisory Board and served two terms as the Senate's appointee to the Statewide Pupil Assessment Review Panel. Dr. Fisher holds an M.P.A. from San Jose State University in San Jose, California, and a B.A., M.Ed., and Ed. D. from Mills College in Oakland, California.



**Dr. Nina Richardson, EdD**



Nina Richardson, Ed.D. is a seasoned professional with more than a decade of experience and leadership in higher education administration. She is a collaborative leader with extensive expertise in developing and executing educational programs at the graduate level at post-secondary institutions. Nina currently serves as the Associate Director for the Master of Science in Business

Analytics program at the University of Southern California. Her research interests include educational equity, online learning, and international students.

Nina holds a Masters and a Doctorate of Education degree from the University of Southern California. Additionally, she is a governing board member at the Long Beach YMCA's Early Childhood Education Center and is civically involved in several roles in the Long Beach community, where she resides with her family.

## Dr. Colette Harris-Mathews

Principal Consultant  
Harris Mathews Consulting



Dr. Colette Harris Mathews is the Founder and Principal Consultant of Harris Mathews Consulting, elevating and centralizing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in higher education and business. Dr. Colette has more than 20 years of experience in higher education and 10 years of management in the private sector. Her work includes DEIB strategic planning, leadership development, and amplifying DEIB in corporate and educational institutional practices. She is a Cosumnes River College Emeriti Dean and Professor of Communication Studies and former, California State University Sacramento Lecturer in both the Ethnic Studies and Communication Studies Departments. She supports education equity in the greater Sacramento area and is an active champion in efforts to close the opportunity gap. Dr. Harris Mathews currently serves as the Sac State Alumni Association Board President and a Board Member for the Village Demands.



## Karen Earl

CEO  
Jenessee Center

Karen Earl is the CEO of Jenessee Center, Inc. Jenessee is the oldest domestic violence intervention and program in South Los Angeles. Jenessee is recognized as one of the first shelter programs founded by Black women who were themselves survivors of domestic violence. Jenessee is a comprehensive domestic violence intervention and

prevention program operating an emergency shelter, two transitional housing facilities, an educational center, in house, direct legal services program, and a domestic violence clinic at the Inglewood courthouse. Jenessee has been a driving force hosting open discussions on

gender based violence, dating violence bullying, stalking and sexual assault with ages 11 to 21. Jenesse also trains intervention and prevention service providers. Several of Jenesse's other achievements include:

- Renowned Legal Services Program - providing holistic legal direct services that include assistance in obtaining family law orders, and help accessing immigration relief, including VAWA petitions, U and T Visas, and Battered Spouse Waivers. Jenesse also assists members of the public in establishing safety plans and obtaining protection orders at its Domestic Violence Clinic located inside the Inglewood Courthouse.
- Work Force Development - on-site vocational assessment, job readiness and entrepreneurship programs.
- "Jeneration J" - Comprehensive youth program focused on prevention
- Jenesse Mothers and Children (JMAC), an after school mother/children relationship building program to rebuild bonds broken by abuse and crisis.
- United Faith Network with specific curriculum that works with African American faith-based institutions to educate about domestic violence.
- Jenesse Style Center, an on-site fully functional professional boutique and salon.

Prior to becoming CEO, Karen was Chief of Staff for six years for Assemblymember Marguerite Archie-Hudson, 48th Assembly District. Karen's responsibilities while working for the California State Legislature included drafting and monitoring legislation, supervising staff, working with constituents and coordinating community events. Karen assisted with policy development and legislative projects particularly issues impacting women and children including Assembly bills that provided landmark funding for domestic violence shelters.

Prior to working for the California State Legislature, Karen worked as a public relations and government relations' representative at Rockwell. Karen was appointed to the board of directors for the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence. She received the Leadership Award for the Los Angeles Branch of the NAACP. Karen is the recipient of the Rosa Parks Award presented by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Los Angeles and the Martin Luther King Legacy Association. The African American Chamber of Commerce presented her with a Community Service Award.



## Carlene Davis

Sistahs Aging with Grace and Elegance  
(SAGE)



Carlene A. Davis is a multi-faceted community impact leader, advocate, and strategist for positive social change. Her life's work is dedicated to creating equity of access, opportunities, and outcomes by building the capacity of women, children, families, and communities to navigate policy and system barriers designed to prevent them from realizing their full potential. Carlene's current passion work is fueled through her service as Co-Founder and Southern California Director of Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance (Sage Sistahs) – an emerging network to empower Black women with knowledge, strategies, tools, and sister circle supports to thrive at every stage of the aging journey. The vision for Sage Sistahs is for Black woman in California to have what they need to plan well, be well, live well, love well, and be cared for well as elders in their homes and communities.

Alongside her service at Sage Sistahs, Carlene is Director of Strategy and Evaluation for California Black Women's Health Project where she is responsible for leading the agency's research and evaluation initiatives and providing strategic guidance on the development and growth of the agency's programs, projects and initiatives. As Principal of Strategy Muse Coaching and Consulting, Ms. Davis provides expertise in organizational development, strategic planning and facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and community participatory research and community leadership development and capacity building. Ms. Davis is also a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leader Fellow working on initiatives to ensure that all individuals and communities have opportunities to live healthier lives. A native of Los Angeles, CA, Carlene earned a B.A. in Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley and an M.P.A. from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.



## Kiara Pruitt

Sistahs Aging with Grace and Elegance  
(SAGE)

Kiara Pruitt is a social entrepreneur located in Sacramento, consulting on issues of personal importance including health & wellness, women's empowerment, energy alternatives, co-housing, and social justice advocacy. Pruitt is co-founder of Sistahs Aging with Grace & Elegance (SAGESistahs).

Kiara has over 30 years of professional experience in executive-level communications and public policy related positions. Ms. Pruitt owned H&H Ecoprises, an environmental and public health marketing & communications consulting firm in Oakland for over 10 years. She has a master's degree in Public Administration and a bachelor's degree in Mass Media Communication.

She began her career as a newspaper reporter. Since then, Kiara has continually held communication and public policy related positions in federal, state, and local governments. Some of these positions include press intern for the Bureau of Refugee Affairs for the U.S. Department of State, Field Representative and Policy Analyst for Elihu M. Harris on his Assembly and Mayoral staffs, and public affairs staff to the Chairperson of the Waste Prevention and Education Committee of the California Integrated Waste Management Board. In her last position Kiara was Director of Communication & Public Affairs for the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. In each of these positions she was responsible for developing and implementing communication policies and programs. She routinely interacted with elected officials and their staff, policymakers, stakeholder groups and the press.

Kiara Pruitt retired from CRA/LA in 2010 and relocated to Sacramento. Prior to Covid she began working with student equity programs at Sacramento City College. Kiara is also served on the committee or the California Masterplan on Aging, the Board for the Jack London Aquatics Center in Oakland, the Black United Fund of Sacramento Valley and currently on Elevation Enterprises LLC, also in Sacramento.

**Editors** – Nolice Edwards, Lynette Gibson McElhaney, Sandra Poole, Carí Jackson Lewis, Kristina Dixon, Darlene Futrel, and Enaj Leotaud



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**Thank you for all your dedication in creating positive change within our communities and to the lives of over 400,000 members of SEIU Local 2015.**

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STATE OF BLACK WOMEN  
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REPORT



2022 AND BEYOND

