

2021 SESSION

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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 277

Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 3, 2021

WHEREAS, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, an international human rights treaty promoting gender equity, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and formally instituted in 1981; and

WHEREAS, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Convention) requires eliminating discrimination against women in all its forms, including in the areas of economic development, health, safety, and education; and

WHEREAS, a number of American cities and states have adopted legislation reflecting the principles underlying the Convention to better inform policy and to empower communities to make the policy changes necessary to lift more women out of poverty and violence; and

WHEREAS, it is the policy of the Commonwealth to eliminate and prevent discrimination in employment, family, leave, public accommodations, credit and financing practices and housing accommodations because of various statuses, including but not limited to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetics, political affiliation, or status as a veteran; and

WHEREAS, the United States Census Bureau indicates a persistent wage gap between men and women and a perpetual difference not only between the wages women are paid compared with those of men, but the wages that women of different races are paid compared with those of their white counterparts; and

WHEREAS, the national median annual pay for a woman who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$47,299, while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$57,456; this means that, overall, women in the United States are paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to an annual gender wage gap of \$10,157; and

WHEREAS, the wage gap is widest for many women of color; among women who hold full-time, year-round jobs in the United States, African American women are typically paid 63 cents, Native American women are paid 60 cents, and Latinas are paid just 55 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men; and

WHEREAS, white, non-Hispanic women are paid 79 cents and Asian American women 87 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, and Asian American and Pacific Islander women of some ethnic and national backgrounds fare much worse; and

WHEREAS, women hold 58 percent of all student loan debt and have an average debt that is 9.6 percent higher than their male peers one year after graduation, and, on average, women take an additional two years to pay off student loans; and

WHEREAS, African American women finish their undergraduate education with more debt than all other graduates; and

WHEREAS, women are statistically more educated than men and seek out more graduate-level degrees to be competitive with their male counterparts, yet wages do not increase for women at the same rate; and

WHEREAS, the gender wage gap is widest in the highest-paying fields, with men earning 17 percent to 43 percent more than women, depending on the occupation; this inequality directly contributes to women having less disposable income to pay back loans in the same time frame as male counterparts; and

WHEREAS, the gender wage gap is a measure of just how far the nation and the Commonwealth still must go to ensure that women can participate fully and equally in the economy; and

WHEREAS, these numbers are more than facts and figures; they represent the tangible consequences of sexism and white supremacy in the United States and how the country systematically devalues women, particularly women of color, and their labor; and

WHEREAS, this persistent, pervasive wage gap is driven in part by gender and racial discrimination, workplace harassment, job segregation, and a lack of workplace policies that support family caregiving, which is still most often performed by women; and

WHEREAS, on average, women employed full time in the United States lose a combined total of more than \$956 billion every year due to the wage gap; and

WHEREAS, these lost wages mean women and their families have less money to support themselves, save and invest for the future, and spend on goods and services; women, their families, businesses and

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the economy all suffer as a result; and

WHEREAS, if the gender wage gap were eliminated, on average, a working woman in the United States could have enough money for, approximately, more than 13 additional months of child care; one additional year of tuition and fees for a four-year public university, or the full cost of tuition and fees for a two-year college; nearly seven additional months of premiums for employer-based health insurance; nearly 65 weeks of food (more than one year's worth); more than six months of mortgage and utilities payments; more than nine additional months of rent; up to more than eight additional years of birth control; or enough money to pay off student loan debt in just under three years; and

WHEREAS, in the United States, mothers are breadwinners in nearly half of families with children under 18, and 34 million households in the United States are headed by women, more than six million of whom support children under 18; and

WHEREAS, 8.2 million United States households, including more than two million with children under 18, have incomes that fall below the poverty level; and

WHEREAS, the wage gap persists regardless of industry, occupation, and education level, and there are numerous causes that contribute to the wage gap, including discrimination and bias; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth ranks 25th among states in the wage gap between men and women by state, per dollar; and

WHEREAS, the health of women and girls in the Commonwealth needs to be more closely examined in the areas of maternal and infant mortality and birth rates, health insurance coverage, and the prevalence of health conditions such as heart disease; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's Healthy People 2000 goals included reduction of maternal mortality rates to five per 100,000 live births, and goals for 2010 included a further reduction to 3.3 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births; neither goal was reached; and

WHEREAS, the most recent Healthy People Goal (2020) is 11.4 deaths per 100,000 live births; and

WHEREAS, in Virginia, the maternal mortality rate for African American women is more than twice that of white women; and

WHEREAS, on June 5, 2019, Governor Ralph Northam announced a goal to eliminate racial disparity in the Virginia maternal mortality rate by 2025 and signed legislation that codified the Maternal Mortality Review Team in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, violence against women and pay inequity have much to do with women remaining at the nation's worst poverty levels, cementing inequities and holding women back; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has allocated zero dollars in the state budget for prevention activities dedicated to sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking; and

WHEREAS, the safety of women and girls in the Commonwealth requires attention and review when it comes to the number of women and girls falling victim to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, the number of reported instances of rape and sexual assault, and the amount of money spent assisting domestic and sexual violence victims; and

WHEREAS, between three and five women are killed by an intimate partner every day, and 20 people are physically abused by an intimate partner every minute, totaling 10 million people annually, with women disproportionately affected; and

WHEREAS, 735,000 people are sexually assaulted annually, with women disproportionately affected; and

WHEREAS, 250,000 contacts have been made, disproportionately by women, to human trafficking hotlines since 2007; and

WHEREAS, the prevalence of violence against women rivals that of other diseases, epidemics, and pandemics in the United States and globally, yet not all physicians inquire this of female patients when capturing case history; and

WHEREAS, domestic and sexual violence impacts children, families, communities, and the economy, and data and tracking of domestic and sexual violence cases must improve; and

WHEREAS, more ameliorative action needs to be taken to achieve real, not piecemeal, nationwide change, because if women are not safe, cycles of violence will be perpetuated, and women will be unable to free themselves from poverty and become productive members of society; and

WHEREAS, violence against women costs the United States trillions in direct support and lost jobs and productivity; and

WHEREAS, violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men, preventing the full advancement of women; and

WHEREAS, violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men; and

WHEREAS, some groups of women, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute

women, women in institutions or in detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women, and women in situations of armed conflict, are especially vulnerable to violence; and

WHEREAS, violence against women in homes and in society is pervasive and cuts across lines of income, class, and culture and must be matched by urgent and effective steps to eliminate its occurrence; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on and exacerbated the many inequities that exist within the Commonwealth and the United States; it has been women, gender minorities, people of color, and other marginalized groups who have borne the brunt of the pandemic's worst impacts; and

WHEREAS, the education, health care, and social care workforce is composed predominantly of women, and the gendered impacts of the pandemic will require thorough examination and mitigation considering already existing inequities; and

WHEREAS, in December 2020, thousands of American job losses were those of women, and largely women in the service industry and women of color; and

WHEREAS, the ongoing dissolution of the child care industry has left many working mothers without options; and

WHEREAS, the pandemic is sidelining hundreds of thousands of women and wiping out the gains they made in the workplace over the past several years, with these devastating circumstances creating a "shecession"; and

WHEREAS, there is a real need and demand to address structural and systemic gender inequality in order to sustainably recover, build back better, challenge the status quo, and make institutional change work for those who have been left behind; and

WHEREAS, there is a dearth of women being honored and memorialized for their contributions to the Commonwealth and society writ large as evidenced by the less than eight percent of memorials named for women and no military bases named for women and only 58 women to 876 men have been awarded the Nobel Prize; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the Commonwealth elected to remove its sculpture of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from the United States Capitol and replace it with a sculpture of Barbara Rose Johns Powell, a pioneering leader in the American Civil Rights Movement, who at the age of 16 led a student strike for equal education at R.R. Moton High School in Farmville, and which became the only student-initiated case consolidated in the 1954 United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*; and

WHEREAS, there are now a total of 10 statues out of 100 dedicated to women in the National Statuary Hall Collection, and women artists have sculpted only 16 of the 100 statues in the National Statuary Hall Collection; and

WHEREAS, core education curricula in the United States fail to recognize the contributions women have made in America, as until recently, all stories have been told by men and most have been in favor of and about men, and thus the history books in circulation blatantly leave out numerous women and their contributions to society; and

WHEREAS, analysis by the National Women's History Museum on the standard K-12 curriculum in social studies for all states and territories estimates that only 178 women are mentioned in today's schoolbooks, compared to more than approximately 559 men; of the women named, more than 60 percent were white and 25 percent African American, with even less representation for Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American or Pacific Islander women; and

WHEREAS, studies show that in standard K-12 curricula, the occupations of women mentioned were related to domestic roles 53 percent of the time, while women's rights and suffrage activists fell below half of that number; and

WHEREAS, edits to current history curricula are needed to include women and a full and fair recitation of their participation in the Commonwealth's and the nation's history and should include a review of content, instructional practices, and resources currently used to teach American history in the Commonwealth to help ensure that every graduate enters adult life with a comprehensive understanding of the women's voices and labors that contributed to the heritage of the nation and the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth became the 38th and final requisite state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment on January 27, 2020 so that women can realize their full equality in the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to promote diversity and inclusion in legislative proceedings, standing rules, and in all recorded laws, and the Commonwealth has not yet permanently stricken gender-specific language and replaced it with gender-neutral language in the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, although women and girls have made gains in the struggle for equality in many fields in the Commonwealth and in the United States, much more needs to be accomplished to fully eradicate discrimination based on gender and to achieve full equality; and

WHEREAS, state and local governments have an appropriate and legitimate role in affirming the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls; and

WHEREAS, women and girls who live in the Commonwealth enjoy all the rights, privileges, and remedies that are bestowed on all people in the United States, no matter their race, national origin, gender, or religious belief, and discrimination against women and girls in the Commonwealth will not be tolerated; and

WHEREAS, a future statewide equity assessment could further address these issues through a gender analysis of all state departments, boards, authorities, and commissions, and future designation of a task force via separate resolution to support these actions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women hereby be commemorated; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for the historical significance of the Convention and the ideals it represents.