

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

Report of the CWA National Women's Committee

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CWA National Women's Committee

District 1

Elizabeth Mercado

CWA Local 1101

District 9

Regina Andrade

CWA Local 9333

District 2-13

Melissa Smith-Kupihea

CWA Local 2336

AFA-CWA

Bruni Agosto-Pinal

AFA-CWA Local 29047

District 3

Yolanda Pearson, Chair

CWA Local 3204

IUE-CWA

Bridgette Jones

IUE-CWA Local 83701

District 4

Cindy Krebs

CWA Local 4502

PHEW-CWA

Desi Navarro

PHEW-CWA Local 7000

District 6

Ilessa Daniels Ross

CWA Local 6186

District 7

Tayqwoiseceyon Akins

CWA Local 7050

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Project 2025: What We Face, What We Protect, and Why We Must Act Now

Elizabeth Mercado, CWA Local 1101

Our country is going through a difficult and uncertain time, with growing efforts to rollback many of the rights and protections that generations before us fought hard to secure. From what's happening at the federal level to what we're seeing in our own communities, the stakes feel higher than ever.

This report takes a closer look at Project 2025 and recent executive actions and what they could mean for civil rights, minority communities, women's rights, LGBTQ+protections, healthcare access, voting rights, immigration, labor unions, equal pay, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts.

At its core, Project 2025 is about reshaping how the federal government operates. While some argue these changes are necessary, many are deeply concerned that they could weaken long-standing protections and disproportionately impact already vulnerable communities.

Some of the important areas of impact include the following:

Civil Rights, Minority Rights & DEI Efforts – Project 2025 raises serious concerns about the future of civil rights protections, particularly for Black, Latino, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized communities. Proposals to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and remove language tied to equity and inclusion from federal policies could erase critical protections that help ensure fair access to education, employment, and housing. There are also concerns about limiting data collection on race and ethnicity, which would make it significantly harder to identify and challenge discrimination. Without these tools, addressing systemic inequality becomes even more difficult.

LGBTQ+ protections are also at risk. Efforts to remove terms like sexual orientation and gender identity from federal policies could push LGBTQ+ individuals outside the scope of legal protections. Additionally, expanded religious exemptions could allow discrimination in areas like healthcare, employment, and public services, creating new barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking equal treatment and recognition.

Women's rights, particularly around reproductive healthcare, continue to face growing challenges. Restrictions on access to reproductive services and reduced support for healthcare providers could limit options for millions. At the same time, without strong enforcement of equal pay laws and workplace protections, the gender pay gap may continue to persist. Weakening policies that protect against workplace discrimination and harassment could leave women more vulnerable and further delay progress toward economic equity.

Healthcare Access: Changes to healthcare policy could impact millions of Americans, especially those who rely on programs like Medicaid and Medicare. Reductions in funding or increased privatization could make healthcare less accessible and more expensive. Communities already

facing disparities, including low-income families and communities of color, would likely feel these impacts the most. Access to preventive care, treatment, and long-term support could become more limited.

Voting rights remain a critical concern. Increased restrictions, such as stricter voter ID laws, reduced early voting options, and challenges to mail-in voting, could make it harder for people to participate in the democratic process. These barriers often have the greatest impact on Black and Latino voters, students, elderly individuals, and low-income communities, limiting representation and political power.

Immigration policies and increased enforcement continue to create fear and uncertainty in many communities. For some families, simply stepping outside, participating in protests, or engaging in civic activities feels risky. This climate of fear prevents people from exercising their basic rights, including voting, organizing, and even opening their doors to participate in community efforts like petition drives.

Labor unions are a cornerstone of worker protection, but they face ongoing challenges. Policies that weaken collective bargaining and expand “right to work” laws threaten wages, benefits, and job security.

When unions are weakened, it impacts not just workers but entire communities that rely on strong labor standards to maintain economic stability and fairness in the workplace. As part of our efforts to raise awareness and spark action, we created a petition with an initial goal of 500 signatures. We are proud to share that we’ve reached that milestone, showing just how much these issues resonate and how engaged our community already is. But this is only the beginning. If we want to truly make an impact, we need to keep that momentum going and expand it nationwide. It’s going to take all of us, our union members, our families, and our constituency groups, working together to show the strength and urgency of our collective voice.

This moment calls for more than just awareness. It calls for engagement, unity, and action. The challenges we’re facing are real, but they also remind us of the power we have when we come together.

We can’t afford to ignore what’s happening around us. We the people hold the power to influence policy, protect our rights, and shape the future of our communities. But that power only matters if we choose to use it.

This is our moment to step up, stand together, and take that power seriously.

We ask that you:

- Sign and share the petition far and wide across your locals, your communities, and your networks: [Support Equality, Paid Family Leave, DEI, and Protections for All](#).

- Start conversations and help educate others about what's at stake.
- Stand in solidarity with union siblings, community partners, and advocacy groups.
- Stay engaged and continue exercising your rights.

Unity is still our greatest strength. We must come together and stand up. Now is the time to take action together.

Pay Disparities for Women: How Unions Level the Paying Field

Melissa Smith-Kupihea, CWA Local 2336 and Julia Keating, NABET-CWA Local 51025

Across the United States, the issue of unequal pay for women remains one of the most persistent economic injustices facing working people today. While progress has been made over the decades, the gap between what women earn and what men earn continues to reflect long-standing structural inequities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 American Community Survey for full-time year-round workers, the female to male earnings ratio in 2024 fell to 80.9 percent from 82.7 percent in 2023. These disparities are not accidental—they are rooted in workplace systems that have historically undervalued women's labor and limited access to higher-paying opportunities.

The wage gap cannot be understood as a single, uniform experience. Women's earnings are shaped by a range of overlapping factors, including race, job classification, access to advancement, and caregiving responsibilities. Women of color, in particular, face compounded barriers that result in even greater disparities in pay and opportunity. The gap is also increased for women over 35 and for single mothers, who make up a third of the workforce. Recognizing these layered realities is essential to addressing the full scope of inequality in today's workforce.

For union members, this is not just a matter of fairness—it is a matter of power. Through constituency groups such as CLUW (Coalition for Labor Women), CWA women are fighting back and educating union members and community coalition activists about the issue of pay inequities. Our CWA Gender Justice training is showing the impact of pay inequities that affect generations of working families.

Our Gender Justice training will be offered at our upcoming CWA Human Rights Conference in August 2026, including case studies like the story of Lilly Ledbetter, highlighting that pay inequality is not just a women's issue but a labor issue.

When pay systems are left unchecked, they weaken collective standards and create divisions among workers. The role of the union is to ensure that wages, benefits, and opportunities are determined by negotiated agreements—not by discretion or bias. Through collective bargaining, CWA continues to push for structures that promote accountability, transparency, and equity in compensation.

Another example of CWA taking action is CWA Local 1180 located in New York City. Every year, the local holds an "equal pay day" rally at city hall in Manhattan, which is attended by many important community members, including elected officials such as the NYS attorney general and the NYC mayor.

Union contracts play a critical role in narrowing pay gaps by establishing defined wage scales, clear job classifications, and consistent pathways for advancement. These protections reduce the likelihood of unequal treatment and ensure that workers are compensated based on objective criteria. In unionized environments, women are more likely to receive equitable pay and stronger workplace protections than in non-union settings.

At the same time, addressing pay disparity requires a broader commitment to supporting workers both on and off the job. Issues such as access to affordable healthcare, paid leave, predictable scheduling, and anti-discrimination protections are all essential to creating a level playing field. These are not separate concerns—they are directly connected to economic equity and long-term stability for working families.

Every member has a role to play in advancing pay equity. Locals continue to stay informed about contracts, engaging in conversations about workplace fairness, and supporting efforts that strengthen transparency in wages and promotions, by attending union meetings, raising concerns when disparities are identified, and standing in solidarity with coworkers across all classifications and backgrounds. Real change happens when workers act collectively—and together, we can continue building workplaces where equal work is met with equal pay.

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Paid Family Leave: A Necessity, NOT a Luxury

Cindy Krebbs, CWA Local 4502 and Bruni Agosto-Pinal, AFA-CWA Local 29047

Life is full of unexpected situations. What happens when you are faced with an urgent need to care for your spouse, child, or aging parent but still have to work full-time?

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides UNPAID, job-protected leave for workers at companies with 50 or more employees. Many of the 53 million adults who step up to care for a family member are unable to qualify for this benefit. Even if they do have access to FMLA benefits, they likely can't afford to go out on unpaid leave.

The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act was reintroduced in September 2025 by Representative Rosa DeLauro and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. The FAMILY Act would provide a NATIONAL paid family leave program for ALL workers. This program would be funded by a small payroll deduction and would give workers 12 weeks of paid leave at up to 85% of their normal wages. Currently, only 13 states and the District of Columbia have private sector paid family leave programs. Seventy-three (73%) percent of all Americans currently don't have access to paid family leave.

Paid Family Leave provides caregivers with a financial cushion, improved health outcomes, and fairness and equity. Women, especially women of color, are more likely to take on the burden of caregiving. They are also more likely to work in jobs that do not provide paid family leave. The FAMILY Act would create a more inclusive definition of family to benefit the LGBTQIA+ community as well, who in many cases don't qualify for paid leave or are afraid to use it.

Some progress has been made toward paid family leave for CWA members. A bargained Parental Paid Time Off Policy was offered to certain AT&T employees covered by their current contract. It granted up to 12 weeks for management employees and up to two weeks for bargained employees. While two weeks is a start, employees need more.

CWA Local 4502, a public local government sector in Columbus, Ohio, has a Paid Family Leave program that offers all members up to 12 weeks of paid leave per year. It is paid at the employee's regular rate. Effective January 1, 2026, Minnesota offers 12-20 weeks of paid leave for medical bonding or family care reasons, funded by employer/employee premiums. Also effective January 1, 2026, Delaware began offering up to 12 weeks of paid leave, with benefits expected to cover 80% of weekly wages, up to \$900 per week. Effective May 1, 2026, in Maine, covered employees can apply for up to 12 weeks of Paid Family Medical Leave for qualifying reasons.

Unions and politicians must continue to unite to get the FAMILY Act passed. It is a lifeline for workers. All workers deserve the right to care for their families without sacrificing their jobs, their health, their homes, or their futures. In the meantime, all bargaining teams should attempt to include this vital lifeline for their employees during the negotiation process.

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Don't Let DEI. D-I-E, 2026 Edition

Tayqwoiseceyon Akins, CWA Local 7050 and Desi Navarro, PHEW-CWA Local 7000

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs have led to positive changes. Our CWA Dennis Serrette Minority Leadership Institute continues to achieve groundbreaking success in educating women and people of color in leadership development. When we lead with diversity, equity, and inclusion, we ALL win.

Through Human Rights training, community activism, the CWA “Our Power” Radio Show, our constituency group work with CBTU, APRI, CLUW, LACLAA, and Pride At Work, and our work with the NAACP Labor Committee, CWA members are not allowing DEI to DIE; however, there is so much more that must be done to fight back.

A large part of our Union’s organizational footprint (our telecommunications division) is currently or has recently been involved in bargaining new contracts. Although individual union locals may be taking steps to promote DEI policies by adding contract language to implement and uphold DEI policies, attacks on these policies are facing continued backlash.

It’s clear the labor community is facing attacks on multiple fronts.

Our basic labor and collective bargaining rights are under direct attack from anti-union lawmakers across the country looking to roll back as much progress as they can, knowing the executive branch has no interest in defending our rights.

We can’t use this onslaught as an excuse to lose sight of our responsibility to defend DEI policies at every opportunity. Every win we have in this union can be attributed, in some way, to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The opposite of DEI is conformity, partiality, and exclusion. None of those ideals will lead to prosperity for the common worker. Killing DEI will only result in stagnation and oppression in every social arena, including our workplaces.

We continue a call to action across our union to continue the fight. It is a rallying cry to our rank and file members to speak up and elect lawmakers who will fight for these values. It’s a demand for our sector and national leadership to take a firm stand and publicly affirm that our union supports DEI policies and help guide business groups to pursue contract language and workplace policies that reflect this stance.

Make no mistake, the future of Labor will not survive giving up on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. As a labor organization, we need to actively pursue adding DEI language into our contracts. Without intentional actions, our values are just words.

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Women's Equality in the U.S. Union

Bridgette Jones, IUE-CWA Local 83701 and Regina Andrade, CWA Local 9333

The labor movement continues to create opportunities, strengthen solidarity, and promote equality for workers across the nation. Through education programs, international cooperation, and advocacy for women's rights, labor organizations have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to building a stronger and more inclusive workforce.

IUE-CWA Local 83701 President Kevin Christian, working alongside the Human Rights team at General Electric Madisonville, developed an important program designed for incoming high school juniors and seniors to learn skilled trades. The program introduces students to careers such as toolmaking, welding, and maintenance work. By providing early exposure to these trades, the initiative helps prepare young workers for stable careers while also expanding opportunities for women entering traditionally male-dominated fields. This effort represents a significant step toward increasing workforce diversity and ensuring equal access to quality job opportunities.

In November 2025, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) held its 25th Biennial Convention, where delegates passed a resolution supporting international union workers. The resolution reinforced CLUW's dedication to global labor solidarity and emphasized the importance of standing together across borders to protect workers' rights.

CLUW has continued to demonstrate this commitment through direct action. In 2024, the organization proudly answered calls for solidarity from labor union women by leading coordinated actions against Nike in eight cities across the United States. Over the past two years, CLUW members from several locals have organized additional actions supporting Asian garment workers. These efforts strengthened connections between workers worldwide and raised awareness of labor conditions within global supply chains. This year, several CLUW chapters had the opportunity to meet directly with union garment workers from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Pakistan, further deepening international cooperation and understanding.

Labor women also united nationally to celebrate progress toward gender equality. On August 26, 2026, women from the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE-CWA) commemorated Women's Equality Day by wearing purple, mint green, and white. The coordinated display symbolized unity, recognition of women's achievements, and continued advocacy for equal rights in the workplace and beyond.

Together, these initiatives highlight the power of organized labor to educate future generations, support workers globally, and advance equality for women. Through leadership, solidarity, and collective action, labor organizations continue to shape a more equitable future for all workers.

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The Importance of Protecting the Transgender Community

Yolanda Pearson, National Women's Committee Chair, CWA Local 3204

Visibility has been a critical element in our collective fight for transgender rights. Transgender individuals are still the most marginalized group within the LGBTQ+ community, experiencing the highest rate of violence, homelessness, unemployment, and discrimination.

The CWA National Human Rights Committee and the CWA Human Rights Department have continued to educate activists on transgender rights through our Gender Justice training in CWA Districts 3, 7, 4, and 9 and AFA-CWA since our convention last year. We will also be offering our Gender Justice training as a workshop at our upcoming 2026 Human Rights Conference in August, which will be attended by over 500 activists from around the country to educate and raise awareness on this critical issue.

The CWA “Our Power” Radio Show has further highlighted the urgent need to protect transgender youth. Jean Thielin of the Trevor Project has served as a recurring guest on the radio show to discuss the importance of mental health services under constant attack and funding cuts.

Additionally, we have continued outreach to organizations such as the Chroma Wellness Center in Denver, Colo., which focuses on protection of mental health for people in the transgender community.

The transgender community has fought tirelessly for recognition and equality. Through education and visibility, CWA locals are continuing the fight for justice through our advocacy for all.

“Where there is injustice, you will find us.”

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