

**A National Agenda for Black Girls
November 2020**



Executive Summary

One year out from the 2020 election, Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) announced a commitment to shift the conversation among candidates running for President in perhaps the most pivotal election of our generation to center cis and trans-Black girls explicitly. Black girls become Black women - and Black women are the heart of the progressive electorate. The government can no longer ignore the issues faced by Black girls and young women. With this vision, GGE launched [A National Agenda for Black Girls](#) (NABG) in November 2019, steered by a team of twenty Black girls and endorsed by 65 organizations serving Black women and girls across the United States. Since its inception, GGE has virtually engaged the steering committee in political education, analysis, and storytelling to continue to support their leadership as they drive this work.



It's time to center the needs of Black Girls in our national policies.

Black girls, non-binary and gender non-conforming youth are routinely left out of policy decisions. Deep-seated stereotypes and institutional barriers rooted in anti-black racism and the legacy of slavery push the narrative that Black girls are aggressive, hypersexual, and undeserving of support and care. As the COVID-19 global pandemic amplifies pre-existing inequalities and structural disparities, we cannot afford for youth to be left behind. From attacks on reproductive health to inadequate safety measures in schools to interpersonal violence within homes and communities, Black girls, non-binary and, gender non-conforming youth must be prioritized by the White House. Policy initiatives and budget priorities must reflect a deep investment in the institutions and communities that center the lives of Black girls, non-binary and gender-nonconforming youth. Additionally, we must divest from systems like policing that harm and abuse Black girls, non-binary and gender-nonconforming youth. We recognize that there is limited disaggregated data on Black girls, non-binary and gender-nonconforming youth, especially disabled and/or undocumented youth. However, the available data is damning and demonstrates the level of violence Black girls, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming youth experience and the lack of investments to combat this violence. The Biden-Harris administration must adopt The National Agenda for Black Girls, which lays out six policy priorities that speak to the needs of Black girls, non-binary and gender-nonconforming youth nationwide.

The National Agenda for Black Girls includes the following policy priorities:

- 1) Expanding Education Justice & Opportunity
- 2) Healing, Wellbeing, and Reproductive Justice
- 3) Immigration and Racial Justice
- 4) Expanding Democracy for Young People
- 5) Ending Gender-Based Violence & Building Culture of Consent
- 6) Passing a Black Girls Bill of Rights

1. Expanding Education Justice & Opportunity

Black Girls need the civil rights protections that allow them to thrive and succeed through public education without the constraints of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Black girls across the United States are more likely to attend poorly funded schools or schools funded at inequitable rates. Black girls also experience disproportionate rates of school exclusion, school-based arrests, and surveillance. There must be a commitment to enhancing and protecting the civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination and punitive practices in schools, as well as a commitment to redistributing resources to ensure quality education is available to all students, regardless of where they live.

Data Points

- African-American girls constitute 14 percent of the general population nationally, but 33.2 percent of girls detained and committed.¹
- Black girls are² six times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions, four times more likely to be arrested, three times more likely to be physically restrained, three times more likely to receive one or more in-school suspensions, three times more likely to be referred to law enforcement, two times more likely to receive corporal punishment in comparison to White female students.³
- Black girls were 76 percent of the girls targeted for school-based New York City Police Department mitigations in 2018-2019, despite representing only 25% of girls in the student population.⁴
- 1 in 10 girls and TGNC youth of color reported lacking the resources and support they needed in schools.⁵
- Forty percent of girls in juvenile detention identify as lesbian, bisexual, questioning/gender non-conforming, or transgender (LBQ/GNCT), and 85% of LBQ/GNCT girls in juvenile detention are girls of color.⁶
- Fifty percent of Black transgender and gender-expansive youth can never use the restroom that aligns with gender identity at school.⁷

¹ Human Rights Project for Girls, *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls' Story*, available at https://forwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/documents_Sexual-Abuse-to-Prison-Pipeline-The-Girls-Story-2015.pdf.

² NWLC calculations of U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2015-16 Public Use Data *File available at* <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>.

³ African American Policy Forum. (2015). Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced, and underprotected

⁴ Girls for Gender Equity, Policy Brief: School Policing Disparities for Black Girls: Analyzing Reported NYPD Interventions During School Year 2018-19, available at, https://www.ggenyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/GGE-Policy-Brief_-NYPD-School-Policing-Data-Impact-on-Girls-of-Color.pdf

⁵ Girls for Gender Equity, *The Schools Girls Deserve: Youth Driven Solutions for Creating Safe, Holistic, and Affirming New York City Schools*, available at <https://www.ggenyc.org/the-schools-girls-deserve/>

⁶ Survived + Punished. Quick Statistics. [online] Available at: <https://survivedandpunished.org/quick-statistics/> [Accessed 20 November 2020].

⁷ Human Rights Campaign, *2019 Black & African American LGBTQ Youth Report*, available at https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC_2019_Black_and_African_American_LGBTQ_Youth_Report-FINAL-web.pdf?mtime=20200713134037&focal=none.

- Black girls made up 12% of girls suspended, while Black girls with disabilities accounted for 19% of girls with disabilities who suspended.⁸

Policy Recommendations

- Eliminate truancy laws and end suspensions and expulsions for students K-12.
- Expand funding for Head Start and Early Head Start and child care services in schools for young Black parents.
- Invest \$3 billion into school-based restorative justice programs.

Relevant Legislation

[Equality Act](#) (S1006)⁹ - This bill prohibits discrimination based on sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and for other purposes.

[H.R.5388](#)¹⁰ - This bill provides that the Secretary of Education may not issue or enforce certain rules that weaken the enforcement of the prohibition of sex discrimination applicable under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

[Increasing Access to Mental Health Care in Schools Act](#)¹¹ (H.R.2958 /S.1642) - This bill directs the Department of Education (ED) to award grants to partnerships between educational agencies and graduate institutions to increase the number of school-based mental health services providers employed by low-income local educational agencies (LEAs).

[Ending PUSHOUT Act](#)¹² (H.R. 5325) - This bill requires the Department of Education (ED) to award grants to local educational agencies and nonprofit organizations to reduce suspension and expulsion of students (i.e., exclusionary disciplinary practices). Requires ED to collect data on exclusionary discipline in schools and establishes a joint task force to end school pushout.

[Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act](#)¹³ (S.436) - This bill diverts federal funding away from supporting the presence of police in schools and toward evidence-based and trauma-informed services that address the needs of marginalized students and improve academic outcomes, and for other purposes.

[The CROWN Act](#)¹⁴ (H. R. 5309) - This bill prohibits discrimination based on an individual's texture or hairstyle.

[BREATHE Act](#)¹⁵ This omnibus bill divests federal resources from incarceration and policing, invests in new, non-punitive, non-carceral approaches to community safety that lead states to shrink their criminal-legal systems and center the protection of Black lives—including Black mothers, Black trans people, and Black women, allocates new money to build healthy,

⁸ National Black Women's Justice Institute, *End School Pushout for Black Girls and Girls of Color*, available at https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/0c71ee_7d6b6469aa144b0397a4d7cd5d0f8051.pdf.

⁹ S.1006, 115th Cong. (2017).

¹⁰ H.R. 5388, 116th Cong. (2019).

¹¹ H.R. 2958, 116th Cong. (2019)

¹² H.R. 5325, 116th Cong. (2019)

¹³ S. 436, 116th Cong. (2019)

¹⁴ H.R. 5309, 116th Cong. (2019)

¹⁵ M4BL, *What is the Breathe Act?*, available at: <https://breatheact.org/learn-more/>.

sustainable, and equitable communities, and holds political leaders to their promises and enhance the self-determination of all Black communities.

2. Healing, Wellbeing, and Reproductive Justice

Black girls, women, and non-binary people need equitable access to health, family building, family planning, and well-being.

Black girls deserve to receive accurate information about sexual and reproductive health in their schools and communities, and they deserve to have autonomy over their bodies and reproduction. Black girls deserve access to culturally affirming mental health support, and they deserve to live self-determined lives, which includes access to affordable mental health and physical health care.

Data Points

- Almost all (90%) of Black parents and students overwhelmingly support comprehensive sexual health education.¹⁶
- A large majority (78%) of Black women and men believe that that sexual development is normal, and the best approach to health education is to provide all the information about sex and contraception.¹⁷
- Quality sexuality education leads to improved health outcomes and perception of self by young people.¹⁸
- Only 20% of Black LGBTQ youth received information about safer sex relevant to their sexuality or gender.¹⁹
- Black youth are more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than youth of other racial-ethnic backgrounds; Black 15-to-19-year-olds, for example, are 4.9 times more likely than Latinx youth and 16.8 times more likely than white youth to receive an HIV diagnosis.²⁰
- 80% of Black LGBTQ youth feel depressed or down, 90% have had trouble getting to sleep.²¹
- Young women of color who live in poverty receive mental health treatment at less than one-third the rate of young white women living in poverty.²²

¹⁶ In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda. Results from a National Survey of Black Adults: The Lives and Voices of Black America on the Intersections of Politics, Race, and Public Policy, April 2018.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, *Sex Ed Saves, a curriculum*, available at <https://www.icaah.org/blog/sex-ed-saves>.

¹⁹ Human Rights Campaign, *2019 Black & African American LGBTQ Youth Report*, available at https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC_2019_Black_and_African_American_LGBTQ_Youth_Report-FINAL-web.pdf?mtime=20200713134037&focal=none.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Human Rights Campaign, *2019 Black & African American LGBTQ Youth Report*, available at https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC_2019_Black_and_African_American_LGBTQ_Youth_Report-FINAL-web.pdf?mtime=20200713134037&focal=none.

²² Kimberlyn Leary, *Mental health and girls of color*, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, available at <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2019/12/Mental-Health-and-Girls-of-Color.pdf>

Policy Recommendations

- Invest in comprehensive sex education programs that center the experiences of Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth, especially those at the intersection of disability.
- Increase funding for adolescent sexual health promotion programs.
- Invest in community health care models by funding fast-track midwifery programs to increase the number of Black midwives providing free, accessible services across the country.
- Invest in holistic and culturally competent mental health care models that include community-level crisis intervention.
- Eliminate federal funding for abstinence-only until marriage programs
- Repeal minor consent laws federally.
- Support Medicaid for All bill that includes reproductive care coverage for Black undocumented and immigrant girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth and coverage that includes gender-affirming care, contraceptive care, and abortion care.
- Eliminate the No Child Left Behind prohibition of funding for programs or materials “directed at youth, that are designed to promote or encourage sexual activity, or normalize teen sexual activity as expected behavior, implicitly or explicitly, whether homosexual or heterosexual.

Relevant Legislation

- **The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (REHYA)**²³ This bill provides the first-ever federal funding for comprehensive sex education for young people in elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education. It also establishes teacher training for school-based sex education, amends current federal law to enable LGBTQ-inclusive education, and allows condoms and contraception on school grounds.
- **Youth Access to Sexual Health Services Act, (YASSA)**²⁴ - This bill supports access to sexual and reproductive health care for LGBTQ+ adolescents, immigrants, young BIPOC, youth in foster care, and teenagers in juvenile detention.

²³ H.R. 2720, 116th Cong. (2019).

²⁴ H.R. 2701, 116th Cong. (2019).

3. Immigration and Racial Justice

Black girls deserve to be free from the fear of family separation through deportation and have full access to fundamental human rights, including health care and education, regardless of immigration status.

Families belong together regardless of their immigration status. Political leaders must commit to providing safe and pathways to opportunity for all people, irrespective of their immigration status. Black women and girls who are immigrants are twice as likely to be uninsured. Being uninsured is particularly harmful to migrants who live in states that have not expanded Medicaid. Black women and girls deserve to have access to quality health care, education, and job opportunities, without fear of prosecution or deportation.

Data Points

- Medicaid is the primary way Black immigrant women and girls gain access to reproductive health and preventative care such as birth control, mammograms, and prenatal care.²⁵
- Black women and girls experience low birth weight preterm birth at higher rates than non-Black immigrants and U.S. citizens alike.²⁶
- Low-income immigrants, including Black women and girls, are more than twice as likely to be uninsured as low-income citizens.²⁷
- Thirty percent of Black girls worry about a friend or family member being deported.²⁸

Policy Recommendations

- Increase access to the diversity visa program, TPS, for all Black migrants.
- Increase access to family-based visa sponsorship for Black migrants.
- Increase access to asylum and refugee relief for Black migrants.
- Eliminate language and education requirements for those seeking residency in the U.S., especially since many Black people migrate from French-speaking countries.
- Eliminate the public charge rule.
- Support a Clean Dream Act²⁹, including no border security, no interior enforcement, no additional detention centers, and no mandatory e-verification.

Relevant Legislation

- [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#)³⁰ - This is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.

²⁵ Black Alliance for Just Immigration, *A brief overview of Black immigrant women and girls in the U.S.*, available at: <http://baji.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BIWG-Updated.pdf>

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ National Women's Law Center, *Stopping School Pushout for: Girls of Color*, available at: <https://nwlrc.org/resources/stopping-school-pushout-for-girls-of-color/>

²⁹ Undocublack Network, *Support a Clean Dream Act*, available at: <https://undocublack.org/cleandream>

³⁰ The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99)

- [HEAL for Immigrant Women and Families Act](#)³¹ (HR 2788) - This bill removes the five-year bar that immigrants must wait before becoming eligible for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). It would enable undocumented immigrants to purchase health insurance plans from the online marketplace made available by the Affordable Care Act and restore Medicaid eligibility to Compact of Free Association (COFA) migrants.
- [H.R. 6: The Dream and Promise Act of 2019](#)³²- This bill creates a pathway to citizenship for immigrant youth, creates a pathway to citizenship for 2.7 million immigrant youth such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, as well as current and or potential Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders.

4. Expanding Democracy for Young People

Black girls need to be able to fully engage in the democratic process.

Black communities, women, and young people face long-standing structural barriers to participation in the electoral process. There must be a commitment to fighting voter disenfranchisement, especially for marginalized communities. Young people’s voices should be valued in the political process. Young people should be permitted to pre-register to vote at age 16, and voting processes should be simple and accessible.

Data Points

- Four in 10 eligible Black voters are millennials or from generation Z.³³
- Young Black voters supported Biden by a particularly wide margin in Georgia (90 percent) and nationwide (86 percent).³⁴
- The pandemic was a key mobilizing issue for many Black youth: one in three (34%) said that COVID-19 was the top issue facing the country, and half of all young Black voters said that the pandemic was the “single most important factor” in deciding their vote.³⁵
- Young Black women were 10% more likely than young Black men (80% to 70%) to say they have been personally affected by COVID-19 due to having events canceled, knowing someone who had died, or losing a job.³⁶

Policy Recommendations

- Increase community and neighborhood-based youth councils to ensure young Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth can advocate for budgetary priorities, programs, and services in their communities.

³¹ H.R. 2788, 115th Cong. (2017)

³² H.R. 6, 115th Cong. (2019)

³³ Pew Research Center, *Amid Campaign Turmoil, Biden holds wide leads on coronavirus, unifying the country*, available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/10/09/election-and-voter-attitudes-appendix/>

³⁴ Lili Pike, *Why so many young people showed up on Election Day*, VOX, (Nov 7, 2020, 12:10pm EST), <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/7/21552248/youth-vote-2020-georgia-biden-covid-19-racism-climate-change>.

³⁵ CIRCLE, *Election Week 2020: Youth Voter Turnout 52%-55%*, available at: <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-week-2020#spotlight:-the-black-youth-vote>.

³⁶ *Id.*

Relevant Legislation

[For the People Act of 2019](#) ³⁷ (H.Amdt.76 to H.R.1) - This bill lowers the mandatory minimum voting age to age 16 in federal elections.

[H.J.Res.23](#) ³⁸ - This resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to lower the minimum age for the right to vote from 18 to 16.

5. Ending Gender-Based Violence & Building Culture of Consent

Invest in tools that end violence and offer supportive services for transgender, cisgender, and non-binary people in schools, communities, and public spaces.

Black girls deserve to have lives that are unbridled by the fear of sexual or gender-based violence. Government must invest in the programs and organizations that provide healing, emotional support, housing, care, and advocacy for survivors of gender-based violence. Political leaders should value the safety, autonomy, and well-being of girls and women.

Data Points

- 60 percent of Black girls have experienced sexual assault before the age of 18³⁹
- African American girls and women 12 years and older experienced higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white, Asian, and Latina girls and women from 2005-2010.⁴⁰
- Among students, 11% of Black girls in a national high school sample reported having been raped.⁴¹
- 82% of Black transgender and gender-expansive youth have been verbally insulted because of their identity, 41% of transgender and gender-expansive youth have been physically threatened because of their identity.⁴²
- 62% of Black LGBTQ youth have experienced unwanted gestures, jokes, or comments, 27% of Black transgender and gender-expansive youth have been forced to do unwanted sexual acts.⁴³

³⁷ H.Amdt.76 to H.R.1, 116th Cong, (2019)

³⁸ H.J.Res.23, 116th Cong, (2019)

³⁹ The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, *Black Women and Sexual Assault*, available at: <https://ujimacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ujima-Womens-Violence-Stats-v7.4-1.pdf>

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² Human Rights Campaign, *2019 Black & African American LGBTQ Youth Report*, available at https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC_2019_Black_and_African_American_LGBTQ_Youth_Report-FINAL-web.pdf?mtime=20200713134037&focal=none.

⁴³ *Id.*

- Overwhelmingly research shows that pre-college education on healthy relationships and consent reduces the likelihood of students perpetrating or experiencing sexual harassment^{44,45}

Policy Recommendations

- Endorse and Implement the Survivor's Agenda⁴⁶ policy recommendations covering a range of issue areas including community safety and alternatives to the criminal legal system, culture and narrative shift, education, healing justice, health care, housing and transportation, and workplace safety and worker's rights
- Pass COVID-19 relief package that includes financial and housing relief for Black girls, non-binary, gender non-conforming youth experiencing homelessness or in abusive and unsafe households
- Invest in bystander training, community de-escalation training, community crisis teams, and community-wide education on consent and power to increase communities capacity to intervene in sexual violence
- Invest in comprehensive, age-appropriate, K-12 sexual health education which teaches about consent, healthy relationships, and inclusion for LGBTQ students
- Establish permanent housing options for homeless Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming
- Create a survivor's fund to provide access to housing, transportation, mental health care, and other psychological, emotional, and physical needs

⁴⁴ John S. Santelli et al., "Does sex education before college protect students from sexual assault in college?," Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, November 2018, page 2, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205951>,

⁴⁵ Catherine Brown & Abby Quirk, "Momentum Is Building to Modernize Sex Education," Center for American Progress, May 2019, available at: https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/05/23052627/Modernize-Sex-Ed_brief11.pdf.

⁴⁶ The Survivor's Agenda, available at: https://live-survivorsagenda.org.pantheon.site.io/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-09-19_SurvAgenda_English-1.pdf

6. Passing a Black Girls Bill of Rights

Based on the United States Bill of Rights, we've created the Black Girls Declaration of Freedom and Humanity. It declares the rights and privileges that Black girls and women deserve in order to thrive in our contemporary society. Created in partnership with Black girls across the country, we will present our bill to the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls to advance issues and legislation important to the welfare of girls of African descent.

Every Black girl deserves:

- The right to education and information about African and Black history.
- The right to express our Blackness however we define it without judgment.
- The right to be safe and have our physical, emotional, and mental health honored, protected, and nurtured.
- The right to real sex education, contraception, tampons, and pads.
- The right to agency and control over our own bodies in every space.
- The right to justice and reparations in response to harm and sexual assault when police officers murder people of color.
- The right to play and have fun.
- The right to community, sisterhood, and support from other girls.
- The right to BE—exactly who we are, free from stereotypes and insecurity, our full, unique selves.

The adoption of the Black Girls Bill of Rights (Black Girls Declaration of Freedom and Humanity) supports a cultural and narrative shift that is essential to the safety, health, and prosperity of Black people in America. Black girls become Black women and Black women are the heart of the progressive electorate. Government must invest resources, policies, practices, strategies, and leadership that no longer ignores the issues faced by Black girls and young women.

“Even in the face of the insurmountable odds Black girls and young women face in America, we are making tremendous strides and contributions in this country. Imagine what 2030 can look like if we invest \$1 billion in Black girls and young women over the next 10 years.”⁴⁷ Uplift this call to action from the Black Girl Freedom Fund.

⁴⁷ Black Girl Freedom Fund - <https://1billion4blackgirls.org>

Conclusion

A National Agenda for Black Girls is a reminder that Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth deserve the resources, support, and care to not only survive but thrive in the United States. The data demonstrates that Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth are systematically locked out of opportunities due to racism, gendered stereotypes, criminalization, hypersexualization, and neglect from elected officials and their communities. To fully address the needs of Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth, this next administration must center the needs, experiences, and voices of youth by adopting this policy platform. Black girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth need to be nurtured, protected, and most importantly, they need to be front and center in the new Biden-Harris administration. Let this administration's budget and policy priorities reflect the futures we want to build for our youth.



ABOUT GIRLS FOR GENDER EQUITY

Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is an 18-year-old organization building the political power of Black femmes, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth. GGE works intergenerationally to center cis and trans-Black girls and young women and gender-expansive youth of color through policy, advocacy, direct service, and culture shift to achieve gender and racial justice through a Black feminist lens.

Joanne N. Smith
Founder/President
jsmith@ggenyc.org

Web: ggenyc.org
T/IG: [@GGENYC](https://www.instagram.com/GGENYC)