



December 16, 2008

President-elect Barack Obama  
Vice President-elect Joe Biden  
c/o Obama-Biden Transition Team  
Valerie Jarrett, John Podesta, Pete Rouse, Dana Singiser

Dear President-Elect Obama and Vice President-Elect Biden:

As leaders of women's organizations and advocates for women's equality, collectively representing over 14 million women, we are writing to elaborate on the need for historic levels of women's appointments and the need to restore and strengthen executive branch offices for women.

We applaud your initial appointments of talented women and we encourage you to further gender balance your White House, Cabinet, and executive appointments. The U.S., with women composing just 17% of the members of Congress, ranks 71st among the world's parliaments in representation of women. With women so underrepresented in Congress, we believe it is crucial for women's representation to increase dramatically at the executive branch of decision-making. Many of us will be submitting names of excellent and diverse women for your consideration.

Like you, we believe that we are at a time of real change in our nation's history. Through both words and actions, you have encouraged and challenged the nation to think transformationally.

In this spirit, we urge you to create a Cabinet-level Office on Women that will deal not only with the status of women, but with the many inequities women face in our society, our nation, and our world. Such an office is even more necessary today, because of the increased disparities and backward movement of the past eight years.

Although many countries have a Cabinet minister responsible for addressing women's issues and concerns, it would be another historic "first" for the United States to recognize the importance of solving inequities faced by women as well as further empowering women and girls to reach for their dreams. The Director would hold cabinet rank and report directly to the President, and the new office would be responsible for, but not limited to, the following:

**1. Impact Evaluation and Strategic Planning.** The Office on Women would seek new ways to bring to this great country the full potential of tens of millions of women and girls of all races and from all walks of life through policies, inter-agency coordination, budgeting and initiatives that will bring us closer to equality.

The new Office on Women would evaluate federal programs, initiatives and policies for their impact on women (addressing both opportunities and inequities) and improve their effectiveness through coordination and strategic planning. The Office would have leadership of the reconstituted White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach as well as the restored Interagency Council on Women. It would also be charged with preparing a coordinated budget for all efforts aimed at achieving the equality of women.

Because women, especially women of color, are differently affected by so many laws and policies – from health care to labor to the economy – it is critical that the *impact on women* be "part of the picture" as each and every critical decision is made. A cabinet-level office is the most effective way to accomplish this goal. Many of our federal programs were designed at a time when women's roles in our society were very different, and they should be reviewed and reconsidered.

The disparate treatment of women and the disparate impact of seemingly gender-neutral policies are so systemic that they cut across departmental lines and require an intersectional approach. More importantly, women need an advocate at the policy-making table whose specific responsibility is considering and weighing in on the potential of decisions to positively or negatively impact women's opportunities for advancement. We cannot expect the few women at the table to bear this responsibility in addition to the responsibilities of their designated agency.

**2. Interdepartmental Coordination [Interagency Council on Women].** Currently, women's programs are housed in many different departments, including Labor, Defense, Health and Human Services, Justice, and many others. Some of these offices are focused on making sure women's needs are addressed adequately as each agency seeks to achieve its mission and deliver services, while others focus primarily on advancing women within the agency's workforce. It is important that each government agency have an effective and strong office (or offices) on women that address both women as workers and women as clients of the agency. These offices could learn much from each other and could work together to bring more effective and timely change for women.

To effectively coordinate the work of the various federal departments and agencies, we urge that the work of the former Clinton-era Interagency Council on Women be taken up by the Office on Women. We recommend the council staff be composed of representatives of each of the agencies and departments who are "lent" to the Council. The work of the Council should be reviewing and assessing the work of all agencies and departments that serve women, coordinate government-wide women's initiatives, and ensure the various agency and departmental policies are in keeping with our national and international commitments to women.

**3. Policy Initiatives, Outreach and Inreach [Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach].**

The Office on Women should also include a restored and strengthened White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach. That office, under President Clinton, was very small and its director was a deputy assistant to the President. The purpose has been described as "outreach to keep women's organizations informed (and presumably supportive) of presidential initiatives, and 'inreach' to solicit views of national women's leaders for injection into White house staff offices as policy proposals were being formulated."


We believe the restored program should be strengthened in rank, staffing, and function, to include both a political function (interrelation with women elected officials) and a communications function (creating communications opportunities for the White House and providing support on women's issues and events).

It is crucial that there be a policy function to this effort addressing a full range of women's issues, including work/family balance and women's disproportionate poverty. This function would include review of new federal policies and budgets and their impact on women in a cross-departmental approach, in addition to the previous outreach and "inreach" functions.

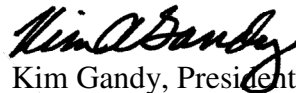
**4. Interrelation with Other Agencies.** The Office on Women would interrelate with the Status of Women Commissions of many states, counties, and municipalities of our nation, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Status of Women Commission, as well as the women's ministries of many other nations.

Thank you for your consideration of these ideas. The extraordinary support you received from women in this election is testament to our confidence in your commitment to equality and change. We look forward to working with you and with the accomplished and visionary women and men who will bring new ideas and new initiatives to your administration.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Smeal, President  
Feminist Majority



Kim Gandy, President  
National Organization for Women



Lorraine Cole, Ph.D., CEO  
YWCA USA



Lulu Flores, President  
National Women's Political Caucus



Dr. Elizabeth J. Clark, ACSW, MPH  
Executive Director  
National Association of Social Workers



Susan Scanlan  
President, Women's Research and Education Institute  
Chair, National Council of Women's Organizations



Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq., Chairperson  
National Congress of Black Women



Eleanor Hinton Hoytt, President and CEO  
Black Women's Health Imperative



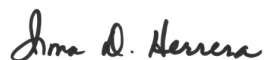
Nancy Ratzan, President  
National Council of Jewish Women




Kimberly Otis, Executive Director  
National Council of Women's Organizations



Hedy Ratner, Co-President  
Women's Business Development Center



Irma D. Herrera, Executive Director  
Equal Rights Advocates



Irasema Garza, President  
Legal Momentum



Jodie Evans, Co-Founder  
CODEPINK: Women for Peace



Faye Wattleton, President  
Center for the Advancement of Women



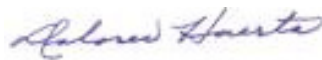
Marsha Zakowski, National President  
Coalition of Labor Union Women



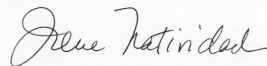
Rose M. Ditto, Ph.D., International President  
General Federation of Women's Clubs



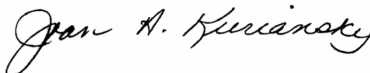
Loretta J. Ross, National Coordinator  
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health  
Collective



Dolores Huerta, Founder and President  
Dolores Huerta Foundation



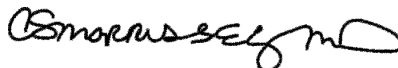
Irene Natividad, President  
Global Summit of Women



Joan A. Kuriansky, Esq., Executive Director  
Wider Opportunities for Women



Martha Burk, Ph.D., President  
Center for Advancement of Public Policy



Claudia S. Morrissey, MD, MPH, National President  
American Medical Women's Association



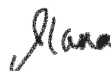
Ashley B. Carson, J.D., Executive Director  
OWL – The Voice of Midlife and Older Women



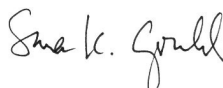
Silvia Henriquez, Executive Director  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health



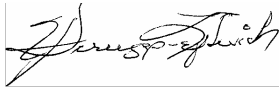
Marie C. Wilson, President & Founder  
The White House Project



Ilana Goldman, President  
Women's Campaign Forum



Sara K. Gould, President and CEO  
Ms. Foundation for Women



Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich, Ph.D., Chair  
CCEJ, Inc. - Sojourner Truth Forum for  
Interactive Justice



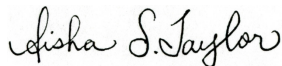
Leigh Wintz, Executive Director  
Soroptomist International of the Americas



Linda Basch, Ph.D., President  
National Council for Research on Women



Melanie L. Campbell  
Convener, Black Women's Roundtable  
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation



Aisha S. Taylor, Executive Director  
Women's Ordination Conference



Sarah Harder, Chair  
National Women's Conference Committee



Martha Allen, Ph.D, Director  
Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press



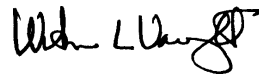
Jennifer L. Pozner, Executive Director  
Women in Media and News



Dr. Wynetta Frazier, National President  
National Hook-Up of Black Women, Inc.



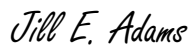
Wendy Pollack  
Director, Women's Law and Policy Project  
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law



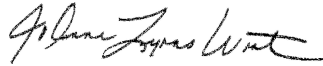
Wilma L. Vaught, Brigadier General, USAF, Retired  
President, Women in Military Service for America  
Memorial Foundation, Inc.



Carol Jenkins, Executive Director  
Women's Media Center



Jill E. Adams, J.D., Executive Director  
Law Students for Reproductive Justice



JoAnne Lyons Wooten, Interim President and CEO  
Women Work! The National Network for Women's  
Employment



Julie Burton, Executive Director  
Project Kid Smart



Pat Bakalian, Executive Director  
Campaign for Gender Equality



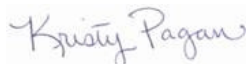
Patricia Willis, Chair  
Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association



Dr. Julia M. Watkins, Executive Director  
Council on Social Work Education



Ariel Dougherty, Director  
Media Equity Collaborative



Kristy Pagan, Chair  
Women's Information Network