OPEN LETTER
To presidential candidates and consultants, debate moderators, political commentators and the media:

If ever there were a time to center women’s lives in the political debate, it’s now.

Women are 51 percent of the country’s population and 53 percent of the country’s voters, yet women’s issues have been shockingly absent from the presidential campaign debates thus far.

Seven nights and 12 hours of moderated debates have largely ignored policy discussions of issues that have an outsized impact on the lives of women and girls, such as equal pay, paid family and medical leave, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, child care, caregiving, and reproductive rights, health, and justice, including access to abortion.

Since 2016, there has been remarkable mobilization by women and girls who have marched in the streets and demanded a change in our culture, our institutions, and our laws. This led to a historic 2020 midterm election, which saw women, including women of color and LBTQ women, running for office at extraordinary rates and winning an unprecedented number of seats in Congress, as well as governorships, state legislative seats and local offices. The gender justice movement is strong, diverse and vibrant, and women’s activism, engagement, and energy continue to grow.

Despite the pivotal role that women play in our representative democracy, the presidential debates thus far have failed to speak to the central issues that impact women’s lives.

According to TIME’S UP Now, there have been zero questions about sexual harassment, zero questions about child care, zero questions about paid family and medical leave during the first three presidential debates in 2019. In fact, historical research by TIME’S UP Now found zero questions about sexual harassment policy out of over 4,000 in two decades, and found that moderators haven’t asked a substantive question about child care since 2004.

Moreover, women of color are increasingly among the most engaged voters, yet there have been no questions about how the intersection of race, gender, and ethnicity affects their wages and economic standing, access to health care, exposure to gender-based violence, opportunity to move up the career ladder, safety, educational opportunity, ability to access affordable child care, and more.

While moderators, pundits, candidates, and networks have rightly explored critical conversations on making health care more affordable and available, fighting the climate crisis, curtailing gun violence, achieving racial justice, addressing violence within and against our communities, treating immigrants humanely while fixing our broken immigration system, and creating an economy that works for all — it is imperative that they directly address how these issues uniquely affect women and girls, and in particular women and girls of color, including transgender women and girls of color.

On October 15, and in every primary and general election debate that follows, debate moderators must ask the candidates to speak about their plans to root out gender-based bias and inequities. Candidates should tell us how all of their policy proposals — including those that address women and girls — will positively affect women’s economic security, health and safety, dignity and equity. Pundits should spend as much airtime assessing whether the candidates’ proposals directly speak to the concerns of women as they do arguing about who “won” that night’s debate.

Women will decide the next election, and we will not accept another presidential debate that ignores these issues. Our economic security, health, equality, dignity and success require more attention by those who seek to lead our nation.

We are waiting to hear from you.

NATIONAL WOMEN’S LAW CENTER
NEW AMERICA
TIME’S UP
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR WORK AND FAMILIES
YWCA
Center for American Progress
9to5, National Association of Working Women
African American Ministers In Action - ABIM
Above All Action Fund
American Association of University Women
American Association of University Women of Ohio
Anita�erg
Black Women’s Roundtable
Caring Across Generations
Center for Advancement of Public Policy
Chicago Foundation for Women
Closing the Women’s Wealth Gap
Family Values @ Work
FreeFrom-Girls Inc.
Global Justice Center
Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation
Higher Heights for America
Higher Heights Leadership Fund
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women’s Reproductive Justice Agenda
Independent Individualism
Innovation Ohio
Justice for Migrant Women
Labor Project for Working Families
Make It Work Nevada
MANA, A National Latina Organization
NARAL Pro-Choice America
NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum
National Coalition of 100 Black Women
Central Ohio Chapter
National Coalition of Jewish Women
Cleveland
National Employment Law Project
National Organization for Women
National Women’s Health Network
Ohio Coalition of YWCA’s
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Ohio Federation of Teachers
Ohio National Organization for Women
Ohio Progressives
Asian American Pacific Islander Women’s Leadership (PAPIW)
Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Ohio Women’s Alliance
Ohio Women’s Public Policy Network
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Action Fund
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
Policy Matters Ohio
Pomona Society
Power Rising
Power to Decide
RadiVa Pascale Foundation
Rhode Island chapter of the National Organization for Women
Seder Family
She the People
Supermajority
The Women’s Fund of Central Ohio
The Women Project
These Research & Consulting
Ultraviolet
United State of Women
United Way of Central Ohio
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
VotetoLead
Vota Latina
Women Employed
Women’s Foundation of Minnesota
Women’s Rights and Empowerment Network
WOMEN’S WAY
Women’s Fund of Rhode Island
Women’s Funding Network
Women’s Law Project
YWCA Alliance
YWCA Canton
YWCA Cincinnati
YWCA Columbus
YWCA Dayton
YWCA Greater Cleveland
YWCA Hamilton
YWCA Mahoning Valley
YWCA Van Wert County