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National Education Association
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American Federation of Teachers

January 12, 2015

Dear Senator,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we write to share with you our legislative goals for the coming year. Our 15 task forces worked to identify and develop a comprehensive list of priority legislative initiatives that represent a path forward for our country in advancing social and economic justice — including initiatives to expand the economy, promote job growth and workplace fairness, encourage educational opportunity, ensure fairness in the criminal justice system, and promote programs for healthy, strong families.

The Leadership Conference believes that these important legislative priorities are well-positioned for Congressional action. A number of the legislative items on our list have had bipartisan support and others have emerged to address critical issues, such as voting rights, economic insecurity, immigration reform, and preventing discrimination in employment, contracting, and housing. While the list that follows does not reflect the complete agenda of all of our member organizations, it does highlight the issues that are at the top of the coalition's agenda. We believe that these goals can and should be met by the 114th Congress.

The Leadership Conference looks forward to continuing to work with you to further these important goals. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Nancy Zirkin or Corrine Yu at 202-466-3311.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President

**Policy and Enforcement
Committee Chair**
Michael Lieberman
Anti-Defamation League
President & CEO
Wade J. Henderson
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CENSUS

- Support sufficient funding to ensure thorough testing and planning for the 2020 Census. This should include ensuring that operational and technological innovations designed to contain overall census costs are robust and address the persistent disproportionate undercount of populations of color and other historically harder-to-count population groups, such as immigrants, people with disabilities, young children, and rural and low-income households, as well as prison gerrymandering and other design and policy issues that affect a fair and accurate census.
- Ensure an accurate American Community Survey by actively supporting continued mandatory response and full annual funding to guarantee adequate sample size, and by implementing steps to ensure reliable, comprehensive measurement of smaller and special populations.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Sentencing Reform

- Support legislation that addresses front-end drivers of mass-incarceration, racial disparities in incarceration, overcrowding in the federal Bureau of Prisons, and over-criminalization.

Law Enforcement Accountability

- Support legislation that eliminates discriminatory profiling in all of its forms, similar to the **End Racial Profiling Act**; mandates racial bias training for all law enforcement agencies receiving federal funds; addresses the problem of police misconduct and brutality – one of the most serious, enduring, and divisive human rights violations in the United States; and strengthens personal property rights under the Fifth Amendment to ensure due process of law by reforming civil asset forfeiture laws, which disproportionately impact people of color.

Reentry/Collateral Consequences

- Support legislation that remove barriers to reentry and addresses collateral consequences for formerly-incarcerated individuals in the areas of education, employment, voting, housing, and public assistance, such as the **Redeem Act**, the **Democracy Restoration Act**, and the **Fairness and Accuracy in Criminal Background Checks Act**. Reauthorize the **Second Chance Reauthorization Act**, which provides funding assistance to state and local governments, and other key stakeholders working with reentering populations.
- Defend and protect against legislation that undermines efforts to provide formerly-incarcerated individuals with pathways to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Juvenile Justice

- Support legislation like the **Youth Promise Act** to address the specific and unique needs of young people, and support evidence-based practices and alternatives to incarceration. Support reauthorization of the **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)**.

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Budget

- Protect programs for low-income and vulnerable people and reject structural changes that would negatively impact beneficiaries, such as a block grant for SNAP, a per capita cap for Medicaid, or transforming Medicare into a voucher program.
- Provide relief from the sequester for non-defense programs no less than for defense programs.



- Enact tax policies that improve tax fairness and raise revenue by closing tax loopholes for corporations and the wealthy.
- Reject budget process changes that make it easier to enact tax cuts without offsets and oppose a balanced budget constitutional amendment.

Economic security and jobs

- Raise the federal minimum wage and the minimum wage for tipped workers, indexed for inflation.
- Protect and expand income and work supports, including Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, nutrition assistance, housing assistance, unemployment insurance, and child care.
- Protect consumers from predatory lending practices by enacting a thirty-six percent Annual Percentage Rate limit applicable to all borrowers and rejecting limits on the authority of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.
- Restore solvency to the Social Security Disability Insurance Trust Fund by reallocating a portion of Social Security's payroll tax to the Disability Insurance Trust Fund without harmful changes that would reduce benefits or limit participation.
- Make permanent the 2009 improvements to refundable tax credits, including to the Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Invest in job creation that builds the economy and meets pressing needs, and ensure that underrepresented populations have access to these jobs.

EDUCATION

- **Early Childhood:** Increase funding for early childhood programs, including child care, and pass the **Strong Start for America's Children Act (SSACA)**, a comprehensive early childhood education bill. The SSACA would increase access to quality critical early learning opportunities for all children regardless of race, color, or ZIP code.
- **Elementary and Secondary:** Any reauthorization of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** must continue to hold states, districts and schools accountable for providing all children with a high quality public education, including by maintaining subgroup accountability for equitable student outcomes and accountability for equitable resources; fully fund and preserve the targeting and supplemental effect of Title I, Title III, and other ESEA programs to meet the needs of disadvantaged student populations; and expand funding for the magnet schools and other programs to promote diversity and reduce racial isolation.
- **Postsecondary:** Any reauthorization of the **Higher Education Act** and the **Perkins Career and Technical Education Act** must increase the quality and access to postsecondary education and job training, including for non-traditional students such as those who are parenting or who attend school part-time while working. Reauthorizations of these critical laws should increase college affordability by expanding Pell grants and making federal student loans affordable, and support programs such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and HEP-CAMP and minority serving institutions to expand access to education.
- **School Climate and Civil Rights Protections:** Approve critical legislation to ensure students attend school in a safe, nurturing and welcoming environment, free of bullying, harassment and assault, discrimination, or harsh disciplinary practices. Pass a comprehensive **Safe Schools Improvement Act**, the **Student Nondiscrimination Act**, the **Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools Act**, the **Ending Corporal Punishment Act** and the **Keeping All Students Safe Act**. Provide sufficient funding to the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of



Education and to the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice to enforce federal laws protecting students and employees from discrimination based on race, national origin, sex, disability, age or religion.

EMPLOYMENT

- Promote legislation that promotes fair pay and employment opportunities for women, low-wage workers, and those with family caregiving responsibilities or medical issues; create appropriate standards for supervisor harassment; and ensure protections against workplace discrimination, including:
 - Protections that make it harder for employers to engage in pay and pregnancy discrimination;
 - Anti-discrimination protections for LGBT applicants and employees in hiring and the workplace;
 - Protections for employees and jobseekers against misuse of credit history and criminal background checks.
- Protect against harmful labor and employment policy proposals on pay equity, minimum wage, erosion of workers' rights under the Fair Labor Standards Act to earn overtime pay, and other issues.
- Defend against legislation that undermines or strips agencies' enforcement authority, thereby negatively impacting workers and/or job seekers.

HATE CRIMES

- Recognizing the limits of legal responses to hate violence, promote the enactment of comprehensive legislation focusing on inclusive anti-bias education, hate crime prevention, and bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment education, policies, and training initiatives.

HEALTH CARE

- Ensure Medicaid is not converted into a block grant or funding is otherwise restricted as part of the budget reconciliation or other legislative processes.
- Maintain the health programs, benefits, and funding that everyone needs to achieve and sustain maximum health, including those enacted in the Affordable Care Act.
- Pass the **Health Equity and Accountability Act**.
- Pass the **Health Equity & Access under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Women & Families Act**.

HOUSING AND LENDING

- Increase funding for the Fair Housing Initiatives Program to better assist private nonprofit fair housing organizations in helping victims of housing discrimination achieve justice and provide fair housing education to the public and housing providers on the rights and prohibitions under the Fair Housing Act.
- Pass legislation, such as the **Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act**, to amend the Fair Housing Act to include LGBT, marital status, veterans' status, and source-of-income protections.



- Safeguard the recently-established mortgage protections in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act;
- Oppose legislation designed to weaken the Qualified Mortgage and Qualified Residential Mortgage definitions in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.
- Protect the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau from a rollback of its authority granted in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.
- Eliminate the existing sunset and permanently extend the **Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act**; add a private right of action for tenants.

HUMAN RIGHTS

- Ratify the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**.
- Ratify the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**.

IMMIGRATION

- The recent immigration executive actions taken by the President are no substitute for comprehensive immigration reform. Congress must pass legislation creating a realistic path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, protecting the rights of both immigrant and citizen workers, promoting family reunification, strengthening due process in detention and removal, and ending all profiling.
- Reject “enforcement-only” proposals, which would harm both individuals and our economy as a whole.

MEDIA/TELECOMMUNICATIONS

- Pass an update to the **Electronic Communications Privacy Act**. Law enforcement searches of email, cell phones, online content, and GPS information should receive the same Fourth Amendment protection as letters and telephone calls.
- Any proposed change to the Communications Act must respect and incorporate central civil rights values, including non-discrimination, access to affordable and quality information services for all, diversity in ownership, consumer protection, and the preservation of jobs.
- Reject efforts to weaken the ConnectEd program.
- Support passage of the **Broadband Adoption Act**.

TRANSPORTATION

- Pass a transformative transportation reauthorization that: (1) improves job opportunities for underrepresented communities in the transportation sector; (2) ensures community involvement and public participation in transportation planning and decision making; (3) protects against cuts to public transportation funding and service; (4) promotes safety for pedestrians and bicyclists; (5) ensures that streets and public rights-of-way are safe and accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities; and (6) targets transportation dollars toward communities most in need of investment.



U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

- Pass reauthorizing legislation that transforms the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights into a truly independent and effective agency, includes increased funding for the agency, and restores and expands its historic mission of protecting and promoting civil and human rights.

VOTING RIGHTS

- Pass legislation to restore the protections of the Voting Rights Act struck down by the Supreme Court's *Shelby County* ruling.
- Pass legislation that would modernize the voter registration system, including the **Voter Registration Modernization Act**.
- Pass **The Democracy Restoration Act**, which would restore voting rights in federal elections to the nearly four million Americans who have lost their voting rights following a criminal conviction, and who have been released from prison and are living in the community.
- Oppose legislation that would create barriers to the right to vote, including photo voter ID laws.