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Los Angeles County Initiative on Women and Girls

Women and girls in our nation, our state and our county suffer from a disproportionate number of disadvantages and burdens. Some of these are reinforced by, but could instead be helped by, policies and services provided by governments and their partners. It is incumbent upon Los Angeles County (“County”) to identify those areas where changes in policies, services and advocacy can help to alleviate those disadvantages and burdens.

Fifty-one percent of County residents are women and girls. The women and girls of the County comprise 13% of the state’s population. Nearly half are Latina, one-quarter are white, 15% are Asian American, and 9% are African American. On the whole, they are younger than the average for women across the United States. Over 1.8 million (35.6%) of the County’s 5.1 million women and girls were born in another country; 56% of those immigrants are Latina, 36% are Asian/Pacific-Islander.

There have been positive trends over the last several years in our County for women. Young women today are staying in school longer, graduating high school, and going on to higher education at significantly higher rates than women of earlier generations. Eighty-six percent of women have health insurance, an increase of six percentage points since 2010. Los

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Angeles has the second highest concentration of women-owned businesses in the nation, and these businesses generate \$88 billion in revenue annually. Employment levels among women have largely returned to pre-recession levels.

Yet significant gender disparities persist, and many County women and girls suffer from a disproportionate share of hardships.

Women and girls in our County experience poverty at higher rates than their counterparts across the country, and are disproportionately affected, compared to men, when our economy worsens. One out of five live below the federal poverty line, a higher rate than their male counterparts. The poverty rate for African American women and Latinas is significantly higher, at 26%. Even when they work, women are still at a disadvantage. More than a quarter (27%) of women 16 years and older who lived in poverty in the past year were employed at the time. Forty percent of all single-mother families with children under the age of 18 at home live in poverty; their median income is more than \$10,000 below the federal poverty level (\$24,230 for a family of four).

Women are the heads of household for nearly 1.1 million of the 3 million households in the County.

The high cost of housing in our County effectively limits the availability of income for other essential necessities such as food and medical care. Households headed by women often struggle with food insecurity, illness and, increasingly, homelessness. A recent study showed a 55% increase in the number of homeless women in our County over the past three years.

Median earnings for women employed in full-time, year-round positions is \$40,219, or approximately \$9,000 lower than the national median earnings for men and \$2,000 lower than the County median earnings for men. Women are 42% of those working full-time in the County. Not only do they earn an average of 20% less than men for the same work, but often have the

additional expense of childcare, which is unaffordable for many women. This wage gap follows women as they age because their earned retirement, when they have it, is proportionally lower. Among those 75 years and older, twice as many women as men live in poverty. Divorced, older and retired women, as well as lesbian and trans women, suffer economic inequity disproportionately.

Life decisions and work history can also be impacted by the disproportionate experience of sexual and partner violence. Women and girls are the victims in two-thirds of the violent crimes in our County. Domestic violence is one of the principal causes of homelessness among women, and an even higher number report, although it did not cause their homelessness, that they have, at some time, been victims of sexual or domestic assault.

These facts, dismal as they are, also present a set of opportunities to lift poor women and their families out of poverty by investing in educating, protecting, training and helping them.

The County is uniquely situated to examine and address systemic differences in healthcare, education, welfare, employment, safety, involvement in the justice system, job opportunities, workforce development and other areas that result in inequitable gender outcomes, and to explore the ways in which benefits, opportunities, and programs can help remedy the differences and improve the quality of life for women and girls in the County.

It is, therefore, important for the County to apply a gender lens in at least three important areas: (1) when the County participates with other entities in consortiums, agreements, grants, contracts, partnerships and cross-jurisdictional work; (2) when the County acts as an employer; and (3) when the County acts as a provider of services.

The County as Participant

The County is increasingly working across jurisdictional and public/private lines to address systemic problems. It enters into agreements, partnerships and consulting contracts; it

convenes and leads collaborations in areas across a spectrum of responsibilities. In each of these alliances, the County must use its influence to understand and correct instances where programs, undertakings, and projects disproportionately and negatively impact women and girls.

The County as Employer

The County is the largest employer in our region. Of the County's 88,960 full-time employees, 59.2% are women. Women hold 58.4% of all County Executive Management and Management positions. This places the County in the unique position to truly contribute to lifting women and girls out of poverty.

Despite the overall representation of women in our workforce, gender-based income disparity still exists. Women and men do not occupy highly compensated jobs with the same frequency. Looking at our numbers in the aggregate, including overtime and bonuses, women earned roughly 76% of the average total compensation for men in 2014-15.

The County as Service Provider

Equity for women and girls, given their unique challenges and needs, cannot be achieved simply by the equal dissemination of goods and services. County Departments must develop and augment their ability to identify appropriate gender-responsive services to create better outcomes for women and their families. Each of our 37 Departments will be asked to examine their policies and procedures in order to understand where they may, inadvertently, be failing to take into consideration the unique needs of women and girls. Some departments have begun, but each touches the lives of women and girls in different ways, directly or indirectly. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- I. **Child Welfare System.** In September of this year, there were 17,441 young women and girls in our foster care system, about half of all our foster children. Many of them are, themselves, parents, and become parents at roughly twice the rate of their non-

foster peers. Girls in the foster system are more than twice as likely to have been pregnant at least once by age 19, a rate that increases substantially in time. By age 21, more than half of female foster youth report having at least one child, compared to 24% of non-foster youth females. Not surprisingly, they also have a much higher rate of poverty and homelessness, along with their children, and their children are more likely to enter the foster system. It is incumbent upon the County to find ways to break the cycle of child welfare involvement. One solution is to redefine support and reunification services for teen mothers and their children. Similarly, relative caregivers comprise approximately 45% of all foster caretakers. These relative caregivers are predominantly women – grandmothers, aunts or other relatives – and they deserve the County’s respect and unwavering support in raising these children.

II. **Health.** In Los Angeles County, the percentage of insured persons has increased from 77% in 2010 to 84% in 2014. The rate of insured women has increased from 80% in 2010 to 86% in 2014. However, although women are more likely to be insured than men, there is an enduring gender gap in health status. In addition, accessibility to comprehensive reproductive health care continues to be a challenge for women.

Women in poverty are four times more likely to report fair or poor health as compared to women with higher household incomes. Poor women have greater health risks, as well as more difficulty accessing care than middle and upper income women. Seventy-five percent of uninsured women reported having difficulty getting medical care, compared with 36% who were covered by Medi-Cal, and just 13% with private insurance.

Women also report having more difficulty gaining access to substance abuse treatment programs, in some cases because of a lack of available child care. In addition, not all of our County-contracted residential treatment programs accommodate

placements for women and their children, and, in programs where placement is allowed, generally only women with children age 12 or younger are eligible.

Women's and girls' health is also disproportionately affected by domestic and intimate partner violence, one of the most common causes of injury to women ages 18-44 in the United States. The repeated injury and stress of a violent relationship can cause long-lasting health problems such as depression, panic attacks, PTSD and chronic pain. This violence also leads to higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases and substance abuse.

III. **Criminal Justice.** Nationally, women and girls are the fastest growing demographic in the jail and juvenile justice systems. Female imprisonment has outpaced men by more than 50% from 1980 to 2014. Incarcerated women have higher rates of substance abuse, and suffer in greater numbers from mental health problems and abuse than their male counterparts.

As of this writing, there are 2,107 women being held in County facilities. Female juvenile offenders are detained by the Los Angeles County Probation Department, which is the largest in the world. Currently, girls comprise 19% of the total Juvenile Hall and Camp populations.

The County must explore its treatment and programming for women and girls in our adult and juvenile justice systems, and develop and increase its gender-responsive approaches.

IV. **Public Social Services.** About one in five Americans, or approximately 21.3%, of American households participate in government assistance programs each month. Half of government assistance program recipients are living in woman-led households, versus 29.5% for male-led households and 14.7% for married couples.

The County's Department of Public Social Services ("DPSS") provides services

to one out of every three residents in the County. The majority of these recipients are women. DPSS administers a multitude of public social services programs ranging from CalWORKs, Cash Assistance, Electronic Benefit Transfer, General Relief, Homelessness Services, CalFresh Nutrition Assistance, Greater Avenues for Independence, Employment Assistance, In-Home Supportive Services and Welfare to Work programs.

The examples above only hint at the complex and wide-ranging breadth of services the County provides to women and girls. Many other County Departments provide programming and services that deeply impact the lives of our County's women and girls, including the Department of Child Support Services; Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services; Office of Child Protection; Los Angeles County Office of Education; Department of Consumer and Business Affairs; the Homelessness Initiative; and Military and Veteran's Affairs. The County touches virtually every aspect of our residents' lives, irrespective of their background or experiences, and is uniquely qualified to unlock solutions to the unique ways women and girls are impacted by our services.

Seeking Input

To begin the process of gathering information and data, identifying gaps, and to consider possible approaches and designing this motion, a group was brought together that included experienced national and local leaders across the spectrum of criminal justice, community outreach, health, history, education, economic security, child welfare, labor, workforce development, violence against women, trauma-informed care, the County's delivery systems and political participation. This group met for six months gathering research, discussing structure and best practices, and suggested a variety of ways the County could study and make policy recommendations to the Board of Supervisors to improve the quality of

life for women and girls in the County.

Given the breadth and scope of our County, the group determined that the participation of all 37 Departments was essential to effectively move a Countywide effort forward. The group recommended that an in-depth process of assessment, outreach, research, analysis, and mapping be applied to each Department and Supervisorial District in order to appropriately target reforms to enhance and expand the County's gender-responsive capabilities, and to advance the mission of improving the quality of life for the County's women and girls.

It is time to begin.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Commit to a five-year Countywide Initiative on Women and Girls ("WGI");
2. Create a WGI Governing Council to be housed in the Chief Executive Office and comprised of fifteen appointees, three appointed by each Supervisor, no later than February 7, 2017. The WGI Governing Council shall reflect a diversity of expertise and the demographics in the County, with attention to the history and qualification of the members such that each is highly qualified and respected;
3. Adopt the following duties and Scope of Work for the WGI Governing Council:
 - a. Develop a Mission Statement or Set of Guiding Principles to shape the work of the WGI Governing Council.
 - b. Conduct a Countywide study of the unique ways in which women and girls are impacted by the policies, programs, services, collaborations and other actions undertaken by the County.
 - c. Conduct a thorough assessment of the County's recruitment, hiring, retention, promotion, testing, evaluation and other Human Resources policies to ascertain any disparate impacts they may have on women. Evaluation must include an in-depth analysis of each Department's

workforce gender data in order to identify opportunities for immediate and long-term improvements in County workforce gender parity.

- d. Conduct a thorough assessment of the County's abilities and deficits in ensuring gender equity, including an analysis of each Department's programmatic impacts, positive and negative, on women and girls in the County.
- e. Initiate and gather research concerning women and girls in the County, including: conduct surveys of community members, county employees and others; identify gaps in research; and collect and analyze the data obtained.
- f. Engage in extensive community outreach that is culturally and linguistically competent, including consulting community groups with established best practices in community engagement; hold at least two Town Hall meetings in each Supervisorial District to gather relevant information as identified by the Council; and take any additional actions to insure the most robust possible community participation.
- g. Provide quarterly written status reports to the Board, including recommendations for actions that may be undertaken.
- h. Present an annual written and oral report to the Board on the WGI Governing Council's progress, including recommendations for actions that may be undertaken.
- i. The WGI Governing Council may establish committees or working groups to focus on key issues; these committees may include members who are not on the Council such as outside experts, advocates and community members, as well as County Department Heads, County Executives, Commissioners or employees.

4. Direct the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Executive Officer of the Board, to report back to the Board by February 7, 2017 with a recommended funding plan for the WGI Governing Council, including staffing and provisions for office space and equipment;
5. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to establish sufficient staffing for the WGI Governing Council including, at a minimum, an Executive Director, a Research Director, a Community Engagement/Outreach Director and an Administrative Manager. The Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Officer of the Board are also encouraged to assign staff from their offices to assist the work of the WGI Governing Council. The Chief Executive Officer should immediately work with the Department of Human Resources to begin a recruitment for the Executive Director, but no formal offer shall be made until such time the Board approves the funding plan; and
6. Authorize all County Departments, all relevant County agencies, County Commissions, County-appointed consultants, the Executive Officer, and the Chief Executive Officer to provide full cooperation to the WGI Governing Council and its executive staff, and provide access to information and records to the fullest extent allowed by law.

S:KS/Los Angeles County Initiative on Women and Girls