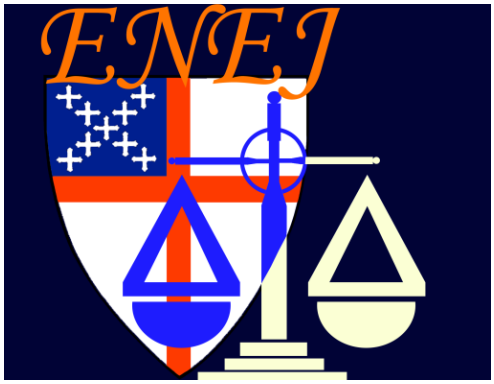
Issue Papers for the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church



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Introduction

Since 2008, the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice (ENEJ) has issued a set of current issue papers for each General Convention. For the 80th General Convention a new set of issue papers has been developed by members of ENEJ as well as the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE). This edition includes papers on student loans and public education, voter rights, the wealth gap, unions, gender inequality, health care, incarceration, and the child welfare system. Together, these papers cover the range of concerns of people interested in addressing issues of justice, and economic and racial inequality.

We hope these issue papers inform you as you consider these topics.

Gender Inequality

By: Laura A. Russell

With the advent of the #metoo movement, and the recent trials of known sexual predators, one might believe that women are equals. Unfortunately, as the recent Supreme Court decision shows, women are not. Women's bodies are still regulated in ways male bodies are not. Women still suffer financial inequality.

The facts are still astounding. For example:

- Women with full-time jobs still earn only about 83 percent of their male counterparts' earnings. African-American women earn 64 cents and Latina women earn 57 cents for every dollar earned by a Caucasian man.
- On average, 30 percent of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner.
- Women hold just 27% of seats in the House and 24% in the Senate. Both numbers are similar to the percent of women in the House of Bishops.
- There are 3.6 million open technology jobs in the U.S. and, at the current rate of students graduating with degrees in computer science, men continue to outnumber women 4:1.
- One in five women on U.S. college campuses have experienced sexual assault.
- Women currently hold 15 percent of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies.

Why does gender equality matter?

Gender inequality has left a legacy in which women are more likely to be disadvantaged than men, to have less access to resources, benefits, information and decision-making, and to have fewer rights within the household and within public life.

By sidelining women's voices, we lose up to 50% of the potential talent and knowledge. Women become disproportionately burdened by poverty, lack of access to services and lack of services to health care. For example, before the Affordable Care Act, women were charged up to eighty percent more for health care, and certain plans did not cover reproductive or maternal services. The "pink" tax is also real. Women pay more for toiletries, clothing, girls' toys, and home health care products. How much more? About $1,351 more a year in extra costs. That is money women, who are already being paid less, don't have.

What about The Episcopal Church?

There is a pay gap between women and men clergy. As reported in a 2013 report, it can be anywhere from 7 to 13% and I am sure those numbers are lower than the reality. Our

lowest paid Executive Officer is a female. Plus, how many women clergy hold positions that lead to upward mobility? How many are working two, three calls to earn an acceptable income? The reality is the Church is not immune to gender inequality. Just as we cannot say racism is dead because we had a President who was a person of color, we cannot say that gender inequality is dead because we had a Presiding Bishop who was a woman.

How do we fix a problem that is so pervasive?

First, we recognize the problem. Take a class or training on gender inequality. Check yourself when sexism happens. Many have heard or thought the following: "She deserved it. Did you see her outfit" Check yourself. Does we care that a female politician changed their hairstyle or gained weight? Why is it when a woman is aggressive at work it is not a positive as it is with a man? Why do we blame women when they are abused? Why are women too emotional to be in roles of authority? Why, when women don't have children, there must be something wrong that they don't want to be mothers? Why must women be the sole caretakers of the house and children?

Next, take steps to change the culture:

- Stand up for your rights and the rights of others! If you are a woman, know that you have the same rights as a man. Do not let others step over you. Men, don't try to bully or demean or use your privilege to trample the rights of women.

- Raise awareness. There are many facts and issues that the public at large is unaware of regarding gender inequality. Maybe this paper showed you something you did not know. Learn about what you do not know. Talk about what you know. Increase public consciousness.

- Don't hinder the dreams of girls. No matter what they want to be, they can. Show them the sky is the limit. Math and science can be female professions. Being elected a Bishop is a reality.

- Watch your language. We all know not to use derogatory language when referring to women, but how often do we ask: So, your doctor/lawyer/priest, what is HIS name? Your teacher/assistant, what is HER name? Language matters. Pronouns show us that it is normal for a woman to be a doctor, and that we should not always use the masculine gender for positions of authority.

Finally, take note of what is around you. Is your place of employment male dominated? Why? Did your vestry recently search for a new clergy person? How many of the final slate were female? When you are in a meeting do you assume women will be the secretary at the meeting?

Actions such as these, whether small or large, can begin to change the culture of gender inequality.

Higher Education, Student Loans, and Public Education

By: Laura A. Russell

Student loans and the rising cost of higher education has been a topic of discussion for many years now. In the 1980's Pell Grants covered 80% of tuition. Now, they cover less than 5% at some institutions. The average college tuition and fees have increased 1200% since 1980, while inflation is only up 236%. Wages have only increased about 17%.

20% of student loan debt is held by those over 50 years of age. There are 44 million Americans with student loan debt. And this debt falls heaviest on communities of color, especially African American women. The average cost of a private four year college degree is $140,000. Even public college tuition has increased 571% since the mid-1980s.

There is currently $1.75 trillion dollars in US student loan debt. Students and parents borrowed an estimated $95.9 billion during the 2020-2021 academic year. 48% of borrowers who attended a for-profit college default within 12 years, compared to 12% of those who attended public college.

Even during college, rising tuition costs keep students struggling. 45% of college students struggle with hunger and 17% experience homelessness. Student loans are not the answer. A four year degree is more expensive than buying a home, and at times, a worse investment. Student loan agencies, many now privatized, have been able to sell loans at exorbitant rates, locking people into 40 year loans that equal mortgages. Plus, with minimal screening, student loan agencies have failed to screen out schools which offer no education to borrowers, instead locking borrowers into payments of an education that did not exist.

Pell grants, work-study and other funding sources used to pay for higher education. Students from low income households could afford college, room and board. They did not have food pantries in colleges, like they do now. These grants have stagnated, or dried up, leaving low income students with no ability to pay for their education and their food or housing.

At the same time, Community colleges, which used to be near free, have become prohibitive for many. Community colleges allow for first generation college students, those living in poverty and other non-traditional students to obtain the education they so desperately need. Community colleges still can cost upwards of $35,000 for a four year degree, and this does not include housing, food or other expenses. As of January 2021, three are 936 public community colleges. In the past ten years, there has been a total decline in enrollment of community colleges of more than two million students.

In the past, a high school diploma was enough to guarantee you a living wage. This has not been the case in some time. At the same time that college degrees because more

necessary to support oneself, government reduced its investment in community colleges, trade schools and vo-tech institutions

What needs to be done?

We need to rethink student loans, both past and present. We need to create forgiveness plans for those whose educational institution overpromised and underdelivered. Forgiveness plans so that people can use their income for better purposes, such as living expenses and reinvestment in the community. Student loan agencies have reaped the benefit of high interest rates and overextending credit.

Interest rates on student loans should be capped. Student loans agencies should be governmental, as they used to be. Bankruptcy discharge and forgiveness, once an option for student loan debt, should be reconsidered in certain circumstances. Public service loan forgiveness (the ability to have some or all of your student loan forgiven by working for a not-for-profit or government agency) should be broadened, and more accessible.

All of these options allow for a more equitable student loan system. They allow for those students to repay their loans in a fair and equitable manner. They also take the profit out of the industry. The ability to obtain a degree, so one may then earn a living wage, should be so overburdening as to cripple one for decades.

We also need to reinvest in community colleges, and trade schools. Community colleges serve 41% of all undergraduates, 43% of African American undergraduates, 53% of Latino(a) undergraduates and 56% of Native American undergraduates. For every dollar that taxpayers invest in community colleges, they reap a return of over two dollars. By reinvesting in those institutions, we are investing in our communities. Community colleges also need to stay more accessible to lower income students. They need to employ intensive counseling to help students graduate.

By stabilizing the funding for community colleges, we can then work to increase investments in other public colleges and universities, thus allowing higher education to be more accessible.

Trade schools and vo-technical schools need to return to the educational system. We currently have a lack of a skilled labor force in the United States. Most trade schools and technical colleges have shrinking enrollments, even though the cost of education is smaller than a four year college, with a higher return on investment for most.

By renewing the discussion in high school about the trade school option, demand will increase. Trade schools are infrequently discussed in high school. Four year colleges are seen as the default option. But many high schoolers will succeed in trade school and for many reasons, will not be able to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Trade schools are better equipped to teach students with different intelligences.

What can you do?

Support Public Education. Support Trade Schools. Support Student Loan Forgiveness.

D048, a resolution to come before General Convention this year, supports public investment in post-school education and training. It supports fair student loan forgiveness. It supports increased investment in post-secondary education. We ask that you vote in favor of this resolution.

Get involved in your local school politics. See how your tax dollars are spent on education in your area. Mentor students who are considering post-secondary education. Donate to your local community college. Support educators. Educate yourself about student loan debt, student loan borrowing and the rising cost of education.

No matter where you sit on the loan forgiveness discussion, community college investment or trade school debate, something must be done. We can no longer afford for college to be a luxury, for public investment to stagnate, and for student loan interest rates to increase. More and more, people need higher education to come out of poverty, homelessness and hunger. We are at an education crisis.

Incarceration in the United States of America

By: Paula Jackson

Carmela and I sat in the defendant's waiting area in the county Juvenile Court. Among those waiting for their kids' cases to be called, hardly anyone was white. We were all waiting to hear from pretrial consultations, to which we were not privy, between a Public Defender and Prosecutor.

An earnest young man introduced himself as Joseph's Defender, and explained rapidly what he hoped to accomplish for Joseph. The Prosecution had three charges against Joseph. Felony drug distribution, Resisting arrest, and Disorderly conduct. Two police officers were ready to testify that Joseph had had a tiny plastic baggie of cocaine which he had swallowed when they approached him on the street. (In fact, Joseph had been taken from the arrest to Children's Hospital and monitored for two days, but the baggie was never discovered. But the Court, we were advised, likely won't rule against police testimony, despite the lack of evidence.) And you can´t win against a charge of Resisting or Disorderly. If the suspect so much as asks, "Why are you arresting me?" that is resisting, and may be disorderly. In short, Joseph was not going to beat this rap. However, if he would plead guilty to Resisting and Disorderly, the Prosecution would drop the felony drug count; and Joseph could go home --with two misdemeanors on his record. Such a deal. Within a week, the arresting officers let Joseph know they were looking for him and would arrest him for something else. 15 years later, Joseph has spent more time incarcerated than not. He knew the mark was on him.

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Jorge, a small business owner, paid his taxes and Workers' Comp scrupulously, hired people who need a second chance, bought his materials from local businesses, and cooperated with police on apprehending violent criminals, even at personal risk. On his way to a construction job at a small town near Cincinnati, he pulled into a quick-mart for gasoline and went inside to pay. When he came out, a local police officer was parked nearby, watching him. As soon as Jorge put his key in the ignition, the officer pulled behind him, lights flashing. "I need to see your license." Jorge's license is from Mexico. "You'll have to come to the police station." Once there, Jorge called his priest and a friend. We met him at the police station, and watched through a window while the officer ran an inexplicable two hour internet search. Finally he came out and said that Jorge had a warrant for stealing a car in Florida (Jorge has never been to Florida); and that he would have to take him to County Jail. If he signed a permission, Jorge´s friends could go to the impoundment and pick up his truck, after paying the $200 fees.

Like a dying man, Jorge gave us his wishes for the care of his wife and their small daughter with Downs' Syndrome. Then he was taken away. From the County Jail, he was handed over to ICE and moved to Butler County's big high-tech facility, built with Federal money to hold immigrants who will be deported. After a couple of weeks, he was shipped out

to a holding facility somewhere in the South (he was not sure where). Jorge was able to talk to his wife by phone for a few minutes during the weeks of waiting there. It was cold at night and there were no blankets. Everyone was miserable. A young woman who cried constantly had been taken from her job in a raid, without even a chance to call the babysitter who had been caring for her nursing baby. It seemed they were keeping people in this place until they had collected enough to fill the respective planes to Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico… But none of the prisoners knew how long their ordeal would last.

These wrenching moments in one parish are common experiences across the United States. Most African American extended families know at least one Joseph; most immigrant families grieve the disappearance of one or many Jorges. All of them know that someone else could become a Joseph or a Jorge, without notice. These families are part of a grand pattern that makes the United States the most incarcerated nation in the world. In actual numbers, and in rate of prisoners to population, we vastly outdo China, Russia, and all the countries we designate as "authoritarian regimes." Our sentences are longer; we have more stringent post-release controls than other countries. We imprison people for offenses hardly designated as crimes, or that in other countries would be a matter for medical treatment rather than incarceration. The rate of arrests, convictions, and incarcerations are disproportionately people of color, even though evidence holds that white people are as likely to commit offenses. **Why?**

In Matthew 25: 43, the King says to the unjust, "I was a foreigner and you did not welcome me; naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in in prison and you did not [most translations say] visit me." It is important to visit the Incarceration in the USA 79 incarcerated, to remember their names, pray for them, and bring a message of redemption. But the Greek verb in the text is from the same root from which we get "episcopal" -- and it means to see to, to be concerned for, to act in the interests of; to make the well-being, inclusion, and reconciliation of the incarcerated our business. The just who inherit the Kingdom are welcomers and pastors of the inmates and immigrants. In order to "visit" in the sense required by the Gospel, we will have to understand the patterns that turn so many people into prisoners; and dismantle them.

Two sweeping designs have contributed to the US becoming the world´s most incarcerated nation; economic interests keep them going. Vested interests will operate this machinery as long as they can appeal to racist motivation (sometimes covertly). Michelle Alexander has narrated the social history behind the War on Drugs and its impact on incarceration in the US –taking the nation from a modern low to an unprecedented surge in prison population in the course of a few decades, a surge that targets African American neighborhoods. As the skyrocketing cost and cost-ineffectiveness of the War on Drugs become more obvious, another strategy to keep prison construction a booming business is the War on Immigration. The beneficiaries in these Wars are private corporations who build and run prisons at taxpayer expense, and a host of contracted "services" operating in them on a per diem basis. Their profits depend on keeping the beds occupied. These corporations lobby for legislation to that end. Politicians gain the legislation by playing to voters' stereotypes (they can do this without

alluding to race) against black and brown people as suspect and criminal. The cost is diversion of public funds from services that would prevent crime and improve public health and safety.

Here's what we have instead:

1. Targeting of African American neighborhoods and persons for drug law enforcement; racial profiling in community policing in general.

2. The "cradle to prison pipeline" and lost opportunities for needed intervention

3. An overloaded Public Defender roster dealing with a constant surge of indigent defendants.

4. Incarceration for non-violent offenders and those whose illegal behavior is related to addiction or mental illness.

5. Mandatory sentencing to increase prison time, although this has no deterrent effect on crime or recidivism.

6. Criminalization for former misdemeanors, with no evidence that reclassification deters the incidence.

7. Removing education, mental health, and human services from prisons.

8. Recidivism from lack of re-entry help, difficulty finding employment with a felony record, and loss of civil rights.

9. Criminalization of undocumented immigrants –sometimes incarcerating whole families awaiting deportation.

What Economic Factors are Behind these Policy Decisions?

The once-flagging private prison-for-profit industry contracts to build and operate prisons. No more efficient or effective than state-run prisons, they make profits through non-union policies, understaffing, non-provision of services, and contracting out prison labor to private employers. Prisoners may be hired out at sub-minimum wages, basically as slaves of the system. The "war on crime" can be seen as a war on the poor at the state level. The resources most needed for the common good are diverted to the cost of the prison system; the services defunded by this transfer are those most needed by disadvantaged citizens; and these are the people most likely to end up in the prisons.

The largest for-profit prison corporations, The GEO Group and Corrections Corporation of America, are among the corporate funder-participants in the American Legislative Exchange Council. ALEC recruits and "arms" state legislators, boasting members in nearly every state; its legislative task forces write "model" legislation which is introduced in states to promote goals such as: Rolling back civil rights legislation; preventing or undoing environmental protection measures; defunding social and human services; defunding public schools; tort reform to limit the power of plaintiffs against corporations; privatization of public services; restrictive voter registration laws; "tough on crime"

legislation that guarantees new Incarceration in the USA and longer-term inmates. As one example, ALEC gained attention for effectively promulgating criminalization of undocumented immigrants with AZ SB1070 and look-alike bills in other states shortly thereafter.

What Can Episcopalians Do?

ALEC's effective action at the state level shows Episcopalians that we might organize at the diocesan level to ¨visit¨ the incarcerated. If we are to affect the future of our burgeoning inmate population, we must help our legislators to get "smart on crime," instead of letting corporations write the laws which make us the most imprisoned nation in the world. We can respond with our Baptismal Covenant, resisting the rhetoric which tempts us to dehumanize people in the Wars on Drugs, Immigration, and Crime—looking instead realistically at human beings, evidence, effectiveness, and real communities that work.

1. Learn about issues and opportunities for reform in criminal justice, drug enforcement, and immigration. Some resources are: -Alexander, Michelle. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (Rev. Ed. 2011. NY: The New Press) -America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline, Children's Defense Fund Report http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=c2pp_report2007

-American Immigration Council/Detention http://immigrationimpact.com/category/detention/

-Soros Foundations Network, Open Society Institute http://www.soros.org/initiatives/issues/law

-The Sentencing Project http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/index.cfm

2. Work with organizations that support former inmates; advocate for criminal justice reform and comprehensive immigration reform.

3. Write to your state representative about the need for smart-on-crime, evidence-based criminal justice reform that reduces crime, lowers rates of incarceration, and saves tax dollars. For example, let them know that spending on education is more effective than building prisons. Oppose the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and any related state legislation. Advocate Immigrant-welcoming municipal and state policies.

4. Encourage business leaders to hire ex-offenders, overcoming barriers against re-entry into the community.

5. Respectfully confront political rhetoric and media representations which imply that crime, violence, or drug use and dealing are more prevalent among people of color; that undocumented immigrants are criminals; that incarceration as it is presently used is an effective and necessary treatment to keep our society safe.

Protecting Voter Rights

If We Are Serious About Protecting Voting Rights, Here's What We Should Do Immediately

By: Joe McDaniel, Jr.

On Jan. 6, 2021, millions watched, horrified, as agitators hellbent on overturning the election results and disenfranchising Black and Brown voters staged an insurrection on the Capitol, fueled by demonstrably false allegations of voter fraud. While there are clear problems with our democracy and voting systems that must be fixed, these issues don't arise from voter fraud. They are instead the legacy problems of our republic: systematic efforts to erect voting barriers and discriminate against voters of color for political gain. The Biden administration has a real opportunity to restore faith in our democracy and move us closer to an electoral system representative of all Americans.

The Supreme Court's 2013 Shelby v. Holder decision and the halting of preclearance requirements have emboldened states and localities to enact discriminatory voting laws without the Department of Justice's oversight, resulting in an increase in racially discriminatory laws that suppress the vote. And right now, after record voter turnout in 2020 and the electoral defeat of Donald Trump, states across the country are generating a new wave of such legislation that can be passed without crucial federal protections.

This latest assault on our democracy must be met with robust action and widespread vigilance, and the Biden administration has tools at its disposal. The Biden administration must work with Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to root out voting barriers built to discriminate against voters of color. Congressional leaders named this legislation in honor of the late civil rights legend, but the real honor to his memory would be the bill's enactment.

More immediately, the U.S. Attorney General should designate an assistant U.S. attorney (AUSA) in each of the 94 U.S. attorney offices across the country to help ensure compliance with federal voting laws. This cadre of Justice Department lawyers would augment the force of the team of attorneys in the Voting Section of the Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C. The severity of the challenge demands a major response. After the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, Attorney General Ashcroft required each U.S. attorney to appoint an AUSA as a point person on anti-terrorism. Jan. 6 and the broader, ongoing anti-voter actions are an attack on our democracy, and we must respond forcefully now too. These AUSA designations would be a clear signal from the Biden administration that it takes the threat of voter suppression as a serious, systematic issue for our democracy.

While tearing down barriers to the ballot, the Biden administration should also ensure all eligible Americans in their custody are able to exercise their right to vote and provide voter-registration information and services as part of release. The Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) should take affirmative steps to ensure eligible voters are not being stripped of their rights because they are incarcerated. Stripping the

right to vote from and limiting voting opportunities for people in the criminal justice system is directly rooted in the suffocating racism of the Jim Crow era and began as a direct blowback from the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to end slavery and enfranchise Black men.

The 2020 election proved that racism-fueled voter suppression is alive and well. The deep racist, historical roots of targeting voters of color have persisted and grown; indeed, even a deadly pandemic provided no reprieve in the assault on voting rights. Instead, the opponents of voting rights have further proved their unrelenting desire to discount the ability of people of color to choose their elected officials, vying instead for a corrupted system in which politicians choose their voters. As John Lewis said in an op-ed published after his death, "The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society." We must empower Americans to vote and, by doing so, restore faith in our democracy.

The integrity of our elections requires that only citizens vote, and all citizens have equal access to vote. America is strong enough to do both. When a politician tells you the only way to protect our elections is to remove citizens from voter rolls, limit voting times after work, prevent churches from giving voters water, and block local leaders from opening additional secure voting locations, that politician is NOT trying to protect our democracy. As Christians, we have a responsibility to separate the wheat from the chaff. We must understand which efforts make America stronger and which are meant to protect politicians from the will of The People.

The Child Welfare System and Foster Care in the United States

By: Laura A. Russell

At any given point there are over 400,000 children in the American foster care system. Children enter the foster care system because they have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents or guardians. Currently, many pieces of the child welfare system are broken, and foster children can suffer as a result.

For example, just recently a law was passed that allows states to not require financial payment when their children are in foster care. Imagine, your child is taken from you and then the State requires you to pay them to care for your child. Even if the child is taken because the parents do not have adequate financial resources, they then were required to pay the State, who took their child, additional monies to care for the child. Thankfully, they just eliminated this law.

Who are foster children?

Foster care children vary in race, with children of color making up approximately 45% of the children in foster care in 2020. The average age they enter foster care is 7. LGBTQ youth are over-represented in foster care, where they are more likely to experience discrimination, abuse, and neglect. Some children exit the system quickly, while others languish in care for years (or decades).

64% enter the system because of "neglect" (as opposed to abuse, which is harsher). Neglect can vary from an unclean house to a failure to vaccinate. It is a loose standard, that frequently is more harshly used on parents of color. Foster care children may be placed with other family members, unrelated foster families, group homes, institutions or simply age out and be left on their own, and alone.

Foster care systems continue to be biased. Children of color are over-represented. Parents of color are more likely to have their children removed than white parents. Low income parents are more likely to have their children removed. These children, at times, will enter into the system and stay in the system until they age out. Parental rights will be terminated, without any adoptive parents waiting. Children will age out, and be on their own without resources. Imagine at 18 or 21 years old having no family, no support systems, and having to care for yourself financially, emotionally and physically?

Why should we care?

As part of the Christian duty to care for our neighbors and God's creation, it is critical that we focus our attention to care for some of the most vulnerable children in our communities, foster youth. Like everyone, the youth in the foster care system deserve the support of a loving family and community.

Our foster care system is broken, and foster care children are suffering because of this. We have stripped the foster care system of the resources it needs to

function. Courts are overburdened with child protective cases, which languish from a lack of resources. Parents whose children are being taken by the state, have no right to an attorney in many areas. Caseworkers have hundreds of children to care for, and are unable to competently do it. Family resources are not being investigated before children are sent to unknown indiviiduals. Families seeking to adopt are caught in lengthy review processes, which deny them the ability to adopt for arbitrary reasons.

Foster care children can be placed in private homes, but some, still, are placed in group homes or institutions. The older a child is, the harder it is for them to be placed in a home. Plus, some children are placed by child protective agencies with friends or families outside of foster care systems, thus depriving the families of any resources to assist in caring for the children. The agencies save money by not giving any resources to the families to assist with care, but the children suffer. Families take in their relations to care for them without assistance granted to other families. This shadow docket of foster care allows for agencies to save money, and lower their over numbers of children in care, but is that the goal? These families need financial help and are being denied this by an agencies desire to look better for their statistics.

Potential adoptive parents also need support. There are over 110,000 children waiting to be adopted in the United States. Many of them have waiting years, sometimes over five years. Children need to have permanency. Potential adoptive parents need to be assisted in the adoption process. They need vetting that is consistent, unbiased and is more child focused. Government support needs to be given to recruiting and supporting potential adoptive parents.

As Christians there are many ways in which we can support every individual involved in the foster system so that we can nurture the most vulnerable children. First, learn and understand the system. Consider becoming a foster parent. Consider adoption. Listen to parents who have lost their children to the system in an unjudgmental way. Support programs that help new parents, and young children.

Do not fall into the belief that every parent involved in the foster care system was not a good parent. Many parents who have children in foster care have tried to be good parents, and continue to try. They are trapped in a system that does little to help them solve the ills that brough the system into their lives. And some, have done nothing inappropriate except dare to challenge the system.

Why Union: Supporting Care Workers

By: Sarah Lawton

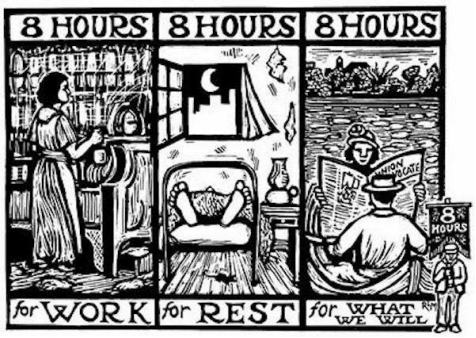
"[We] reaffirm the right of workers in the United States to organize and form unions. We especially affirm the right to organize and form unions for seasonal and migrant workers who historically have been deprived of those rights. We support the right to organize and form unions as a means to securing adequate wages, benefits, and safety conditions for all workers. We encourage all levels of the church to be informed about, and act accordingly, when rights of workers to associate is being jeopardized …."
The 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, in resolution 2006-C008: Reaffirm the Right of Workers to Organize and Form Unions

"[We] support …. the right of care workers to organize in unions to have a voice in their working conditions and collective bargaining, and to seek innovative solutions to the problem of organizing worker voice in an industry with multiple employers …."
Proposed resolution D023: Support for Care Workers, 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church

An Amazon warehouse on Staten Island; an Apple store in Maryland; a Trader Joe's store in Central Massachusetts; more than 150 Starbucks stores all over the United States. Workers, many of them young workers of color, are filing for union recognition in an upsurge in organizing not seen in decades, and in many cases winning unexpected victories in the face of anti-union campaigns, especially in warehouse, retail, and food retail industries whose workers bore the brunt of being "essential workers" during the pandemic but lacked voice in safety decisions, working for companies that made huge profits during COVID but didn't raise wages by much if at all. It's not easy organizing a union in the United States, much less winning a contract. But we may be entering a new era of labor unrest and activity. And the Episcopal Church is called to be involved.

What is a Union?

A union is an organization formed by workers who join together to use their collective voice in their workplace. Through their union, workers negotiate with their employers over wages, benefits, workplace health and safety, job training and other work-related issues. Unions serve an important role making sure that management acts fairly and treats its workers with respect. Unions can also be a voice for workers in the public square. Unions are democratic organizations whose leaders are elected by the membership.



The first unions arose from skilled craft guilds of medieval times, but the labor movement grew enormously during the Industrial Revolution, sparking a reaction of repression and violence aimed at workers trying to organize. Unions demanded a living wage, and also, during a time when many workers were expected to work 12-14 hours days, adequate sabbath time: "8 Hours for Work, 8 Hours for Rest, 8 Hours for What We Will."

[Silkscreen poster created by Ricardo Levins Morales as part of the 100th anniversary of the St. Paul Union Advocate newspaper; original prints can be ordered here: https://www.rlmartstudio.com/product/eight-hours/).]

Unions also demanded better safety and working conditions and protested gross violations of worker safety—perhaps today the best remembered campaign for occupational health and safety is the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union's effort in the wake of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City in 2011, which killed 146 workers, 123 of them women, most of them young Italian and Jewish immigrants. The fire, and the women jumping to their deaths from the upper floors of the building, was by chance witnessed by Frances Perkins, later President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, and also faithful Episcopalian.

Throughout the period of labor union formation countered by (often state-sponsored) repression, surging worker movements were increasingly led by immigrant workers, who had the worst pay and working conditions. Tensions within and between the unions reflected the divisions of the larger society: racial and ethnic tensions, encouraged and exacerbated by bosses who brought in strikebreakers of different ethnic and racial groups, but also led by union members themselves, who voted to keep out Chinese workers, Black workers, and other groups. There were tensions between skilled worker unions, who often felt they could demand better wages, and unions of unskilled workers, such as the Wobblies, who led the famous Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912, with seventeen languages represented on the strike committee. There were also tensions between men and women—should women be allowed to participate in unions at all? Would women also undercut labor standards?

And over all of this, repression from the bosses and aided by the state was the order of the day—with some gains in labor rights at the state levels through the Progressive Era, but rarely at the federal level. Repression of the Progressive Era culminated in the anti-immigrant, anti-worker Palmer Raids of 1919-1920 under Woodrow Wilson (the American Civil Liberties Union was founded in 1920 in response to these raids).

The New Deal

In the 1930s, in the throes of the Great Depression, and in the wake of explosive strikes in 1934, such as the West Coast Longshore Worker strikes that led to general strikes in West Coast cities, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was formed out of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to focus on organizing workers in industrial mass production industries, including unskilled workers. Unlike many unions in the AFL, CIO unions were open to Black workers. The CIO met with initial success in the Flint, Michigan sit-down strike of 1936-1937, which brought CIO chief and former mineworker John L. Lewis to the bargaining table with General Motors and led to recognition of the United Auto Workers.

The high level of militant labor action set the stage for FDR's New Deal, which was largely carried by out by his Labor Secretary, Episcopalian Frances Perkins. The recent book *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life and Legacy of Frances Perkins--Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, and the Minimum Wage*, by Kirsten Downey, is well worth a read for any Episcopalian; it describes her faith journey and its relationship to her work in public policy. (It's said that she wrote the Social Security Act at her parish church's rectory kitchen table.) This short article from Forward Movement also gives a quick snapshot of this remarkable woman of faith and her accomplishments. She was the first woman cabinet secretary, and is widely understood to be the architect of the New Deal. She has a place on our own church's calendar of Lesser Feasts and Fasts on May 13. See also the Frances Perkins Center for more!

With the New Deal came new labor rights, including the National Labor Relations Act, giving rights to workers to organize in unions; the Fair Labor Standards Act (finally lowering the work week to 44 hours); the Social Security Act; child labor laws; and occupational safety laws, among many others. Excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, however, were agricultural and domestic workers—jobs held mainly by Black workers at that time—in order to secure votes from Southern Democrats.

The 1950s and 1960s, while hardly a time of labor peace, were at least a time in which "industrial relations" was understand as a baseline practice, and up to a third of the U.S. workforce was part of a union – with many of the rest benefiting from prevailing labor standards set by union contracts. During this time, the AFL and CIO merged to become one big labor federation devoted less to militant organizing of new workers and more to serving its existing members. Meanwhile, the lowest levels of inequality in American history are correlated with the highest levels of union membership and density in American history.

1980 – 2020: Attack and retrenchment

The 1980s ushered in a period of union-busting and deregulation of industry and financial services and a retreat by organized labor. With the new era of "free trade," companies increasingly headed offshore seeing lower wages and higher profits; shareholders demanded higher, quicker returns for their stocks, exerting downward pressure on wages; and labor unions density grew weaker, both from ossification, in some cases, but also through an erosion in labor rights and in government enforcement of labor rights. Real wages stagnated, with the minimum wage stuck at 1968 levels in real dollars in recent years, even as productivity and profits increased.

Nevertheless, the labor movement has held on, and in some places has been invigorated especially by new immigrant workers who have brought a new organizing spirit to previously unorganized industries. The Justice for Janitors fight has won contracts even in an industry with many subcontractors, by targeting the companies hiring janitorial services and demanding industry-wide contracts. Similarly, the Fight for Fifteen movement, led by fast food and other low-wage workers, has fought both for a new minimum wage, from the current federal wage of $7.65 to at least $15 per hour, and a union—with some successes at the city and state levels in terms of wage rises, though less success in organizing shops.

Post-Pandemic: A New Era for Labor?

After the Covid pandemic hit, we have seen an upsurge in organizing among frontline workers in food retail, warehouse work, and also among caregivers. The most startling victory of recent years, the Amazon Staten Island warehouse vote, was led by a diverse coalition of workers who organized their own independent union from within the warehouse itself. Meanwhile, over 150 Starbucks stores have voted for a union. This new

militancy is coming more and more from the shop floor itself rather than from unions organizing from the outside, drawing comparisons to the upsurges of the 1910s and 1930s.

The Episcopal Church: Supporting Care Workers in 2022

This year, the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice is endorsing a resolution on Support for Care Workers, 2022-D023. The burdens on caregivers during the pandemic have been both well described yet also underreported. Nursing home workers were among the first to get sick from COVID, and many suffered from isolation as care facilities shut their doors to visitors. Home care workers and other domestic workers, such as home cleaners and nannies, either continued to work under adverse conditions or were told not to come to work—often with no pay and no recourse to seeking unemployment or other benefits, as so many work "off book" for multiple employers.

Caregiving is underpaid (often unpaid) and undervalued. As a society we pay lip service to care work, but in an economic system that values short-term profit, the needs of children, elders, and people with disabilities are too often disregarded as costing money rather than bringing it in. Our economic system does not value caregiving and has failed to sustain a functioning market system for care, as it is both deeply unaffordable and deeply underpaid. Care work is also largely carried out by women, especially poor and working-class women, women of color, and immigrant women. A few statistics illustrate this point:

- **Wages:** On average, child care workers in the U.S. are paid **$13.51**/hour and home health care workers are paid **$13.81**/hour—roughly half what the average U.S. worker is paid (**$27.31**).
- **Benefits:** While **52.2%** of all workers have employer-sponsored health coverage, only **25.8%** of home health care workers and only **20.7%** of child care workers do.
- **Gender:** Women make up **88.6%** of the home health care workforce and **94.0%** of the child care workforce.
- **Race/ethnicity:** Women of color make up **17.8%** of the workforce overall but **54.6%** of the home health care workforce and **40.9%** of the child care workforce.

Child care workers across the country are seeking union representation as states have opened up to collective bargaining for care workers who have been excluded from collective bargaining in the National Labor Relations Act—remembering that, when the law was passed during the New Deal, the workers were (and still are) disproportionately Black women; this is a racist legacy. But states have the ability to grant those rights, and about a third of U.S. states have done so. Home care workers in many states, shut out of state labor organizing rights, have pressed for state laws to create public authorities that allow home care workers as independent contractors to unionize and bargain with those public authorities over wages and job standards. Other workers have organized through cooperatives and worker centers to push for policy changes and find solidarity.

The Episcopal Church is already on record supporting the right of workers to organize and form unions:

Call for Public Investment and Community Participation in Transition to New Economies [2018-D006]
Support Policies Addressing Workplace Harassment and Exploitation [2018-D017]
Urge Governments to Follow Principles in Adopting Trade Polices [2012-A012]
Support the Labor Movement [2012-D028]
Reform Labor Laws to Protect Collective Bargaining Rights [2009-D039]
Reaffirm the Right of Workers to Organize and Form Unions [2006-C008]
Support Worker Unions and a Living Wage [2006-D047]
Recommend Criteria for Re-industrialization Plans [1982-A058]
Support Extending Legal Protection to Agricultural Workers [1973-D027]

Passing D023 would sharpen and deepen our position to focus on a greatly underrepresented set of workers that historically has been excluded from labor union organizing both by law and in practice. It would lift our collective voice as the Church to support the care workers who do the hard "reproductive labor" that supports, sustains, and nurtures human life and maintains kin and community ties that bind us together. As Christians we must speak, counterculturally, to deeply rooted attitudes that elevate money over people, and lift up with conviction our understanding that every person is beloved of God and worthy of care, nurture, community, and love.

Access to Health Care for All

By: Laura A. Russell

Everyone has heard the debate on health care. Some say the Affordable Care Act was a miracle. Others say it hurt them financially. Some ask for Medicare for all. Others say it would overburden the system. The debate continues. Unfortunately as it continues, people continue to get sick, and even die.

The United States lags behind most developed nations in providing health care. The U.S. life expectancies have dropped for the last two years in a row, with the life expectancy of women regressing at a faster pace. The U.S. child mortality rates are the worst among the top twenty wealthiest countries. The United States is worse for maternal health than we were twenty-five years ago, with 50,000 preventable deaths or near-deaths occurring annually. The U.S. has seen a 70% increase in maternal mortality in the past twenty years.

And these facts, many of which show the regression of health care, are only compounded when you add poverty and race to the mix. Poverty tends to yield higher burdens on women and girls' health. And race, also exacerbates the problems. African-American women are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than Caucasian women. Even education does not equalize these results. African-American women with advanced degrees are more likely to lose their baby than Caucasian women with less than an eighth grade education.

These are just a few facts about the current system of health care. The reality is that the United States has a poor system for the distribution of health care.

Health Care is a Right

Health care is, in fact, a human right. Everyone in the bottom 90% of wealth are fundamentally undermined if they cannot function effectively, which includes working, because of lack of access to health care. It is inhumane to deny health care to individuals, and it is economically and social destructive. By denying health care, one cannot work, cannot care for a family and cannot support themselves. That creates for a person, who was middle class, an income at or below the poverty guideline. Without health care, you are simply pushing more people into poverty.

Health Care needs to be equitable based on need, not gender or race

Race and gender discrimination exist in health care. For example, women of color with cervical cancer-a disease that can be easily prevented and cured-have a lower survival rate that Caucasian women, due to later diagnosis and treatment differences. The US has the highest maternal mortality ration among wealthy countries. In one city, the rate for women of color to die in childbirth was 12 times higher than that for Caucasian women.

Through equitable access to health care, possibly by a single payer system, we could eliminate the discrepancies in health care for gender and race. The amount health care providers would be paid would be equal, thus creating a single tiered payment plan. Currently, health care insurers pay for items at varying rates, and some pay more for certain items. This creates an inequity in the system. A single payer option would create one system for all. At single-payer's core is the age-old principle of basic human equality, translated to the arena of health. "Health care is a basic human right,"

Health Care needs to be available everywhere

Health care costs are often notably higher in rural communities. There are many reasons for this, included lack of market competition and lack of providers. Colorado, for example, has documented a nearly 36% differential in the annual cost of services for individuals in its "mountain communities" versus in the rating area including Boulder, its lowest-cost region.

When health care costs are high, everyone suffers. People pay more for insurance, and very often, go without. Rural communities, in general, have higher rates of poverty, so insurance is unaffordable. Without patients, health care providers go elsewhere. This leaves a community with no doctor, no hospital and no hope.

If insurance was a basic human right, we would all be entitled. And it could cost the same regardless of region. Therefore, patients would have insurance and the ability to see a doctor. More health care providers would stay and there would be equality and availability for all, not just for the people in a densely populated area.

Health Care should be based on need

Americans often do not get the care they need even though the United States spends more money per person on health care than any other nation in the world. Preventive care is underutilized, resulting in higher spending on complex, advanced diseases. Some patients will be over-served because of incomes or insurance. Health care is based on ability to pay for procedures, not need.

As a basic human right, health care should be based on need. The need for universal and equitable access to good quality health care that allows for equal utilization for those with equal need is a must. Without it, those who can pay will supersede those who need medical help.

Health Care should not be based on gender

As the recent Supreme Court Decision, Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization makes clear, health care is gendered. People who can become pregnant have their bodies regulated more than those who cannot become pregnant. Women are denied basic human rights of health care, and they are denied their own autonomy. Their health

become pawns in a political system. All genders need access to the same health care and health services. No gender should be forced or denied access to medical procedures based on others' beliefs.

What does The Episcopal Church say?

Since 2009, The Episcopal Church has advocated for basic healthcare to all (Resolutions 2009-C071, 2009-D048, 2009-D088). The Church has advocated that we have a universal health care system, which would be able to insure everyone who needed insurance. Even recently, in 2015 and 2018, The Episcopal Church reaffirmed its belief in Medicaid and Medicare, and advocated for equal access to health care regardless of gender (Resolutions 2015-A092, 2018-D032) .

Addressing the Wealth Gap

By: Joe McDaniel, Jr.

The coronavirus, fueled by America's pre-existing condition of structural racism, spread with a fatal swiftness through Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities. No American community was spared, but communities of color bore the heavy brunt of sickness and death. The cellphone video of George Floyd's killing, and the revelation of Breonna Taylor's final hours sparked an international outcry during the pandemic's tightest grip. This compounding crisis mobilized a long-overdue national reckoning on the legacy of structural racism, police violence and the need for police reform. Measures to contain the spread of the virus shut down businesses and schools. Economic devastation inevitably followed. The established pattern of disproportionate damage in communities of color, once again, bore out in the face of the pandemic-induced recession: In every instance, Black and brown people lost their lives and their livelihoods at predictably higher rates.

Today, vaccines are slowly getting into arms; states are beginning to drop masks mandates; and lockdown restrictions are easing. We are living in a historic moment that demands that historic injustices are recognized and repaired. However, we have yet to solve for the deep-rooted inequities that pre-dated the pandemic, accelerated the virus's spread in communities of color and exacerbated the "undeniable effect of racism" in every facet of American life.

Instead, as the risk of infection and death plummets, there is an overwhelming desire to "get back to normal." Given the litany of disparities that defined our pre-pandemic "normal," we cannot—and must not—return to "normal."

Instead, I contend that consistent with our baptismal covenant of respecting the dignity of every husband being, we are called to reimagine "normal" and forge a new, diverse, equitable and inclusive normal.

When asked to describe the economic well-being of African Americans, there is a tendency to focus on income, employment, or poverty rates. While these factors are important, they are not the only measures of economic well-being. Wealth is another key measure. It is both a driver of other measures of economic well-being and a consequence of poor outcomes in those areas.

Wealth is the sum of all assets minus liabilities or debt. Wealth, in the form of savings, can tide families over during difficult times; fund an education; provide a down payment on a house; or act as seed capital for a business start-up. Without assets, individuals and families will find it much more difficult to get ahead, leaving them unable to provide their children with the necessary resources and tools to achieve economic success.

By all measures of wealth, African Americans entered the pandemic at a distinct disadvantage. According to data from the Federal Reserve Bank's 2019 survey of consumer finances, the typical African American household had less than 15% of the median wealth of the typical white household ($24,100 versus $188,200).

The largest source of wealth for most families is in their home. And here, African Americans are further disadvantaged in two ways: First, they are less likely to own homes – only 45% own their homes as opposed to 74% of whites. Second, their stake in those homes is traditionally lower. The median home equity for African Americans was $150,000 in 2019 versus $310,000 for their white peers.

Another prime source of wealth is business ownership. And for African Americans, the numbers are similarly discouraging. Only 4.8% of African Americans owned businesses in 2019 compared to 16.5% of their white counterparts; and those Black-owned businesses were smaller, with lower revenues and fewer employees.

While home and business ownership are ways to build wealth and pass it on to the next generation, liquid or near-liquid assets in the form of savings and investment accounts are important components of wealth. These financial vehicles provide individuals and families with resources to draw on when they lose their jobs or get sick. They are also a source of funds to pay for the kind of education or career training that gives them, or their children, access to better jobs. But, as with other measures, African Americans lag here ($5,500 vs. $49,510).

Given the numerous disadvantages, there was every reason to worry over how African Americans would fare during a year that was trying for everyone.

Although we do not have the data to assess the impact of the sharp economic downturn and acute health crisis, we can, however, look back at the country's most recent experience of economic decline to get a sense of how wealth will be affected. The Great Recession of 2007-2009 resulted in a 26.2% decline in wealth for white households and a 47.6% decline for African American households. Several sources of data suggest that it is very likely that we will emerge from this pandemic-induced economic decline with an even wider racial wealth gap.

Hardship data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau show that African Americans are more likely to have drawn down on their savings early in the pandemic (51.6% vs. 36% of whites). One year after the pandemic, they were more likely to face problems related to homeownership. African American households are nearly three times as likely as white households to be behind on their mortgage (17% vs. 6.7%) and almost one and a half times as likely to expect foreclosure if they are behind on their mortgage (22.1% vs. 15.7% of whites).

A Federal Reserve survey, conducted in late 2020, of older, more established business owners showed that Black business owners over the age of 45 were more likely to have curtailed business operations, drawn on personal assets, borrowed from family or friends,

and reduced their own salaries than white business owners. They were also less likely to have received Payroll Protection Plan funds. And if they received them, they were more likely to receive less than requested.

After centuries of overt discrimination and structural racism, African Americans are disadvantaged at generational wealth building. The theft of their land, the exploitation of their labor, and the role American businesses played by legally enforcing or sanctioning residential segregation all contributed to depriving African Americans of wealth. Given the agenda of the Biden administration to "redress systemic racism," today, we find ourselves at an opportune moment to work on reducing barriers to wealth and supporting African American wealth building.

Historically, many federal policies designed to assist and support middle- and low-income families by improving their economic condition were not implemented equitably. On his first day in office, President Biden signed an executive order requiring that all government agencies review their programs to assess whether any of their regulations or practices result in inequitable treatment by race. As part of that assessment, agencies will have to improve their data gathering and monitoring to identify patterns of service delivery and structures that might be barriers to equitable access. This will be an important tool for both assessing and monitoring progress.

There are a variety of ways to increase access to opportunity for African Americans. Many of these prescriptions could come via the implementation of programs or policies put forth by then-candidate Biden. Since assuming office, other directives have come via proposals of now-President Biden. During the past 50 years, at worse, government policies neglected or impeded access to opportunity. At best, these policies managed to partially, if unevenly, combat discrimination and break down barriers. Much remains to be done if African Americans are to be afforded a chance at a better life through personal wealth creation.

Might I also suggest several starting points for action:

Diversify hiring and promotions and improve the workplace experience. Employers can expand where and how they recruit while eliminating biases in hiring. One way to do this is to de-emphasize traditional credentials and hire based on aptitude and skills; another is to offer more paid apprenticeships and internships to Black applicants. Beyond hiring, organizations can examine the workplace experience and attrition for different groups of employees. Many Black workers face day-to-day discrimination and scrutiny that make promotions more difficult to achieve. A McKinsey survey found a 27-percentage-point gap between Black and white employees who report feeling accepted at work. But these dynamics can be changed. Several companies have established formal mentoring and sponsorship programs; others are incorporating diversity goals into managerial performance reviews.

Strengthen educational pathways. Pre-K and K-12 education lays a foundation for better labor market outcomes, so strengthening schools is vital. College degrees, from associates to bachelor's, may not guarantee upward mobility, but they remain an important passport to the middle class, particularly as employers have been adding requirements for academic credentials, even for jobs that did not require them in the past. However, there is a significant gap in educational attainment between Black Americans and other racial groups. Supporting historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is key, since they educate almost 20 percent of Black college graduates. But other institutions can do more to enroll and support Black students. Since many are the first in their families to attend college, dozens of institutions have added social, advisory, and financial programs to increase their completion rates. STEM degrees are required for many of the fast-growing jobs of the future, but currently only 6 percent of computer science and engineering students are Black. Nontraditional training programs, such as multiweek coding bootcamps, teach specific skills and could offer a model for a more direct and accountable training ecosystem.

Improve the quality of jobs disproportionately held by Black workers today. Black workers are the backbone of the nation's caregivers and essential frontline workers, and their value was made clear during the pandemic. Looking forward, an aging population is expected to increase demand for the types of care-economy roles that many Black workers occupy today. Upgrading the quality and stability of these jobs is an issue of growing importance. The public and private sectors can address issues such as the wages paid for truly essential work, predictability of hours, workplace safety, sick leave, and other benefits.