

CALIFORNIA COMMISSION  
ON THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN & GIRLS

# GIRLS AGENDA

*towards a gender-equitable future*



## Youth Advisory Council



**EDUCATION & WORKFORCE  
HEALTH & ACCESS  
SAFETY & PREVENTION**

Cover designed by Youth Councilmember Sophie Kim

*"Each time a woman stands up for  
herself, she stands up for all women."*  
– Maya Angelou

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**2026**

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

Every girl in California deserves the chance to grow up safe, healthy, and able to pursue the education and opportunities that shape her future. Yet across our state, girls continue to face barriers that limit their access to economic security, quality healthcare, and environments where they can learn and thrive without fear. These challenges are not isolated: they overlap, reinforce each other, and fall hardest on low-income youth, girls of color, and young people in underserved communities.

The Girls Agenda reflects the combined work of 17 youth commissioners serving on the CCSWG Youth Advisory Council. Together, we examined the issues that most directly impact girls in California today: Education & Workforce Development, Health & Access, and Safety & Prevention. Each section outlines the real conditions girls are navigating in their schools, homes, and communities, supported by current data, lived experiences, and existing policy gaps. Most importantly, the Agenda centers solutions that uplift youth voices and ensure girls are not only protected, but also empowered.

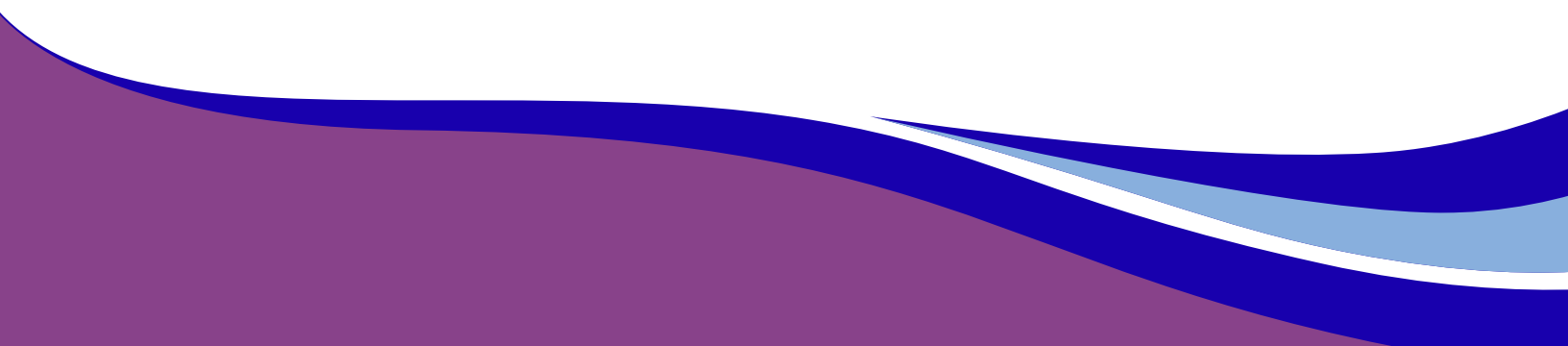


Our goal is simple: to recommend actionable, equity-driven policies that allow every girl in California, regardless of background, ZIP code, or circumstance, to feel safe, supported, and able to imagine a future without limits.

Nicole Kim (Los Angeles County)  
Chair, Youth Advisory Council

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# WHAT IS THE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL?

In 2022, the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls recognized that the voices of our younger constituents were not being represented. In response to that need, we created the Youth Advisory Council.

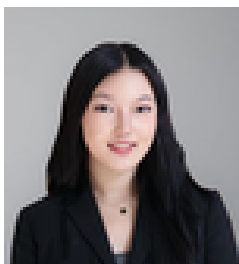
Having a youth-centered approach ensures that the Commission is including the voices of all our constituents.

The Council is a group of young residents (ages 14-20) of California brought together to increase youth involvement in California's public policy efforts.

Through this Council, the Commission shall keep youth engaged through thoughtful conversations, experienced speakers, and advocacy and leadership development, resulting in the development of a Girls Agenda for the Commission.

\*All references to 'women and girls' include gender-expansive individuals (cis women and girls, trans women and girls, nonbinary individuals, gender-nonconforming individuals, genderqueer individuals, and any women or girl identified individuals).

# 2025-2026 YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL



Nicole Kim  
(Chair)  
Los Angeles County



Sriya Srinivasan  
(Vice Chair)  
Solano County



Sonia Sharma  
(Secretary)  
Contra Costa County



Audrey Parkin  
Contra Costa County



Caden Shepard Choi  
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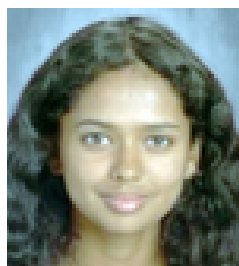
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# EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Issue Statement:

Women and girls continue to face increased barriers to achieving economic security, with education being a major driver in obtaining this type of security. Pursuing education enables women and families to alleviate poverty, fiscal instability, and build wealth. It is therefore equally important that our state create the external conditions necessary for women and girls to access education and thrive in the workforce.

## Affordable and Quality Childcare Access:

California is one of the most expensive states for families. Access to affordable childcare is an important health and equity issue in our state. The incredibly high cost of child care—sitting at an annual cost of around \$19,719—has created immense stress and instability. This forces women to leave the workforce, hinders their ability to return to work, and also delays accessing education. Nationally, we see that childcare remains the number one reason that women are exiting their jobs, disrupting their income, benefits, and economic security. For teen mothers, the impact of insufficient childcare access and support is even more staggering. Only 51% of teenage mothers earn a high school diploma by age 22. Further according to the National Women's Law Center, 64% of pregnant or parenting girls ages 14-18 report not feeling safe at school as a barrier to attending school. All of these directly impact family health and their wellbeing. The lack of affordable, accessible childcare and safe conditions has long term impacts on gender equity in the professional fields as well, with the gender pay gap continuing to widen and women continuing to make less than men.



## **Girls in STEM and other fields where they are underrepresented:**

We see this challenge especially in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. While demand for STEM workers is growing substantially, women remain underrepresented in these fields. Globally, women hold only 1/3 of research positions, and account for only 27% of STEM roles. In California, a study by Mount Saint Mary's University found that although women make up about 42 percent of the state's workforce, they comprise just a quarter of those working in STEM careers and are underrepresented in certain high school classes, such as AP computer science.

Some of the barriers women face include limited access to STEM classes, lack of career readiness and support, and limited pathways for advancement. This continues to restrict women and young girls from fully participating in STEM education and pursuing STEM careers and professions.

Addressing childcare and STEM access is immensely important to ensuring health and opportunity for women, as well as their families. Legislation like AB 131 and AB 887 demonstrate the urgency of creating solutions that expand childcare access, reduce barriers to participation, and open doors for women and young girls to thrive in STEM & beyond. Policy solutions should also address equity across income, race, and geography and disproportionately impacted groups.



## Existing Legislation and Policy:

- AB 887 (Berman, 2025) – would have required specified schools that serve students in grades 9 to 12 to adopt plans to offer at least one computer science course. **Held in committee.**
- AB 131 (Committee on Budget, 2021) – provided funding and changes for childcare and preschool providers, including \$579 million for provider support and stabilization stipends. **Signed into law.**
- AB 234 (Skinner, 2019) – considered large family daycare homes as residential use of property for all local ordinances, including zoning. This allowed them to operate in multifamily dwellings. **Signed into law.**
- SB 271 (Reyes, 2021) – ensured that student parents receive information and support when seeking financial aid, childcare, and basic needs support on campus. **Signed into law.**
- HB 924 (2025) - Montana state law that invested 10 million dollars and surplus revenues in early childhood initiatives.
- Oregon Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) – social insurance model for PFML that has supported women’s caregiving transitions.
- Washington State’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) – distributes statewide preschool subsidies with a sliding scale
- Vermont’s Universal Pre-K /early childcare subsidies.
- Maryland’s “Infants and Toddlers Program” or “Roadmap for Innovation in Maryland Child Care” – innovation fundings and infrastructure grants.
- Connecticut State’s Early Childhood Education Endowment - funding infrastructure to provide free or low-cost childcare, build and improve existing facilities, and provide resources and pay for childcare providers.

## Policy Recommendations:

- Make investments in providing computer science courses in grades K-12, particularly those in rural areas, and target increasing enrollment of girls, youth of color, and other groups that are underrepresented in STEM careers
- Establish greater wraparound services that support teen mothers/parents with access to affordable, quality childcare, stable housing and food security, mental health support, transportation, and other resources needed
- Additionally provide job and workforce training opportunities, legal resources, and higher education resources for teen mothers/parents

# HEALTH AND ACCESS

## Issue Statement:

Healthcare Access for youth encompasses a broad range of unique issues and barriers girls experience, inclusive of both physical and emotional well-being. It is important to address these obstacles holistically as these issues collectively impact girls' health and access to care.

## Nutrition and Food Security:

Nutrition plays a significant role in the health of Californian households and youth. With 1 in 8 Californian households lacking the ability to meet their food needs, federally funded programs like CalFresh and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) are vital for these households. Programs like WIC are especially essential for pregnant mothers and those caring for young children. Half of California's public schools each offer free breakfast and/or lunch, and such efforts have improved poverty rates in California. State data shows that eligibility for free or reduced-price meals has grown from around half of students in 2007 to nearly six in ten in recent years, reflecting persistent economic need among families.

In 2021, about 3.4 million children in California—approximately 59% of K-12 students—were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, underscoring how many students rely on schools for basic nutrition. However, a lack of nutritious food has been shown to continue cycles of chronic health conditions like obesity in underserved populations. Yet, federal funding is a large part of California's nutrition safety net and allows for various programs and initiatives to take place. Recent budget cuts pose a threat to the current nutrition support that Californians' households rely on. Food insecurity also disproportionately affects Latino and Black households and children, so to mitigate such risks, state investments and resources are needed to combat the threat and reduce disparities.



### **Eating Disorders:**

According to the National Eating Disorders Association, 22% of all children globally experience disordered eating. Disordered eating not only poses physical harm to the child but can also cause mental distress and negatively impact their academics. Implementing nutrition education has been found to combat the increasing prevalence of disordered eating and eating disorders by promoting healthy eating practices. Schools have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of their students. Therefore, such an education should be enforced to address these discrepancies and enhance Californian pupils' comprehension of healthy foods and eating habits.

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders states that at age 6 to 10, girls start to worry about their weight, and by age 14, 60 to 70% are trying to lose weight. Research shows that there is a clear link between the usage of social media on teen girls' perception of their bodies and their relationship with food. Disordered eating habits are often normalized and brushed off. When these behaviors are not identified early on and treated for they materialize into severe health complications and lifetime health impacts. Students should have points of contact at their school campuses where they can find support for themselves and/or a peer(s). School Counselors are trained to help students find external resources to guide them through seeking help.



### **Mental Health Access:**

Mental well-being is another area of focus, particularly for California's youth. Girls, in particular, have faced increasing rates of chronic sadness and hopelessness, almost double the amount seen in boys. With roughly half of California's high school girls exhibiting a form of depression, it is critical to tackle growing mental health concerns creatively. Access to mental health care and resources is even more difficult in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. To improve the well-being of California's youth, especially girls, of all backgrounds and cultures, it is critical to create accessible youth-centered interventions and opportunities that instill positive and effective improvement.

## **Menstrual Equity:**

A lack of menstrual equity has created a public health crisis that disproportionately affects low-income youth and communities of color. Many menstruating students in California lack consistent access to free and high-quality menstrual products, despite the passage of legislation like AB 367. The reality is that implementation and oversight vary widely by school district, leaving students vulnerable to stigma, academic disruptions, and long-term health consequences.

The cultural stigma around menstruation, paired with insufficient health education and limited funding for menstrual care, reinforces barriers for marginalized students. Many students are forced to use unsanitary alternatives or suffer in silence because they cannot afford or access necessary hygiene products. According to a 2021 State of the Period report, one in four students in the U.S. have missed class due to a lack of access to menstrual products, with higher rates among BIPOC youth and about 25 percent of students have struggled to afford menstrual products. They report that this lack of access has made it more difficult to attend school or do their best schoolwork.

Addressing menstrual equity involves comprehensive and inclusive education, proper policy enforcement, and youth-centered health services. While California has made legislative progress, many students are still unaware of their rights, and there are no formal accountability systems to ensure school compliance. Increased funding and clearer guidelines at both the state and local levels would improve enforcement of existing laws and support initiatives that provide culturally competent health education and equitable product distribution. Investing in menstrual equity promotes dignity, improves academic performance, and advances public health, ensuring no young person is held back.



Women, especially women of color, have long faced systemic barriers to healthcare rooted in structural racism and sexism. The impacts of these barriers and, therefore, lack of care have been shown to manifest in chronic physical and mental conditions as well as lower life expectancy. While in recent years, nearly 2 million Californians have been enrolled in health insurance, disparities continue to persist. Smaller and rural counties face barriers, including limited health providers and fewer resources available. In MediCal, there are gaps in enrollment in African American, Asian Pacific Islander, and American Indian populations. Outreach efforts that consider geographic, cultural and linguistic differences would allow for better enrollment rates and closing such gaps. Specific to women, critical services like prenatal care remain insufficient and largely affect women of color. This calls for initiatives focused on women's specific health concerns that largely influence the lives of their future children and overall communities. Threats to cut federally funded Medicaid would largely widen the gap in health outcomes. This calls for the state to strengthen MediCal efforts to reinforce and support community health.

### Existing Legislation and Policy:

- AB 367 (Garcia, 2021) – also known as the Menstrual Equity for All Act, this bill required that public schools with grades 6-12 (any combination inclusive) stock restrooms with an adequate supply of free menstrual products. **Signed into law.**
- SB 65 (Skinner, 2021) – also known as the California Momnibus Act, made doula services a covered benefit in Medi-Cal. **Signed into law.**
- AB 904 (Calderon, 2023) – expanded coverage beyond Medi-Cal to include doula services as part of maternal and infant health equity programs. **Signed into law.**
- AB 352 (Bauer-Kahan, 2023) – required electronic health records to segregate and restrict access to data concerning contraception, abortion, and gender-affirming care and preventing the sharing of this data with out-of-state entities without explicit patient consent. **Signed into law.**
- AB 254 (Bauer-Kahan, 2023) – expanded privacy protections for digital and sexual health information, including data from apps and websites. **Signed into law.**



## Policy Recommendations:

- Ensure California's universal school meal efforts include making sure meals meet strong nutritional standards
- Invest in school-based nutrition education and culturally relevant meal programs, especially in districts with high rates of free/reduced-price eligibility, to break cycles of diet-related chronic disease among low-income students and students of color
- Amend California Education Code to include information in school curriculum to mandate teaching how students can more comprehensively identify signs of eating disorders in addition to the healthy eating provisions present in existing law
- Ensure youth possess the information and awareness that they can talk to their school counselor and/or another appropriate staff contact if they feel they may be struggling with an eating disorder
- Identify and assign the appropriate staff to enforce ensuring the availability of and access to free menstrual products in K-12 schools as created by AB 367, the Menstrual Equity for All Act
- Require districts to report on AB 367 implementation (e.g., which restrooms are stocked, frequency of restocking, and student feedback) to create accountability and ensure consistent access across schools
- Provide dedicated state funding for free, high-quality menstrual products in all eligible schools and pair this with comprehensive, inclusive menstrual health education integrated into health curricula
- Support youth-led and community-informed education campaigns that normalize menstruation, inform students of their rights under AB 367, and address stigma that prevents students from asking for or using products available at school
- Pilot mobile reproductive health clinics to address access to healthcare particularly in rural areas



# Safety and Prevention

## **Issue Statement:**

### **Supporting Title IX Protections:**

The lack of comprehensive safety measures and violence-prevention education has placed women, youth, and minority populations in California at significant risk of being victims of physical violence. According to the National Women's Law Center, 21% of girls ages 14-18 have been kissed or touched without their consent and 83% of LGBTQI+ students ages 13-21 experience harassment based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression each school year. Despite decades of policy efforts addressing gender equity and student rights, domestic violence, teen dating violence, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment remain pressing challenges. Structural barriers such as the gender wage gap, limited access to healthcare, and the absence of preventive education continue to undermine safety and security. Minority women face particular vulnerability: Latina women earn only 42 cents for every dollar earned by men, and one in ten women lack health insurance, financially restricting access to vital support systems through. Research consistently reveals that women who participate in safety and self-defense training are less likely to experience domestic violence, yet these opportunities remain limited.

At the root of this issue is systemic inequity and inadequate education. Survivors are often blamed or overlooked within institutions that fail to meet their needs. Schools, for instance, are burdened by unreported sexual violence as students remain unaware of their Title IX protections or how to access resources.

### **Digital Safety and Literacy:**

Meanwhile, the rise of social media has created new spaces where youth are subject to exploitation and cyberbullying, yet formal education on digital safety is largely absent. Without effective preventative tools and equitable support systems, women and girls remain vulnerable.

Addressing these gaps through expanded access to training, equitable healthcare and wage reforms, and stronger reporting and education structures would significantly improve safety, resilience, and opportunity for communities across California.

## Existing Legislation and Policy:

- AB 2308 (Davies, 2024) – authorized a court, upon request of a victim, to issue a protective order on a permanent basis for up to 15 years. **Signed into law.**
- AB 2422 (Grayson, 2024) – required the Department of Financial Protection and Innovation (DFPI) to create and maintain an online resource about financial abuse for domestic violence survivors. **Signed into law.**
- SB 976 (Skinner, 2024) – also known as the Protecting our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act, prohibited online platforms from knowingly providing an addictive feed to a minor without parental consent and prohibiting social media platforms from sending notifications to minors during school hours and late at night. **Signed into law.**

## Policy Recommendations:

- Make investments in providing self-defense training as part of physical education classes in grades K-12
- Create standardized statewide frameworks and resources for schools to integrate into their education on teen dating violence. Information should include recognizing the signs of teen dating violence, identifying what unhealthy relationships look like, and enhancing digital safety and literacy for combating dating violence that occurs in online environments
- Create more youth-centered teen dating violence resources as most existing resources are adult-oriented and no hotline exists for teen dating violence. A future hotline should also be pursued as a text line, a more user-friendly method that youth feel more comfortable utilizing
- Provide K-12 sexual violence and Title IX sensitivity training to school principals, who act as the final decision-maker in Title IX cases



# CONCLUSION

The policy issues and recommendations outlined in the Girls Agenda shape a bold new vision to guide all future policy action regarding California's girls and youth.

In speaking to the current state of the barriers girls and youth generally encounter statewide today, the agenda advocates for critical changes that will lead to greater physical and financial security, educational and career success, and overall prosperity. Girls and youth in today's day and age continue to face long-standing inequities in educational access, food security, and their physical safety as well as new challenges that have come with the rise of the digital society. This new environment has further perpetuated negative cycles of teen dating violence, mental health struggles, and unhealthy body image as discussed. In the same moment, girls continue to remain left of the important conversations and decision-making surrounding these new technologies, with their lack of access to STEM courses, social opportunities, and jobs in these male-dominated fields.

As the Commission looks forward to pursuing these recommendations set forth by our Youth Advisory Council members, we encourage the California legislature, political leaders, fellow agencies, and other organizational partners and stakeholders in this work to join us in working collaboratively to enact this vision – created by girls and youth, for girls and youth. Only once this agenda has been implemented, can we truly moved toward a gender-equitable society.



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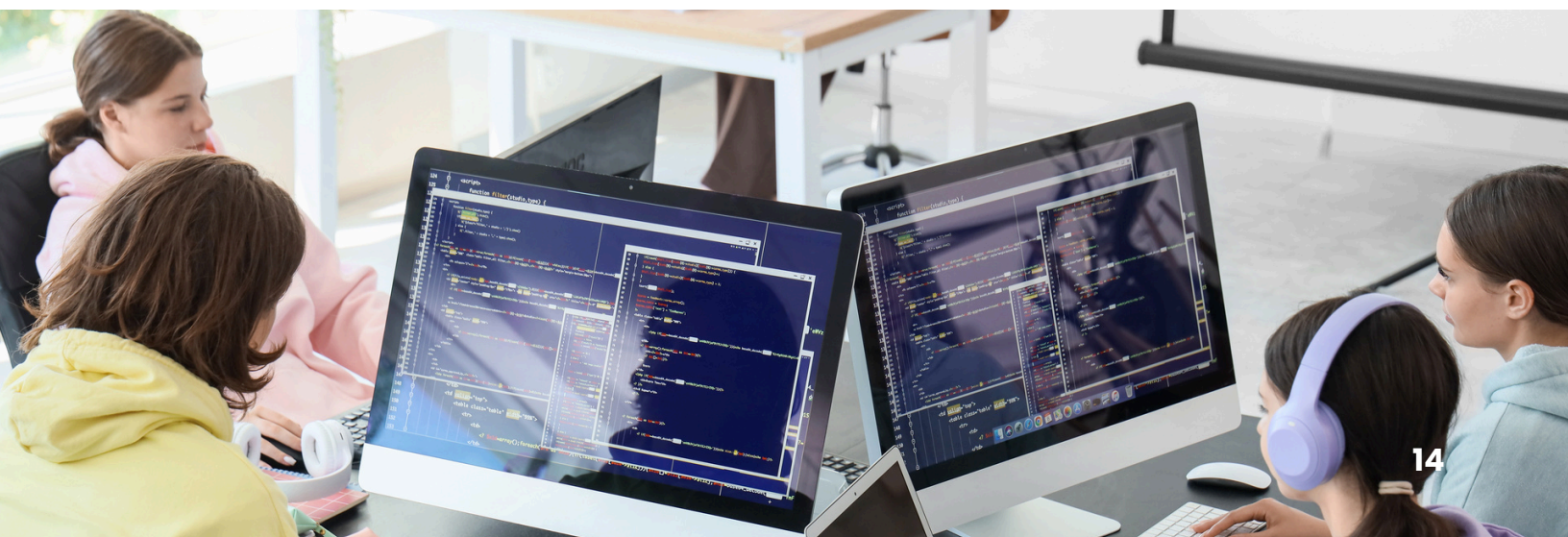
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