



60 years ago, this report jump-started the gender equality agenda

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Sixty years ago today, the Kennedy administration released "American Women", the report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. The report was inspired by Esther Peterson, then director of the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. She had observed that while many women's organizations had publicly called for greater equality, there was no consensus about what that meant.

One of Peterson's priorities was to make visible the lives of women she had worked alongside in the labor movement, particularly those affected by poverty and with families they struggled to support. She proposed a President's Commission on the Status of Women to document the obstacles facing

women in the workplace and create a broad policy agenda to respond. President Kennedy agreed, and the Commission was born. What resulted was a groundbreaking report on the status of women in the home, workforce and society at large.

The report's findings offered a policy roadmap for women's equality, and since its publication, many of the proposals have been adopted in some form via federal legislation, like Title IX in 1972, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978, the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993 and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009. Further, the report inspired the creation of women's commissions across the country at the state, county and municipal level. Four years after the report was published, all 50 states had active women's commissions.

Carrying on Esther Peterson's legacy, the Women's Bureau and women's commissions work to advance gender and racial equity in the labor market to this day. For example, the Women's Bureau's has published research that supported efforts to make the case for pay equity studies that have raised pay for millions of women in state government jobs, strengthened state support for childcare services, and curtailed financial discrimination that had limited women's access to credit cards, business loans and housing.

This year, we released the National Database on Childcare Prices, which is being used to advocate for stronger state and federal investments in child care. Our grants to study paid leave and train women for apprenticeships and nontraditional occupations have allowed commissions to actively advise state leaders on ways to expand workplace supports for parents and build pathways for women into high-wage jobs.

Most recently, the Women's Bureau and women's commissions across the country are elevating a critical issue that was not addressed in "American Women" at all: gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work. This form of violence and harassment is pervasive, with national headlines filled with examples of women experiencing

it at work – from scientists in Antarctica, to truck drivers, service members, tradeswomen, hospitality workers and countless others.

As noted in the United States' first National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work deeply impacts survivors' and workers' safety and economic security. The National Plan includes actions that aim to change work cultures, address the root causes of gender-based violence in the world of work and improve economic security for workers and survivors. In line with these objectives, the Women's Bureau redesigned its Fostering Access, Rights, and Equity (FARE) grant program to exclusively focus on carrying out these actions at the community level.

With their convening powers and local influence, the Women's Bureau's regional offices and women's commissions across the country are advancing strategies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work, based on international best practices. The first such convening was held in the Mid-Atlantic region with 16 women's commissions and the International Labor Organization's Office for the U.S. and Canada. In the coming weeks, more are planned in Erie County, New York and San Diego, California that will bring together government, business and worker organizations, local unions and academic leaders to discuss how to prevent the gender-based violence and harassment that limits jobs for women in the skilled trades, tech, politics and more.

The Women's Bureau is proud to celebrate the progress made since "American Women" was published. We know that our history of building consensus with state and local commissioners, union leaders, academic researchers, employers and elected officials is key to driving our future success and agenda for action.

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Tags: working women, President's Commission on the Status of Women, Esther Peterson, child care, gender-based violence, FARE grants, Women's Bureau, grants

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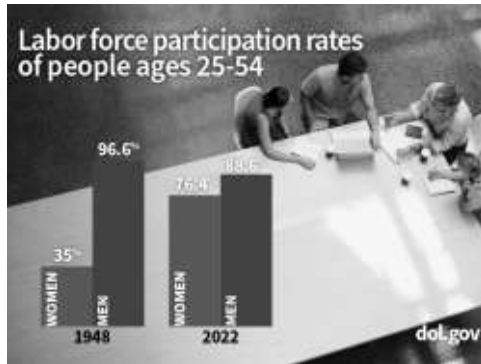
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