

March 22, 2021

Dear President Biden, Senate Majority Leader Schumer, and Speaker Pelosi,

We are women leaders and leaders of organizations representing and serving millions of women, transgender and nonbinary individuals, and others across the country. Thank you for your commitment to gender justice issues in the two months since you've assumed leadership. The historic COVID relief package will support millions of women and others in America and our communities recognize the important work you did to make that happen.

We also want to thank you for prioritizing raising the minimum wage to uplift millions of women and their families and reduce the gender pay gap. We understand that negotiations will have to occur to get the minimum wage bill across the finish line. We write now to urge you to not compromise for anything less than 100% of the full minimum wage for tipped workers, because anything less than a full minimum wage with tips on top will perpetuate gender and racial pay disparities and [a sexual harassment rate in the restaurant industry](#) that is higher than all others.

The subminimum wage for tipped workers is a legacy of slavery that exacerbates gender pay inequity and devalues women's work. Among the millions of tipped workers nationwide for whom the federal subminimum wage is still just \$2.13 an hour, [more than two-thirds are women](#), disproportionately women of color. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the leisure and hospitality industry—[including job loss, reduced hours, and lower tips](#)—the poverty rate for women working as restaurant servers, bartenders and in other tipped jobs was nearly 2.5 times the rate for workers overall. Women in tipped jobs generally are paid less than their male counterparts: [women restaurant servers, for example, typically made just \\$10.96 per hour](#) in 2019, including tips—78% of the \$14.09 typically paid to male servers. This is in part due to women being concentrated in subminimum wage positions and in part because they earn less money in tips than men due to customer bias. And these disparities are larger for many women of color; Black women tipped restaurant workers, for example, are [paid nearly \\$5 per hour less](#), on average, than white men tipped workers.

The subminimum wage for tipped workers is also the key reason that the restaurant industry has the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry. Because they are dependent on customer tips as a portion of their base wage, tipped workers who earn a subminimum wage often feel forced to tolerate inappropriate customer behavior to avoid jeopardizing their income. During the pandemic, as restaurants have reduced capacity and servers have faced declining tips, this power dynamic has grown even more problematic; in one survey, [41% of workers reported a noticeable change in overall levels of unwanted sexualized comments](#) from customers during the pandemic, and hundreds of women reported that male customers asked them to take off their masks to judge their looks and their tips on that basis. But in the seven states that require One Fair Wage—a full minimum wage with tips on top—tipped workers can count on a paycheck from their employers; they are not as reliant on tips alone to feed their families, making them less vulnerable to harassment from customers. In a 2014 survey, tipped workers in the seven One Fair Wage states reported experiencing [half the](#)

[rate of sexual harassment](#) as women in states with the federal subminimum wage for tipped workers of \$2.13 an hour.

President Biden, Senate Majority Leader Schumer, and Speaker Pelosi, you all have been leaders in addressing gender equity; please work with us to end the subminimum wage for tipped workers, which is the key reason that one of the largest employers of women – the restaurant industry – has such low wages and the highest rates of sexual harassment of any industry. We are proud to have a President whose signature issue has been ending violence against women, and hope to work with all of you to reduce sexual harassment through the historic Raise the Wage Act. In negotiating over the subminimum wage for tipped workers, we could consider additional, time-limited supports for small businesses in the leisure and hospitality industry, supplementing the new Restaurant Revitalization Fund and other small business assistance, given that both workers and employers in the sector have been hard hit by the pandemic, or even a longer timeline to achieve a full minimum wage. But we cannot allow tipped workers to ultimately earn less than 100% of the wage, even if it takes several years to get there. Allowing employers to pay anything less than the full minimum wage to tipped workers exacerbates crisis-level rates of sexual harassment and gender pay inequity.

We would be happy to discuss this matter with you further. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Individual Women Leaders

Gloria Steinem

Jane Fonda

Alyssa Milano

Amy Schumer

Sophia Bush

Patricia Arquette

Rosanna Arquette

Lily Tomlin

Rosario Dawson

V (formerly known as Eve Ensler), Vagina Monologues & One Billion Rising

Mira Sorvino

Alyssa Mastromonaco

Heather Booth

Sally Kohn

Heidi Hartmann, economist

Tina Tchen, President, TIME'S UP NOW

Vicki Shabo, Better Life Lab at New America*

Judith Lichtman, Board Chair, Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights*

National Organizations

Saru Jayaraman, One Fair Wage

Noreen Farrell, Equal Rights Advocates
Shannon Williams, Equal Pay Today
Mary Kay Henry, SEIU International
Shaunna Thomas, Ultraviolet
Jordan Brooks, United State of Women
Rachel Carmona, Women's March
Fatima Goss Graves, National Women's Law Center
Aimee Allison, She the People
Esta Soler, Futures Without Violence
Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Moms Rising
Tanya Wallace-Gobern, National Black Workers Center Project
Debra L. Ness, National Partnership for Women and Families
Maya Rockey Moore Cummings, Ph.D., Global Policy Solutions, LLC
Reshma Saujani, Girls Who Code
Teresa Younger, Ms. Foundation for Women
Rebecca Dixon, National Employment Law Project
C. Nicole Mason, Institute for Women's Policy Research
Terri Poore, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
Katherine Spillar, Feminist Majority Foundation
Ankita Kanakadandila, TIME'S UP NOW
Dina Bakst and Sherry Liewant, A Better Balance
Nancy Trevino, Presente.org
Cindy Wiesner, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Dara Baldwin, Center for Disability Rights
Amanda Brown Lierman, Supermajority
Heather McCulloch, Closing the Women's Wealth Gap
Jeanie Chunn, Seattle Restaurants United & RAISE High Road Restaurants
Tiffany Dufu, The Cru
Susan Celia Swan, V-Day
Wanda Hammoud, Sisters for Justice, 178,000 Strong
Susan McPherson, McPherson Strategies
Rachel Green, Women of Color Coalition
Emily May, Hollaback
Dee Poku, The WIE Suite
Carrie Barnes, ELISE Communications
Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, National Crittenton
Meredith Jacobs, Jewish Women International (JWI)
Maria Dowd, My Money LYFE
Corinne Roller, PL + US: Paid Leave for the United States
Surina Khan, Women's Foundation of California
Anne Price, Insight Center for Community Economic Development
Elizabeth Alex, CASA & CASA in Action
Stosh Cotler, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Sheila Katz, National Council of Jewish Women

State Based Organizations

Deborah Axt, Make the Road New York (NY)
Beverly Neufeld, PowHer (NY)
Ana L Oliveira, New York Women's Foundation (NY)
Amy Halsted, Maine People's Alliance (ME)
Asma Elhuni, Rights & Democracy (NH)
Alejandra Gomez, LUCHA (AZ)
Karina Ruiz de Diaz, Arizona Dream Act Coalition (AZ)
Emily Timm, Workers Defense Action Fund (TX)
Terry Fromson, Women's Law Project (PA)
Megan Peterson, Gender Justice (MN)
April Verrett, SEIU 2015 (CA)
Ann Warner, Women's Rights & Empowerment Network (SC)
Cassandra Welchlin, Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable & Mississippi Women's Economic Security Initiative (MS)
Sangita Kumar, Be The Change & Oakland Freedom Theater (CA)
Michele Hamilton, Pear Tree Community School (CA)
Andrea Luqetta, CA Asset Building Coalition (CA)

Women Restaurant Owners

Emily Spetrino, Owner, The Coronado (AZ)
Gail Somers, Yahso Jamaican Grille (NH)
Dominique Crenn, Owner, Atelier Crenn (CA)
Nina Compton, Owner, Compere Leten (LA)
Katie Button, Owner, Katie Button Restaurants (NC)
Amanda Cohen, Owner, Dirt Candy (NY)
Maria Simon & Cynthia Shephard, Owners, La Adelita de Woodside Restaurant (NY)
Kimberly Brianne Alter, Owner, Nightbird (NY)
Lina Hoshino, Petaluma Pie Company (NY)
Elena Barcenos, Owner, Rincon Salvadoreno (NY)
Yancy Perez, Owner, Barepas (NY)
Yuka Loroi, Owner, Cassava Restaurant (CA)
Rocio Meza, Owner, Rocio's Mexican Restaurant (OR)
Laura Valle, Owner, Salsa's Grill (IL)
Heather Mojer, Owner, Big Dipper Hospitality Group (MA)
Cheetie Kumar, Owner, Garland Restaurant (NC)
Anne Peloquin, Vice President & Regional Chef, Levy Restaurants (IL)
Marianne Ide, Owner, Smith Restaurant (WA)
Heather Chitty, Owner, Madres Kitchen (WA)
Allison Fong, Owner, Bon Me (MA)
Constance Simms-Kincaid, Owner, 5 Loaves Eatery (IL)
Emily Crawford Dann, Owner, The Corson Building (WA)

*for identification purposes only