



The 2021 Public Policy Report

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On September 26, we hosted on Zoom the movie *Rigged: the Voter Suppression Playbook*. It was followed by a discussion of the film with director Mac Heller and Ralph Watkins, former Vice President for Voter Services for the League of Women Voters of Maryland.

Our attention during October was to promote voting in the 2020 election. Also, in October we attended the virtual MLAW fall conference to hear about the effect of the pandemic on Marylanders of color, and to hear the presentation of bills from advocates seeking Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women support during the 2021 General Assembly. In December, the members of MLAW voted for the bills and in early January the MLAW agenda was announced.

In October we started having monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month, to discuss public policy. This committee usually included around eight branch public policy representatives. It was a lively group with lots of ideas. One idea under discussion was checking on Title 9 compliance around the state. We also attended national public policy meetings on the first Wednesday of each month, run by Robin Lucas, Advocacy Manager for AAUW.

Here is a short summary of the results of our advocacy work this year during the Maryland legislative session. We provided testimony for each of the bills and members contacted legislators prior to committee hearings.

Two 2020 MLAW bills passed both chambers during the 2020 session but were vetoed by the Governor. The General Assembly passed the bills again in late February 2021 overriding the Governor's 2020 veto.

- Public Safety – Rifles and Shotguns – Sales, Rentals, and Transfers will require background checks for all gun sales, even private sales.
- Correctional Services – Pre-release Unit for Women – Facilities and Services (Gender-Responsive Prerelease Act) will establish a pre-release center for incarcerated women. Six exist now for men; none for women.

The Maryland General Assembly 2021 session ended Monday, April 12. Here are the results for the bills supported by AAUW Maryland and MLAW:

- The bill which would consider a continuing course of child abuse/torture to be first degree child abuse has passed both chambers and has been sent to the Governor.
- The bill providing schools with menstruation supplies in bathrooms in middle and high schools passed both chambers and has been sent to the Governor.
- The bill establishing a permanent Health Equity Communities Program passed both houses and has been sent to the Governor.

- The Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act was passed by the General Assembly in a greatly reduced form and is on its way to the Governor.
- Three of the bills that we have supported did not pass this year. Paid Family and Medical Leave did not pass out of the first committee. The bill that requires judges to explain when giving custody to an abusive parent passed the Senate but was referred to committee in the House of Delegates. The bill eliminating marriage as a defense for sexual crimes has passed both houses, but the conference committee failed to produce an acceptable bill.

AAUW Maryland opposed one bill: the Healthcare Heroes Protection Act. It would deny patients' and workers' rights to take legal action during the pandemic. It did not pass. It was referred to committee without support.

AAUW Maryland is now focusing on national issues:

- Paycheck Fairness Act: passed the House on April 15; we now shift to putting hard pressure on the Senate (<https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/paycheck-fairness/>)
- Healthy Families Act: reintroduced in Congress; focus is on both House and Senate (<https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/healthy-families-act/>)
- For the People Act: AAUW has formally signed on in support of the bill; focus is on both House and Senate (<https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/forthepeopleact/>)
- Equality Act: while this passed the House with bipartisan support, coalition partners have pressed a great need for grassroots support here (<https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/equality-act/>)