

Below is a sign-on letter urging the candidates of the Ohio US Senate race to make issues impacting women and families including paid leave, child care, equal pay, minimum wage, and student debt a central part of their upcoming debates. If your organization is interested in signing-on to this letter, please contact Erin Ryan at [ryan@innovationohio.org](mailto:ryan@innovationohio.org)

October 13, 2016

Governor Ted Strickland  
Strickland for Senate  
PO Box 2196  
Columbus, Ohio 43216

Dear Governor Strickland,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and the tens of thousands of hardworking men and women, caring mothers and fathers, and determined students across the state that we represent and fight for every day, we urge you to make the issues impacting women and working families a priority during the upcoming Ohio US Senate race debates between you and Senator Rob Portman.

News coverage during this current election cycle has often been focused more on horse-race politics, rather than substantive policy issues. Ohio voters deserve to hear from both you and Senator Portman on where you stand on issues that will have a direct impact on women and working families such as paid leave, minimum wage, and student debt.

**On behalf of the working families forced to choose between a paycheck and caring for a loved one, we need you to share during the debates where you stand on the issue of paid leave.** Access to paid family leave has been proven to improve the health outcomes for the child and mother, reduce gender and economic disparities among workers, and create a stronger, more productive workforce. Despite these invaluable benefits, the US falls behind the rest of the world in failing to offer a national paid leave policy. In fact, only 13 percent of workers have access to the benefit, and among low-wage workers that number drops to just four percent.

**During the debates, you should address the concern facing families who are struggling to balance their duties in the workplace and at home due to the inability to access affordable child care.** High-quality child care is an extremely important factor in determining a child's future. Yet too many low-income and working families – particularly single mothers – cannot find affordable options for their children; sometimes paying as much as one-third of their income for child care. As many women still take on the vast majority of caregiving duties, they are often forced to leave the workforce if affordable child care cannot be attained.

**For the women shortchanged by the gender wage gap, during the debates you should discuss your plan to ensure equal pay for equal work.** Despite the gains made by women over the last few decades in educational attainment and increases in labor force participation, the gender wage gap that holds women back from their full economic opportunity persists today. In Ohio, women, on average, are paid just 80 cents for every dollar their male counterpart is paid, and the wage gap is even more disparaging for women of color.

**For the millions of low-wage workers straining to make ends meet, you must address during the debates where you stand on raising the minimum wage.** The minimum wage has failed to keep pace with inflation, which has left economic security out of reach for many working families that are living paycheck to paycheck. Women are disproportionately impacted by the minimum wage as two-thirds of low-wage workers are women. In our state and across the country, women are more likely to be living in poverty, working in minimum wage, or working part-time.

**And for the countless young Ohioans shouldering the burden of paying off student loans, during the debates you should share what you will do to help with student debt.** The issue of student debt is more than just a student issue. It impacts the financial futures of graduates for years after they are out of school and begin to start their families. High student loans can limit or completely prevent graduates from having financial income to go towards investments, savings for retirement, or home ownership. Wealth loss is even greater for students from low-income families and students of color, who are more likely to have student debt.

We are encouraged that issues impacting women and working families – such as paid leave and child care – have taken the spotlight during this election cycle as the presidential candidates from both major parties released proposals for these policies. This is a historic milestone in the efforts to advance these policies nationally, but the discussion of these issues cannot stop there.

We need to ensure that these issues, and more, continue to be discussed throughout the election, especially during key times when you have the opportunity to give voice to your vision for our country's future. That is why we urge you to make these issues – and where you stand on them – a central part of your upcoming debates.

Sincerely,

Innovation Ohio Education Fund  
Majority Ohio  
NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio  
Ohio AFL-CIO  
Ohio Student Association  
Ohio Organizing Collaborative  
Ohio Women's Public Policy Network  
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio  
Policy Matters Ohio  
ProgressOhio  
SEIU District 1199  
SEIU District 1  
Stand Up For Ohio  
The Ohio Democratic Party  
UHCAN Ohio

October 13, 2016

Senator Rob Portman  
Portman for Senate  
P.O. Box 39  
Terrace Park, OH 45174

Dear Senator Portman,

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News coverage during this current election cycle has often been focused more on horse-race politics, rather than substantive policy issues. Ohio voters deserve to hear from both you and former Governor Strickland on where you stand on issues that will have a direct impact on women and working families such as paid leave, minimum wage, and student debt.

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