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President and CEO

Maya Wiley

March 12, 2025

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 240 national civil and human rights advocacy organizations, we write to share our coalition's topline priorities for the 119th Congress. The list of civil rights priorities below is not exhaustive, but it represents the most critical areas for congressional engagement during this unprecedented time, which have been made even clearer following the presidential address to a joint session of Congress on March 4, 2025.

This first quarter of the 119th Congress and new administration have proven that the stakes for the American people and our democracy could not be higher. With an administration doubling down on harmful policies and determined to upend civil rights policies that ensure a fair and thriving country, Congress must step up where the White House has failed. As such, we urge you to stand firm against a president who reiterated in his joint address that he will prioritize self-serving politics over the well-being of the American people.

The president's agenda has been clear from day one: tax breaks for his billionaire buddies, attacks on working families, and a blatant disregard for the rule of law. The president has used the government for personal and political gain while failing to address the real challenges facing everyday Americans. Among his many critical jobs is lowering the cost of living for the American people, but his policies have instead made life more expensive and precarious for millions. If Trump refuses to govern for the people, then Congress must.

It is an unfortunate coincidence that Inauguration Day fell on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday and that the president's joint address took place during the week commemorating the 60th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Both are stark reminders of the civil rights battles fought and won over decades. The Trump-Musk agenda threatens the fundamental rights of children, families, immigrants, federal workers, and older Americans, which could erase decades of progress for all of the communities The Leadership Conference represents. Congress must not allow Trump to rule like a king or dictator. Instead, it must act decisively to protect civil rights, strengthen democracy, and address the urgent social and economic needs of everyday people. The Leadership Conference's priorities for the 119th Congress represent a path forward to achieve these goals.

Cross Cutting Priorities

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

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- Congress must ensure the enforcement of the laws prohibiting discrimination, conduct robust oversight over the agencies enforcing civil rights laws, and reject any efforts to roll back [diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility](#) initiatives that promote equal opportunity in all facets of life, including education, employment, and government programs. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are essential for a thriving democracy and economy, fostering innovation, fairness, and representation in all sectors. Attacks on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives are thinly veiled attempts to undermine civil rights protections and exacerbate economic disparities for millions of Americans, including veterans, women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and people with disabilities. Instead of dismantling progress, Congress should strengthen policies that promote equitable access to federal resources and opportunities.

Technology

- In an era where [technology](#) is shaping every aspect of life — from employment and health care to immigration and voting — Congress must take decisive action to protect [civil rights](#), prevent unlawful discrimination, and advance equal opportunity. [Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) and other emerging technologies are being used in ways that can either reinforce systemic discrimination or promote greater equity. Without strong congressional oversight, biased algorithms can deny people job opportunities, restrict access to health care, or exacerbate disparities in housing and lending. Facial recognition technology and automated decision-making systems also raise concerns about racial profiling, voter suppression, and violations of due process in immigration enforcement.

Budget and Appropriations

- Congress must reject any budget or appropriations proposals that slash funding for essential programs while prioritizing tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations. Attempts to cut health care, nutrition assistance, housing, education programs, and other critical resources will only deepen economic hardship for millions, particularly in underserved communities. Instead, [Congress should prioritize investments](#) that promote economic mobility, protect civil rights, and ensure access to vital public services. The budget is a moral document that reflects the nation's values, and it must not be used as a tool to undermine working families while enriching the powerful. As budget and appropriations fights unfold, Congress must remain steadfast in protecting critical programs that advance and protect civil rights and economic opportunity.

Executive Nominations

- Senators must exercise their constitutional duty, as part of their advice and consent responsibility, to carefully consider each of the president's nominees for our federal agencies, in addition to nominees for federal judgeships. These positions should only be filled by individuals who have a [demonstrated commitment to civil and human rights](#), who will be independent and [uphold rule of law](#), and who are reflective and representative of the vast and rich diversity of our country.

Issue-Specific Priorities

Anti-Poverty

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- Congress must expand and improve eligibility, affordability, and access to services for all federal and federally funded public benefits programs and reject cuts to these programs that will take health care away, [increase food insecurity](#), and jeopardize financial [security for individuals and families](#).
- Congress should enact reforms that create a more just and equitable tax system that addresses racial, gender, and economic disparities and does not favor the wealthy and corporate interests over people and families with low incomes. This includes [permanently expanding the Child Tax Credit \(CTC\)](#) — a proven way to reduce child poverty and improve economic mobility, particularly for families of color — and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Census

- Congress must secure [adequate funding for the Census Bureau](#) so that the agency can: (1) conduct research and develop strategies to address, ameliorate, and eliminate persistent differential undercounts in the decennial census; (2) enhance data quality in all census data products, including the American Community Survey and population estimates; and (3) prepare for a fair and accurate 2030 Census.
- Congress must support informed, evidence-based policymaking by safeguarding data collection and dissemination from political interference, as well as preserving the ongoing advancements in the implementation of the updated Office of Management and Budget race and ethnicity data standards.
- Congress must ensure the accuracy of the census by [combatting efforts](#) to unconstitutionally exclude non-citizens and/or undocumented immigrants from apportionment counts; opposing attempts to add a citizenship question to the decennial census; and [supporting](#) the mandatory nature of the [American Community Survey](#).

Education

- Congress is charged with protecting key investments in children, families, and educators, including funding under Title I and Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), early care and education, college access and support, and student financial aid. Congress must not divert public funds to private schools or limit college opportunity in the reconciliation process.
- Congress must advance legislation to protect students from discrimination and promote equal opportunity in [early care and education](#), K12 schools (including [safe, healthy, and inclusive school climates](#) and supports for [multilingual learners](#)), and [higher education](#).
- Congress should conduct robust oversight to ensure the Department of Education, and especially the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), protects students from discrimination and promotes equal opportunity in education.

Employment

- Congress must enact legislation to strengthen and ensure anti-discrimination protections for [all working people](#), including the Paycheck Fairness Act, POWADA, the Equality Act, and the BE HEARD in the Workplace Act. Congress must support the health, safety, and economic security of working people by passing the PRO Act, the Healthy Families Act and FAMILY Act, the

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Schedules That Work Act, and the Raise the Wage Act, and by eliminating the exclusions in the FLSA, NLRA, and OSHA for domestic, agricultural, and tipped workers.

- Congress should fully resource the administration of state unemployment insurance (UI) systems and implement necessary structural reforms, including mandating a minimum of 26 weeks of UI in all states, requiring states to replace a higher share of people's lost income, requiring work sharing programs, and fixing extended benefits triggers on economic indicators. Legislation should also create a jobs seekers' allowance and expand eligibility.
- Congress must also ensure robust funding for employment and labor agencies.

Fair Courts

- Senators must make it an [enduring priority](#) to exercise their constitutional duty, as part of their advice and consent responsibility, to carefully consider each of the [president's nominees](#) for the federal bench, most of whom are nominated to serve in lifetime positions, and only fill federal judgeship vacancies with individuals who have a demonstrated commitment to civil and human rights, who are reflective and representative of the vast and rich diversity of our country, and who will commit to adhering to a binding code of ethics. [This diversity](#) includes race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, ethnicity, national origin, religion, religious belief or lack thereof, socio-economic status, and experiential and professional background.
- Congress must enact [legislation](#) that [modernizes and reforms our courts](#), including legislation that strengthens the ethical code of conduct for all federal judges, creates an enforceable code of conduct for Supreme Court justices, institutes a gift ban for federal judges similar to existing rules for other public officials, and strengthens recusal and transparency measures. Additionally, Congress should pass court structure reforms, such as term limits for justices, to improve court stability and access to justice.
- Congress should oppose legislation to restrict access to courts and access to justice, such as efforts to impose mandatory arbitration and restrict class actions.
- Congress should conduct robust oversight over the ongoing judicial ethics crisis, including disturbing patterns of reported ethics violations by some Supreme Court justices; the abuse of long-standing legal procedures and principles and the misreading of the Constitution and federal jurisprudence, which includes oversight of threats to the enforceability of federal judicial orders, the Supreme Court's shadow docket, and other ways in which the integrity and independence of the judiciary are being jeopardized; and the inadequacy of reporting and enforcement mechanisms within the federal judiciary regarding hostile workplaces and sexual and racial harassment and discrimination, and whether the Judicial Conference of the United States is conducting a meaningful review process of the problems and providing solutions.

Fair Housing and Lending

- Congress should promote [fair and affordable housing](#) and sustainable finance in order to create the economic foundation that families and communities need to thrive. Policies should encompass a comprehensive housing strategy that includes supply-side and demand-side solutions designed to advance safe, stable, and equitable rental and homeownership opportunities while ensuring robust compliance with fair housing and lending laws, including the Fair Housing Act's obligation to affirmatively further fair housing.

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- Congress must provide oversight of the financial services industry, including ensuring regulators end modern-day redlining and confirming that technological innovations reduce the effects of past and current discrimination and result in long-term financial health. Congress should also support policies to close the racial wealth gap.

Hate and Bias

- [Congress must](#) pass the [Improving Reporting to Prevent Hate Act](#), which would condition federal funding under the Safe Streets Act on credible hate crime reporting for law enforcement agencies serving populations over 100,000.
- Congress must conduct oversight of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division to ensure those who commit hate crimes against any vulnerable community are held accountable.
- Congress should protect and fully fund the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service (CRS) so that CRS may carry out its critical mandate and work to prevent and respond to potential violations of federal hate crime laws.

Health Care

- Congress must oppose cuts to Medicaid, CHIP, Medicare, marketplace, and other public health programs. Congress must also expand and improve eligibility, affordability, and access to services for all federal and federally funded health and public benefits programs, and protect and expand access to the full scope of best-practice medical care for transgender people, as well as sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion.
- Congress should protect against discrimination in health care and promote civil rights principles, including requirements for language and communication access for limited English proficient individuals and people with disabilities; require collection and disaggregation of comprehensive demographic data; and hold the Office for Civil Rights accountable to robustly enforce existing civil rights protections.

Immigration

- Congress must [oppose legislation that advances inhumane measures](#) such as mass deportation, family separation, privately run for-profit immigrant detention, racial and ethnic profiling and mass surveillance, the [criminalization of immigrants](#), and the deputization of local police to pursue immigrants.
- Congress must support immigration reform policies that welcome and value immigrants and refugees of all backgrounds; protect the rights of immigrant and citizen workers alike; promote family reunification; and ensure humane and nondiscriminatory enforcement, including prosecutorial discretion initiatives such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and humanitarian parole initiatives.

Justice

- Congress should [oppose legislation](#) and executive actions that expand criminalization or increase racial disparities in the criminal-legal system in any area, including efforts to criminalize and

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target immigrants, unhoused people, people who use drugs, and people seeking reproductive health care.

- Congress should oppose efforts by the federal government to coerce state and local law enforcement to aid in mass deportation.
- Congress should [support legislation](#) like the People's Response Act, the Mental Health Justice Act, and the Break the Cycle of Violence Act that meaningfully invest in communities and violence intervention and that expand access to health-based, unarmed emergency response.

Media/Telecommunications

- Congress must [ensure that technology works for all of us](#) by addressing and preventing discriminatory data practices and reducing algorithmic surveillance. To end use cases that threaten civil liberties (including use by immigration officials and law enforcement), Congresses should limit appropriations for new surveillance systems that can be used to harm vulnerable communities.
- Congress must pass legislation reviving the [Affordable Connectivity Program \(ACP\)](#) and any Universal Service Fund (USF) contributions reform necessary to support ACP through the USF.
- Congress must explicitly protect civil rights in any privacy legislation, including expressly prohibiting the use of personal data to discriminate based on protected characteristics.
- Congress must conduct robust oversight of the Federal Communications Commission's role as a viewpoint neutral steward of the nation's media and technology infrastructure.

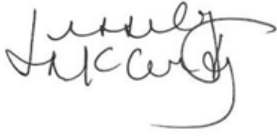
Voting

- Congress should pass the [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#) to restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act; the [Freedom to Vote Act](#) to provide a national baseline for expanded access to the ballot; the [Native American Voting Rights Act](#) to ensure Indigenous people can fully participate in our democracy; and the [DC Statehood bill](#) to provide full representation in Congress to Washington, D.C. residents.
- Congress should appropriate substantial and consistent funding for election administration in FY26 and each subsequent budget to ensure state and local election administrators have the resources they need to run safe, secure, and accessible elections and to eliminate significant disparities in local election budgets across the country. Elections are the heart of our democracy, and federal funding for our nation's election systems plays a key role in ensuring every eligible voter can access the ballot box.
- Congress should conduct robust oversight to ensure that the Department of Justice vigorously enforces the U.S. Constitution and all federal voting rights laws to combat all forms of discrimination in voting and promote access to the ballot at the state and local levels. This includes but is not limited to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Help America Vote Act, and the National Voter Registration Act.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to connect further on our legislative priorities. If you have any questions, please contact Kanya Bennett, managing director of government affairs, at bennett@civilrights.org.

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Sincerely,



Jesselyn McCurdy
Executive Vice President of Government Affairs