



The Honorable Gavin Newsom
California State Capitol, 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Holly Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review
Committee
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Richard Pan
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 3 on Health
and Human Services
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room Sacramento
CA 95814

The Honorable Dr. Joaquin Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 1 on Health and
Human Services
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 5155
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

Black Women for Wellness and California Black Women's Health Project are gravely concerned about the proposed May revisions to California's budget. Although we deeply understand the hardships that COVID-19 is causing in our communities' health and on the California budget, our response as a State will have an impact on generations to come.

During the last recession, Black families were hit especially hard, with medium income loss of 25%, more than any other racial group in California. Furthermore, Black women were one of the slowest demographics to recover from the recession, with Black women and girls having twice the unemployment rates in 2016 as their white counterparts.¹ This is all with the backdrop that Black women and girls make up disproportionate numbers of poor outcomes of socio-economic indicators connected to health and wellness. As two of the only handful of Black women's health organizations in the State, we urge the Legislature and the Governor to not balance the budget on the lives of Black women and girls. Below we have outlined specific concerns and suggestions regarding the budget.

¹ Brookings Institute - Employment and disconnection among teens and young adults: The role of place, race, and education <https://www.brookings.edu/research/employment-and-disconnection-among-teens-and-young-adults-the-role-of-place-race-and-education/>



BLACK INFANT HEALTH PROGRAM

We are opposed to the \$4.5 million in cuts to the Black Infant Health (BIH) program. It is troubling that out of all the programs under the California Public Health Department, that this was singled out by the Governor's office for budget cuts. Black infant and maternal health are key indicators not only of current health and well being, but one with strong implications of future generational health. California, for too long has tolerated the disproportionate rate of Black infant mortality and morbidity.

- Currently Black infant death sits at 9.3 per 1000 lives birth, more than twice the rates of California's average at 4.5 deaths per 1000 lives birth.² These rates are even higher in select counties, like Fresno and Stanislaus where Black infant death is 18.5 and 22.5 per 1000 respectively.
- Twelve percent of Black babies born are preterm (under 37 weeks) which is the leading cause of infant death.³
- Black infants are almost three times more like to die from Sudden and Unexpected Infant Death (SIDS) than their white counterparts.⁴

The BIH program has only in recent years had its funding restored, after a near-total defunding of the program in the last recession. The health and wellness of Black newborns babies should not be a tool to balance the budget of CA.

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

We are opposed to the \$45.8 million that would eliminate the maternal mental health eligibility extension. Particularly during these times of isolation, economic woes, and ongoing disparities in Black maternal and infant health outcomes, there is an intensified need for services that address stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental conditions, especially for pregnant people and people who have recently given birth.

² California Health and Human Service data - <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/infant-mortality-deaths-per-1000-live-births-lghc-indicator-01/resource/f209d3b1-56aa-44b8-b231-36bb539c69db>

³ A profile of prematurity in California - March of Dimes <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/tools/prematurityprofile.aspx?reg=06>

⁴ Department of Finance Budget Change Proposal https://esd.dof.ca.gov/Documents/bcp/1920/FY1920_ORG4265_BCP2879.pdf



- One in four Black women report depressive symptoms during their pregnancy or postpartum period, a slight bit higher than California's average of 1 in 5 pregnant people.⁵

Untreated mental health issues can lead to severe negative health outcomes including lack of child/parent bonding and long term physical and emotional development. **Eligibility should be restored to the full year.**

MEDI-CAL ADULT DENTAL SERVICES

We are opposed to the rolls back on Medi-Cal Adult Dental health coverage that would eliminate coverage for gum disease, deep cleaning, root canals, and partial dentures. Research has shown poor oral health particularly gum disease can cause premature birth, low birth weight babies and very low birth weight babies. Given the high rates of Black infant death, premature and low birth-weight babies, we ask the Legislature to **restore full dental services.**

REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

We are opposed to Proposition 56 funding redirection of \$100 million set aside for sexual and reproductive health care services, starting July 1, 2020. Draconian federal guidelines regulating Title X funding have forced closures and reduced services of community clinics and health centers.

In the last year alone, over 137 clinics have left the Title X program in California, leaving only 18 counties in CA that have a Title X clinic.⁶ Family planning/women's health clinics are often the first line of defense to addressing access to both contraception and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) testing and treatment as well as broader health issues. Funding to these clinics who are the safety nets and often the front line of access to healthcare for under and uninsured people is critical. Black women are disproportionately at risk for STIs as well as unintended pregnancy. Redirecting these funds will have a severe impact on many clinics' abilities to offer timely care and our communities' ability to seek and secure health care during this pandemic.

⁵ California Family Health Care Foundation - Improving Maternal Mental Healthcare <https://www.chcf.org/project/improving-maternal-mental-health/>

⁶ Essential Access Health <https://www.essentialaccess.org/sites/default/files/essential-access-health-california-title-x-network-comparison-april-2020.pdf>



ELECTIONS

California is making several significant and major changes to how we vote. **We are deeply concerned that there are no funds allocated for public education for the November elections.** Research shows when there are changes in the election process, it disproportionately impacts low propensity/high potential voters.

Californians in the midst of transition of voting options, are now faced with making a pivot to how we vote caused by the corona virus pandemic. It is absolutely imperative our communities are well educated on these changes. Without sufficient public education, the potential for disenfranchisement is high. Black women voters are consistent, a growing electorate and deserve full information to exercise their vote in this very important upcoming election.

Looking at the special election as a case study, there was historic lows of Black participation both in SD 28⁷ and CD 25 race this past May, indicating a need for robust education to alert voters of their mail-in ballots, how to fill it out, as well as how to turn those ballots in.

Black Women for Wellness & California Black Women's Health Project knows that for young people, unhoused people, people with disabilities, people who have language barriers, people who are new to voting, and people who have lost their ballots or need a replacement, that there needs to be an in-person option to vote as well as ample drop off locations for ballots. Being able to participate in the democratic process is essential for representative democracy. It is deeply important that our communities are well informed about how to participate in the fall election as well as have the options to do so.

HOUSING

We support the Governor's efforts to protect and expand affordable housing in California and ask the Legislature to continue these efforts. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 55% of California's renters are cost burdened, meaning that they spend more than 30% of their income on rent. For Black moms, Fair Market Rent is

⁷ Political Data Incorporated <https://tableau.the-pdi.com/t/CampaignTools/views/28thSDSpecialAVTracker/2020SpecialElectionTrackerVB?iid=2&isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&embed=y>



70.9% of their median income.⁸ Tracking of data addressing the housing crisis, including data pertaining to the medium price of new affordable housing units, location and occupancy rate, accomplishments of housing programs as well as lessons learned are critical to ensuring that we measure our impact. We ask the Legislature to track data of evictions, and foreclosures that are disaggregated by racial and gender demographics, income levels, cities, and family size.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

BWW & CBWHP support the Governor's decision to close/ defund California's last three remaining youth prison and fire camps. In California, Black youth were imprisoned at **9 times the rate as their white counterparts**,⁹ and Black girls have the second highest rates of incarceration behind Native/Indigenous girls.¹⁰ We urge the legislature to join the Governor's call to close these prisons.

SAFE COSMETICS PROGRAM

We are deeply concerned about the 60% cut to the Same Cosmetic Program, which is the sole program that tracks and alerts the public about cosmetics products that contain ingredients known or suspected to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm.

The total budget of the Safe Cosmetic Program is \$860,000. A \$500,000 cut would leave the program with only two staff positions to implement this program for the entire State. We propose that a 10% cut would be more equitable to the program. Any more would severely undercut the mission of the program. The beauty industry is a \$8 billion annual industry, and two staff people are barely a match to keep up with the toxic chemicals in beauty and personal care products consumed by California residents. Gutting the budget will have long term consequences to the health of Californians.

We understand that our State is in unprecedented times that force California to make hard choices. Black women have a long history of boldly confronting hard moments that create paths forward that leaves our

⁸ Finding and Staying Home Women of Color in the Housing Crisis <https://cayimby.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Finding-and-Staying-Home-Women-of-Color-in-California%E2%80%99s-Housing-Crisis-.pdf>

⁹ The Sentencing Project <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-disparities-youth-incarceration/>

¹⁰ Incarcerated Women and Girls <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>



future generations in better positions to push us ahead. Our organizations are committed to working with the Legislature and the Governor's office to innovatively address the pandemic and the harm that it is causing while protecting the most vulnerable among us. Please feel free to reach out to our organizations for any clarity or follow up questions to this letter.

Sincerely,

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CC: Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, Speaker of the Assembly Anthony Rendon