

## President Elect's Letter

Mary Gill, AAUW Iowa President-Elect

At AAUW, we understand the pursuit of equity is not a solitary journey. Our strength comes from our collective resolve, our shared vision, and our belief that every girl and woman deserves the opportunity to flourish. Moving forward, we carry with us the knowledge that meaningful change happens when we support one another, listen to one another, and continue walking side by side even when the road becomes challenging.



Whether our walking together takes the form of speaking up, offering encouragement, rolling up our sleeves for action, or any other means of propelling critical issues forward, everyone's involvement with their unique talents is essential. As we affirm each member's passion for issues, let us also support that we each have limitations of time, talents, and treasures in how we support vital issues.

For more than a century, AAUW members and supporters have been champions of education, fairness, and opportunity. Today, with a plethora of issues with equally critical consequences, we must focus on the numbers joining us on any issue; we must step courageously and confidently in our collective identity and strength devoting ourselves to the issues about which we are most passionate. In these times where too often we feel we have taken steps in reverse creating roads in need of repaving, we must remember that each conversation we spark, each policy we support, and each barrier we dismantle becomes another step toward a more equitable future—not only for women and girls.

Along the way, we celebrate the courage of those who paved the path before us. Their resilience lights our way, reminding us that progress is possible and every action—large or small—helps widen the road for those who follow.

Walking together, we create momentum; we create hope; and we create lasting change.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

President Elect Letter .....	1
Public Policy News .....	2
AAUW on Gutting the Dept of Education .....	3
Women's Organizations Collaboration .....	3-4
AAUW Opposes DOJ Merit Rule .....	4
Truckers Against Trafficking Program .....	5
Human Trafficking Legislative Agenda .....	6
Membership Info and More .....	7
Keokuk Program on Artificial Intelligence .....	7
AAUW Role at the Way Up Conference .....	8
Lewis Central Program on Internet Safety .....	9
Leadership on Vouchers in Keokuk .....	10
AAUW and International Relations .....	11

## Lock It In:

### Annual AAUW IA. State Conference

One day only - April 25

Diamond Event Center in Cedar Falls, IA

We have confirmation from several speakers for the 2026 spring conference. Speakers include:

1. Chris Martin - UNI professor of Digital Journalism. Topic: Misinformation in Social Media
2. Allison Rank - UNI Director of the new Civic Education Dept. Topic: Civic Education in Iowa Universities and Schools
3. Kelly Stern - Director of Cedar Falls Public Library and Joan Taylor - UNI Professor in Dept of Curriculum, Library Studies. Topic: Banned Books
4. Abigail Escatell – AAUW grant recipient currently living in Iowa City. Topic: Orphaned Upon Entry – Detaining the Migrant Child

## Lobby Day

AAUW Iowa Lobby Day will be Wednesday, February 11th from 9-11 in Room 305 (same room as last year) at the Capitol. Please join us!

## Public Policy News

Diane Kearns, AAUW Iowa Public Policy Director

Season's greetings! I hope everyone is on the way to getting their Christmas shopping done. There has been quite a bit happening since my last article. As everyone is aware, there was a government shutdown. I have been joining the monthly Zoom SPPC (State Public Policy Corp) Meetings. The pay gap widens (again). For the second year in a row the pay gap has grown. There was a rally regarding voting rights at the Supreme Court on October 15. Gloria Blackwell, AAUW CEO, was among the speakers at the rally. The America First Legal Foundation has petitioned the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to add documentary proof of citizenship to the federal voter registration form, intentional tactic opponents of voting rights are deploying nationwide. The truth is, voters already affirm citizenship when they register. Adding paperwork hurdles would block eligible voters, especially students, women, people of color, rural and low-income communities.

November 4 was an off-year election day, which saw some wins for our public policy priority candidates. During the SPPC December Zoom meeting there was discussion regarding the proposed dismantling of the Department of Education. AAUW CEO sent a letter to the members of Congress regarding the unlawful dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education. In her letter she stated our concern regarding the unlawful transfer of responsibilities. Congress created the Education Department through the Department of Education Organization Act of 1979 to strengthen the federal commitment to equal educational opportunity, improve coordination and accountability of federal education programs, and enforce civil rights protections in education. Only Congress can abolish a Cabinet department or reassign statutory responsibilities that Congress has placed with it. AAUW is especially concerned about what these moves mean for gender, racial, and disability equity. The Education Department is the federal agency charged with ensuring that students can learn free from discrimination under Title IX, Title VI, IDEA, Section 504 and other civil rights laws. For these and many reasons AAUW is requesting Congress exercise strong congressional oversight and investigate this unlawful transfer of authority, publicly oppose the Administration's attempt to dismantle the Department of Education, and support legislation or other actions that block any unauthorized reorganization of federal education programs. I sent a letter to Senator Ernst, and as of today have not received a response from her other than the usual, she would get back to me.

Another issue which was brought to my attention, the possible end of coverage for abortions with ACA coverage. I contacted our Public Policy office in Washington, and received a response from Kalina Majercak, Advocacy Manager. She stated there is not currently a bill, but this is definitely a concern regarding negotiations around extending the ACA subsidies. Anti-abortion advocates urging Congress to prohibit any premium tax credits to be used toward any plans that include abortion coverage. AAUW joined a coalition letter in September calling for an extension of the ACA tax credits without additional abortion restrictions. Congress must protect health care and coverage by permanently extending the tax credits that make health insurance premiums affordable. These enhanced tax credits have proven critical to increasing access to health care for millions of Americans, particularly women and LGBTQ people who are more likely to have lower incomes due to systemic discrimination. This letter was signed by 50+ organizations.

The second session of the 91<sup>st</sup> General Assembly will convene January 13, 2026. Our Lobby Day has been scheduled for Wednesday, February 11.

If anyone should have any questions or concerns about events happening in Washington or Des Moines, let me know. Otherwise, everyone have a joyous holiday season!



### Lobby Day

AAUW Iowa Lobby Day will be Wednesday, February 11th from 9-11 in Room 305 (same room as last year) at the Capitol. Please join us!

## AAUW: Gutting the Department of Education Betrays Students' Civil Rights

November 25, 2025

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is deeply alarmed by the Trump administration's escalating efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education. These efforts include mass staff cuts and the recent announcement of six "partnerships" that shift the day-to-day work of major K-12 and higher education programs to other federal agencies.

These moves raise serious questions about how the Department can carry out the statutory responsibilities Congress assigned it in 1979. These were enforcing civil rights laws in education, administering federal aid fairly and effectively, and ensuring equal educational opportunity for all students.

### **Statement of Gloria L. Blackwell, Chief Executive Officer, American Association of University Women (AAUW):**

*Let's be clear about what is at stake. The Department of Education was created to center students' rights and educational equity, not to outsource its core expertise across agencies whose primary missions are labor, health, interior affairs, or foreign policy. You cannot meet that mandate when the people and programs with the most expertise in K-12 equity, higher education access, Native education, international education, and childcare for student parents are scattered across agencies whose missions are labor, health, public lands, and foreign policy. When you*

*hollow out the Department and scatter its knowledge of K-12 and higher education, you make it harder for students to challenge discrimination and harder for Congress or the public to hold parties accountable.*

*AAUW urges Congress to intervene and ensure that the Department of Education can do what the law requires it to do — protect students' civil rights and advance gender and racial equity in every classroom and on every campus.*

### **AAUW Official Statement**

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AAUW urges Congress to intervene and ensure that the Department of Education can do what the law requires it to do — protect students' civil rights and advance gender and racial equity in every classroom and on every campus.

— GLORIA L. BLACKWELL  
Chief Executive Officer

## Women-Led Organizations Join Forces to Strengthen Democracy Nationwide

November 7, 2025

### *AAUW Announces Collaboration with League of Women Voters' Unite and Rise 8.5 Campaign*

**WASHINGTON, DC** — The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is proud to join the League of Women Voters of the United States and fellow women-led organizations as part of the Grassroots Power Partners initiative, a key component of the League's *Unite and Rise 8.5* campaign. Together, these partners are mobilizing women and communities across the country to expand civic participation, foster equity, and build a stronger, more inclusive democracy.

This latest partnership uplifts AAUW's long-standing commitment to open and fair elections that are broadly

accessible to all voters, nonpartisan voter education efforts that will promote equitable political participation and expanding voting rights. Launched in May 2025, *Unite and Rise 8.5* is the League's nationwide effort to engage 8.5 million people in defending democracy and advancing voter participation. This next phase — running from November 2025 through January 2026 — focuses on partnership and collective action.

"Education and civic participation have always gone hand in hand," said Gloria L. Blackwell, CEO of AAUW. "For over 140 years, our mission has been to empower women to use knowledge as a catalyst for action — to turn awareness into advocacy and leadership into lasting

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change. Through this partnership, we're helping women across the country strengthen their voices, mobilize their communities, and shape a democracy that truly represents us all."

AAUW's network of branches and members will collaborate with the League and other partners to promote civic education, increase voter participation, and deepen community connections. Together, these organizations aim to amplify the power of women-led advocacy and inspire civic action in every community.

"Throughout history, women-led organizations have stood at the center of America's progress- shaping the nation's conscience, guiding movements, and anchoring the

march towards lasting change," said Celina Stewart, CEO of the League of Women Voters of the United States. "When women come together to lead, we don't just expand participation, we expand possibility. Partnering with organizations like AAUW allows us to harness our collective power to educate, engage, and empower communities across the country. Together, we're building an inclusive, multiracial democracy that reflects the leadership, strength, and vision of women everywhere."

The partnership underscores a shared belief that when women lead, democracy grows stronger. By aligning missions and mobilizing across states and communities, these organizations are demonstrating the power of collaboration in advancing equity, inclusion, and civic participation.

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## AAUW Warns DOJ 'Merit' Rule Undermines Civil Rights Safeguards

AAUW Press Release, December 10, 2025

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The American Association of University Women (AAUW) strongly objects to the Department of Justice's (DOJ) new rule eliminating disparate-impact protections from its Title VI regulations. This major change limits enforcement to only blatant, intentional discrimination. The new policy was adopted without a public comment period.

For more than fifty years, disparate-impact standards have revealed when "neutral" rules — a test score cutoff, a discipline policy, or a siting decision — systematically push people of color to the margins. This is even when no one explicitly says race is the reason. Without these protections, it will be more difficult to challenge policies that consistently harm communities of color, women and girls of color, immigrants, and people with disabilities.

### **Statement from Gloria L. Blackwell, AAUW CEO**

*The Justice Department is trying to sell this rule as a return to 'equal protection' and 'merit'. Yet, merit has too often been a smokescreen to keep women out of classrooms, labs, boardrooms, and leadership.*

*Biased entrance exams, arbitrary credentials, and coded expectations about who looks and sounds 'professional enough' have all been defended in the name of merit. Disparate-impact protections are what allow us to ask the real question: Who is being shut out, and is there a fairer way to measure talent and potential? Ending this enforcement doesn't end discrimination – it will just make it easier to ignore.*

Because DOJ coordinates federal Title VI enforcement, this rule is a dangerous model for other agencies, including the Department of Education. It threatens progress toward educational and economic equity. AAUW urges Congress to conduct robust oversight of this rollback and to pursue every appropriate avenue to restore strong protections against systemic discrimination.



### Official Statement

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Disparate-impact protections are what allow us to ask the real question: Who is being shut out, and is there a fairer way to measure talent and potential? Ending this enforcement doesn't end discrimination – it will just make it easier to ignore.

— GLORIA L. BLACKWELL  
Chief Executive Officer



**EDUCATE  
EQUIP  
EMPOWER  
MOBILIZE**

## Join in a Virtual Meeting about Truckers Against Trafficking

**SAVE THE DATE for  
Thursday afternoon,  
January 29, 2026.** Join  
us from 3:00-4:00 pm  
central standard time

organizations that you've connected with on human trafficking. Those that are in the transportation industry, your state legislators who are in session, and law enforcement can also be contacted. [Find more Information in this flyer, and print and distribute as needed.](#)

for the first 2026 AAUW Iowa Human Trafficking Prevention ZOOM learning event to gain new knowledge about another dynamic stakeholder making an impact in the United States by tackling human trafficking awareness, education, action, and prevention. Use this link to join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2017201809?pwd=WXcyREhjclOZINQMUtmZjCU0RQQT09&omn=86273963329>

**TRUCKERS AGAINST TRAFFICKING.** In 2009 this organization was established by a Texas mom, her four daughters and a friend. TAT comprehensively serves North America through partnerships with transportation and energy professionals.

*Human trafficking is a crime hidden in plain sight*, and transportation and energy professionals are uniquely positioned to help stop it. At this event, TAT's Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sara Sefried, will unpack TAT's mission, goals, and national impact, explore the ways traffickers exploit transportation systems and energy-sector touchpoints, and share the training, resources, and partnership models TAT offers to states and communities. Attendees will gain a fresh understanding of the issue, discover concrete avenues for engagement, and learn how TAT can help advance a stronger, more coordinated anti-trafficking response. [tat@nonprofit.org](mailto:tat@nonprofit.org)

Contact interested family, friends, neighbors, and other

Sara Sefried serves as the Director of Strategic Partnerships for TAT, a nonprofit dedicated to educating, equipping, empowering, and mobilizing key industries and agencies to combat human trafficking. In this role, she builds and strengthens public-private partnerships across the United States, engaging stakeholders from the transportation, energy, law enforcement, and government sectors.



*Sara Sefried*

Before joining TAT, Sara directed statewide anti-trafficking initiatives in Illinois through the Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center with the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police. With more than 23 years of experience advancing programs for survivors of interpersonal violence, she is recognized as a trusted relationship builder and collaborator.

A nationally recognized speaker, Sara educates leaders and organizations on the realities of human trafficking and inspires them to take action to create meaningful change in their communities.



**WATCH FOR MORE INFORMATION** on the Sunday afternoon, March 29 ZOOM event 3:00 – 4:00 pm, focusing on another *dynamic outreach* child human trafficking prevention organization presented by Nick Lembo, CEO of Street Grace Arizona. Headquartered in Georgia, Street Grace is now also in Arizona, Texas, Tennessee, and Florida.

[www.streetgrace.org](http://www.streetgrace.org)

## 2026 Human Trafficking and Slavery Iowa NAHT Iowa Legislative Agenda

Mary Ann Ahrens [maahrens66@gmail.com](mailto:maahrens66@gmail.com) and Elle Sweborg [ellesweborg@gmail.com](mailto:ellesweborg@gmail.com)

January is just around the corner which means the Iowa Legislature will soon convene. Human trafficking prevention stakeholders have their 2026 Legislative Agenda set and are ready to phone, email, and visit with our elected officials within their communities and at the Capitol. Please share the following priority agenda items with our members and other people or organizations you connect with:

### Increase Funding for Survivor Services

NAHT requests an **increase in funding for survivor services from \$150,000 to \$1million**, as requested in the Judicial Services Budget. Iowa currently relies on a limited pool of resources to meet complex needs of survivors. Increased funding will strengthen residential programs, restoration facilities, and wraparound services that help survivors rebuild their lives. *If you will remember, before the last legislative session, there were no Funds allotted for survivors of human trafficking! Last year for the first time legislators provided \$150,000 for Human trafficking survivor needs. With nine rehab facilities in Iowa, asking for \$ 1 million would greatly benefit the operation and survivor healing at the facilities.*

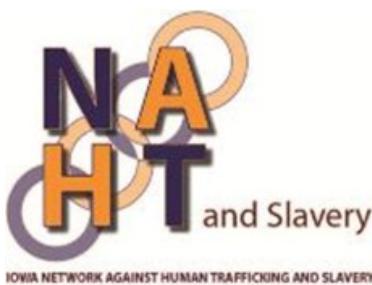
### PASS House File 1036

A work in progress. NAHT strongly supports passage of HF 1036 which passed the House unanimously in the 2025 session. It includes:

- Screening children for human trafficking using a standardized, trauma-informed tool
- Extending civil statutes of limitations for child victims
- Requiring an annual stakeholder meeting and report to the Governor and Legislature
- Expanding the definition of commercial sexual exploitation of children
- Referring minors in prostitution to protective services instead of prosecution
- Permitting deposition of victims in place of courtroom testimony
- Expanding restorative facilities and protective services, with DHS planning and reporting requirements
- Ensuring restitution for survivors
- Strengthening investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases.

### **A SIMPLE WAY YOU CAN HELP**

Since the 2026 legislative agenda was set in late fall, **Iowa NAHT developed and has been distributing a half-sheet blue flyer to anyone they meet and see in their communities**. Iowa NAHT asks our members and supporters to duplicate a supply of the message below in support of the 2026 legislative agenda for branch members to distribute as they go about their lives. [Find that printable flyer here](#). Be sure and include a sentence indicating they are being distributed by your AAUW Iowa branch.



In our community, EVERY person counts, and you matter because you bring something unique that no one else can offer. As we address the critical issue of human trafficking, let's unite our voices and actions to advocate for stronger legislation and support for survivors. Together, we can create a community that stands against human trafficking and fosters healing for those affected. Your voice is invaluable in this vital mission.

In our community, EVERY person counts, and you matter because you bring something unique that no one else can offer. As we address the critical

We are asking for increased funding for human trafficking survivor services from \$150,000 to \$1 million by adding to the Human Trafficking Survivor Services Fund within the Judicial Services Budget. This increase in the fund would grant money to nonprofits running residential programs focused on comprehensive support for trafficking survivors—strengthening and expanding restoration centers and wrap-around services to help survivors rebuild their lives.

We invite all community members to join us: PLEASE CONTACT your local Iowa Senator and Representative today to ask them to support this vital funding increase.

## Useful Membership Information and More

### February 1 Count Preparation

Check your branch member roster and verify your member count in preparation for the official February 1 count — which includes memberships processed through January 31. Click [here](#) for video instructions on how to prepare your roster. Expired members will automatically drop from your rosters during November. Reports will be available by mid-March. Once received, report any discrepancies to [connect@aauw.org](mailto:connect@aauw.org).

### Degree Equivalency Policy

In May 2025, the AAUW National Board of Directors approved a formal policy for Degree Equivalency for prospective members. The policy can be found on page 4 of the May 14, 2025, Board of Directors [Minutes found here](#).

### Right Sizing Toolkit

Many affiliates have not changed structures to meet changing affiliate and community needs or member capacity. [The Branch Right Sizing toolkit](#) will guide you through evaluating your leadership needs, AAUW branch board requirements and meeting frequency.

### New Webinars Now Available in AAUW's Webinar Library

If you're looking for fresh ideas and inspiration for your branch, be sure to explore the latest recordings now available on [AAUW's Webinar page](#).

- **Working in Coalition: Building Power through Partnerships** Strong alliances make lasting impact. In this session, AAUW members from across the country share how they build power with trusted partners and how your branch can do the same. You'll hear real examples and walk away with concrete first steps to strengthen your advocacy through coalition work.
- **Branches in Action: A Century of Advocacy, Fundraising & Impact** This webinar traces the history of AAUW branches, how they began, how they've shaped AAUW over time, and how they continue to fuel our accomplishments through advocacy, fundraising, and a shared commitment to equity for women and girls in higher education.

### Recruitment Discounts and Waivers - Coupon Codes

The [Shape the Future Campaign](#) discount of 50% off national dues for new members (those entirely new to AAUW or rejoining after two or more years) remains. Use the coupon code **STFFY26** at checkout. The free membership report and redemption form are available [here](#) through **October 31**! Coupon codes for AAUW College/University member students are **CUStudentFY26** Student Associates (undergrads); **CUGradStudentFY26** for Grads.



## Keokuk Program on Artificial Intelligence Covers Benefits and Risks

The Keokuk's branch of AAUW hosted a special program about artificial intelligence, also known as AI, on Oct. 27 at the Keokuk Public Library.

The program featured two educational leaders from southeast Iowa: Chuck Chrisman and Stephanie Harrison. Harrison is the professional development coordinator for Keokuk Community School District, and she is passionate about creating meaningful learning experiences for both students and educators. Chrisman is the vice president of technology services at Southeastern Community College. He provides training on AI to faculty



Chuck Chrisman



Stephanie Harrison

and staff, helping them explore practical, ethical, and secure uses of AI in education.

The program presented information about how AI is used, benefits and risks of AI, and tips for staying safe in using AI. People were engaged and interested. People had fears and misconceptions. Learning more vocabulary and

terminology was helpful. Participants asked questions, and they had a lot of things to think about. Chrisman allayed some fears and discussed benefits, especially in medical fields. Don't repost things before checking out the authenticity. People left feeling a bit more positive.

## AAUW Iowa Collaborates with The Way Up Conference

Mary Gill, AAUW Iowa President-Elect

With DEI reversals created by Iowa legislative actions, the University of Northern Iowa no longer could manage the budgeting process for The Way Up Conference without risking losing governmental funding for the University. The Way Up Conference, existing for thirty-five years, completed its most recent conference on November 6-7, 2025. Its conference, hosted in Iowa, aids leaders in higher education institutions as they continue to develop their leadership and administrative skills and ability. About 200 participants attended.

To facilitate continuance of the conference, a collaboration with AAUW was created whereby AAUW provides a structure and process for their continued use of collected funds to aid its work in developing leadership and administrative skills and ability throughout higher

education in Iowa. AAUW's Finance Director manages processing of their needs through separate bank accounts created at the bank AAUW uses.

The new collaboration also benefits AAUW. For decades, AAUW has hosted a vendor table displaying membership and action materials related to AAUW, staffing the table with available AAUW members and/or officers. With the recent collaboration, AAUW no longer pays a vendor table fee, beginning with the 2025 conference, and is included in the conference by introducing keynote speakers.

The Way Up Conference alternates locations each year between central Iowa, often Des Moines, and eastern Iowa, the Cedar Rapids/Iowa City corridor. The 2026 conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Coralville on November 5-6.



Above and right: Mary Ann Ahrens, Becky Ahrendsen, and Beverly Bunker at the Way Up Conference. Beverly was instrumental in the Way Up Conference from the beginning, and is now an AAUW member as well.

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### Nicole Wallace on normalizing “verbal violence” against female journalists:

“This is sick s-t. This is sick. And anyone in the room is in the room to do a job for their viewers or their readers. But they should go home tonight and think about whether their sisters or their daughters or their moms or their sons or their husbands or their fathers think that there’s something else they should do the next time [Trump] calls a female journalist obnoxious, terrible, stupid, nasty, ugly, terrible, insubordinate or piggy.”

“We’re either going to normalize this, and then you’re going to hear all sorts of prominent people calling women all sorts of names — I’m sure by the time I get off TV, I’ll have a few of those myself — but we’re either going to normalize this and usher in an era of unprecedented misogyny, or that press corps is going to act as one and say no more.”



## LEWIS CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL HOSTS INTERNET SAFETY SPECIALIST KIM SMITH

**Council Bluffs, IA** - Students at Lewis Central Middle School took a stand against online exploitation by learning how to recognize and prevent targeting, sextortion, and digital manipulation. On Tuesday, November 18, Kim Smith, an Internet Safety Specialist, led assemblies focused on how technology can enable targeting and exploitation, and what students can do to stay safe.

Approximately 722 students attended the three assemblies for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Smith's presentation helped them understand the online risks that can lead to real-world harm, covering:

- How targeting begins, what it looks like, and how it impacts young people
- The importance of protecting private information and avoiding unsafe online connections
- How to recognize online predators and identify signs of exploitation
- The realities and consequences of sexting - and safe ways to respond
- The dangers of sextortion, and strategies for setting healthy digital boundaries

In addition to the student sessions, parents were invited to

a special event on Monday, November 17 at 6:00 P.M. at Lewis Central Middle School. Smith offered practical tools and conversation tips for parents to help them engage with their children about online safety. They were encouraged to contact law enforcement if their children have been victims of predators. Prosecution requires evidence to be obtained by trained professionals.

*Kim Smith*

"This presentation was about more than awareness. It was about empowerment," said Carla Saddoris, school counselor for grades 6-8 at Lewis Central Middle School. "Our goal was to equip students and parents with the knowledge and confidence to navigate the digital world safely."

The event was organized in collaboration with the Loess Hills Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), whose mission includes advancing equity and education for women and girls.

For more information, contact:

Jan Creasman, AAUW Loess Hills President,

Email: [creasman@logannet.net](mailto:creasman@logannet.net) Phone: 402-515-0553



*Thanks to Waverly Branch board members Lindi Mick and Karen Lehmann for putting up a tree with the theme of Fighting Human Trafficking for the Wartburg College/Waverly Festival of Trees.*

## AAUW Alumnae Championing Universal Human Rights

### MUSKAN TIBREWALA

Muskan Tibrewala, 2024-25 International Fellow, is pursuing graduate studies at Columbia University focused on gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights. She has provided pro bono legal support to gender and sexual minorities and conducted research on sexual and reproductive health and rights. As an AAUW and Columbia Human Rights Fellow, she centers her work on advancing gender and queer justice. She is currently a Global Public Service Fellow with Women's Link Worldwide, using legal strategies to strengthen reproductive rights and address gender-based violence.



## AAUW Members Show Leadership in Educating the Public about Vouchers in Keokuk

*Members of the Keokuk branch of AAUW have been working to educate the public about vouchers. Members Barb Edler, Dev Kiedaisch, and Anne Pietcher did a presentation in October. In November, Tim Glaza from ICCI spoke to the public about vouchers for private schools, and the nearly \$1 billion in funding that has been spent on the voucher system in four years. The following article appeared in the local newspaper in November. Used with permission by Daily City Gate.*

### ICCI, PSS propose resolutions to school voucher situation at KCSD board meeting

Vicky Kloepper, Daily City Gate

At the recent Keokuk school board meeting on Monday, Nov. 17, several members of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (ICCI) and Public School Strong (PSS) gathered at the forum while a representative of the group, Dev Kiedaisch, provided information to the board in the form of a letter and proposed resolution. Both articles were crafted as a response to the ongoing private school voucher program in Iowa.

Kiedaisch described ICCI as “an organization that works hard to bring real improvements to everyday people’s lives,” and said “Public School Strong is one of their initiatives, and its goal is to obtain full funding for public schools.” Kiedaisch first brought forth ICCI’s letter addressed to the board, reading it aloud before a full audience.

She said that on behalf of Public School Strong and Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, CCI, they are submitting a collection of local signatures that support the resolution they are providing. These documents urge Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds as well as the state’s legislature to fully fund public schools.

They propose an annual 5% increase of State Supplemental Aid, adjusted for inflation to maintain an income for SSA, and phase out the Educational Savings Accounts voucher program over the next five years. They also ask that public funds be used for public schools only. They have asked that the proposed resolution be added to the school board agenda as soon as possible, in accordance with Iowa Code, 279.8B.

“We encourage you to discuss, support, and vote to pass this resolution,” Kiedaisch read aloud. “At Iowa CCI, we believe that every child, no matter their zip code, identity, background, race, gender or ability, has a right to a high-quality public education – That means fully funding all our public schools, urban and rural alike.”

“We know how great our public schools, were, are, and could be, and how critical they are to our community’s future generations. This is why we firmly believe we must use our public funds for public schools.”

All members of the school board for their service on the board, and they were asked to remember that they have the community’s support to pass the resolution.

Then the resolution was presented by Kiedaisch, “a school board resolution urging the Iowa governor and state legislation to fully fund our public schools and phase out the education savings accounts,” she said.

Set forth in the resolution were the following premises:

- 91% of Iowa students are enrolled in public schools
- Public schools are universally accessible as well as non-discriminatory
- Public schools are accountable to local communities via non-partisan, democratically-elected school boards
- State of Iowa has a decades-long record of underfunding public schools- a 2% annual increase of state supplemental aid since 2012
- Iowa is experiencing one of the worst teacher shortages in the country
- Private schools are lacking in accountability, transparency, and standards when compared to public schools
- Iowa’s ESAs defund public schools and cost Iowa taxpayers \$129 Million in 2023-24; \$218 Million in 2024-25, with a projected cost estimate of \$315 Million for 2025-26, with all income eligibility gaps removed
- A vast majority of Iowa private schools are religious but their public funding blurs the line between separation of church and state
- Independent studies in IN, LA, OH, and D.C. showed lowered student performance and achievement was correlated to the voucher program’s expansion
- all generations, extant and future, benefit from strong public schools as they make the nation “far more equal, educated and democratic”

In the conclusion, the annual 5% increase, phase out of the ESA program, and the other propositions from the letter were reiterated. Then the paperwork was distributed to the board.

A book, “The Education Wars,” was also recommended by Kiedaisch and offered for board members to borrow if they so desire.

Those who would like to know more about ICCI or PSS are directed to their website at [iowacci.org](http://iowacci.org).

## Does AAUW in Iowa Have an International Focus?

Kathleen Wood Laurila, AAUW Iowa International Relations Director

What does a focus on “international relations” mean in the context of AAUW activities today? How do Iowa AAUW members address this focus, or do we consider it a part of our concern at all? Historically, it was long one of AAUW’s four areas of interest. Addressing needed change at the local and state levels is now seen to be more doable -- and we’ve become relatively effective. However, the positive influence that women report having over their immediate environments does not extend to formal institutions where systemic decisions are made at the national or international levels, according to a recent survey by the [Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security \(GIWPS\).](https://www.giwpssummary.org/)

AAUW had been in existence nearly 40 years when World War I ended on the 11th day of the 11th month and at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, in 1918. Imagine the discussion that took place when an AAUW member and two friends from the UK – all professors - were together early the following year. Perhaps they discussed the atrocities of war, and the damage to the disruption of normal life, including education, that had taken place? No doubt.



AAUW member Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean of Barnard College, was a Co-Founder of the International Federation of University Women in 1919, and the only woman in the seven-person delegation appointed by President Roosevelt to represent the U.S. at the founding of the United Nations.

As friends, they shared their various experiences and gained different insights into the impacts each had felt, strengthening their bonds through such understanding. In addition to their friendship, they shared the perspective of how education has a role in the prevention of misunderstandings which too often lead to conflict. They yearned for a way to make a peaceful world and commenced upon the journey of fostering friendship and understanding through education around the world by creating the *International Federation of University Women (IFUW)*, a federation of national women’s organizations from across the world. As a founding member, AAUW added International Relations as an area of study and action.

***United globally, graduate women work for understanding and friendship and, thus, foster peace.***

Since 2005, when AAUW dropped its relationship in IFUW (now called [Graduate Women International](https://www.graduateresources.org/)), explicit interest in international relations as a focus for programming and advocacy has waned except for our representation at the United Nations. However, we continue to value the friendships we have with women and in a multitude of ways we work on issues to bring understanding and relationship which are necessary for “peace” as visualized by the women in 1919 – albeit at the local level.

Although we are currently living through a politically divisive period in the U.S., we still like to consider that we live in a comparatively peaceful country, but in the 2025 *GIWPS Summary* of 181 countries, the U.S. is ranked #31. Factors included impacts on gender, development and peace and security, “underscoring the importance of a multidimensional understanding of women’s status and the urgent need to invest in women to advance the well-being of all people and societies.”

In AAUW we are, indeed, *peacebuilders*, referring to anyone who contributes to peace, in the full scope of work that women do across a variety of organizations and on multiple issues. But do we look at the global aspects of our issues, putting them into a larger context, and, thus, greater understanding? Are there ways we can use our influence on national or international decisions about the issues we care about? These are where systemic solutions for change are made.

In Iowa these issues are at the fore:

- civil rights for all
- equity and inclusion for women and girls
- access for all to quality education, including international students
- women and leadership
- human trafficking
- reproductive rights and services
- immigrant and refugee services
- ...and many more

How could we broaden our effectiveness if we considered these issues in a broader context? Let’s think together...

The AAUW Iowa Board would like to know how your branch is carrying out work as *peacebuilders* as an initiative of an International Relations focus. **In January, an email survey by the IR Director will be sent to branch presidents** for you to briefly share your thoughts. Please respond so guidance on future direction for IR programming can be more relevant to your work.