

Good morning. My name is Tara Romano, and I am president of North Carolina Women United. We are a coalition of organizations and individuals across the state working for the full social, political and economic equality for all women of North Carolina.

Thank you all for braving the weather to be here for the release of our 2013 legislative report card. North Carolina Women United provides this Report Card after each long session as a tool citizen for advocacy.

During the long session, we create a legislative agenda of items that our members and supporters believe are critical to achieving full equality for women. At the end of a session - this past one lasting six months and producing over 1700 pieces of legislation - we provide this Report Card to help women sort it all out, focusing on how items relating to our agenda fared during the session.

As we looked back over this latest session, we saw it clearly demonstrated that North Carolina women were **not** a priority for lawmakers. In addition to blatant and dangerous ideological attacks on women's reproductive rights, lawmakers ignored the realities of North Carolina women's lives as workers, caretakers, breadwinners, educators and engaged citizens.

Restrictions on voting rights, elimination of critical safety net programs, a detrimental tax shift, obstructions to health care access and inadequate funding of public education will all have intersecting impacts on women's lives across the state.

Too often, policy makers fail to understand the complexity of women's lives. In 2014, North Carolina women fill multiple, diverse roles in our society. These complexities seem to have been ignored in an effort to create an increasingly narrow vision of what it means to be a North Carolina woman – seemingly one who never has an unplanned pregnancy, who always has a husband to provide for her and her family, and who can afford to stand in line for hours to vote.

We at North Carolina Women United understand that Tarheel women lead diverse and multifaceted lives, which is why we advocate for policies that have the potential to benefit all women at different points in our lives when we may need it most.

Women still face unique barriers in society because we are women, and we must set our legislative priorities to remedy that. Affordable child care and housing, workforce re-entry training, protection from discrimination on the job, pay equity, access to affordable, quality, comprehensive health care, and an easy and accessible way to bring our voices to our democracy provide women with opportunities to reach our highest potential.

We did see a few gains this session, particularly in regards to protecting women from the domestic and sexual violence many of us face. We were glad to see these gains – such as strengthening statues that can protect domestic and sexual violence victims from further harm, and also an effort to address the problem of human trafficking in North Carolina. Every time we strengthen these policies, we send a message that this kind of violence has no place in our society.

But this abuse is a complex problem requiring solutions from many different angles. We may need both the crisis services to keep us out of immediate harm as well as the support services - such as job training and affordable child care and housing - to guide us back to a new life of safety and self-reliance.

In addition to services for victims rescued from sex trafficking, we need to address the economic insecurity and gender inequality that makes young women vulnerable to trafficking in the first place. If we ignore these aspects of what also contributes to women experiencing abuse, we fear any gains made this past session will be diluted in the long run.

It's not enough to make some gains while taking more steps backwards. This is not the way towards equality, and our report card reflects our disappointment in the latest session.

But while we were disappointed with how the session ended in July, we are confident there are ways we can move forward in the coming short session. We hope lawmakers will listen to women's voices to help us correct this wrong course. Thank you.