Girls’ Leadership, Engagement, Agency and Development Act (LEAD Act) (S. 2766)

The Problem: Globally, about 132,000,000 adolescent girls between the ages of 6 and 17 are not enrolled in school. Moreover, women are largely underrepresented at all levels of public sector decision-making. Promoting adolescent girls and women’s education and pathway to political leadership will decrease the likelihood of child marriages, violence against women and promote the creation and maintenance of democratic societies.

- Only 24.5 percent of all national parliamentarians are women leaders.
- Women’s political participation promotes democracy by providing greater responsiveness to citizen needs and cooperation between party and ethnic lines.
- Research indicates that including women in the early stages of peace negotiations decreases corruption, enhances stability and promotes higher living standards in sectors like education and healthcare.
- For each year of continued secondary education, the likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 among adolescent girls will decrease by 5 percent.

The Solution: The bipartisan Girls LEAD Act will implement the following measures to increase adolescent girls’ participation in democracy, human rights and governance in the following ways:

- Establish a specific implementation plan to identify and address barriers to girls’ and women’s civil engagement and political participation in U.S. foreign assistance initiatives.
- Support girl-led and girl-focused civil society organizations with funding and technical assistance.
- Ensure that all foreign programs engage participants under the age of 18, and integrate metrics, benchmarks and monitoring capabilities to ensure accountability and effectiveness.

Supporters: The Girls LEAD Act was introduced by Sen. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) and has received bipartisan support from Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Sen. Christopher Coons (D-DE), Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR).