



# WRJ Advocacy Plan: From Education to Action

(Updated Summer 2021)

## Challenges and Opportunities

WRJ has a long and proud history of advocacy and engagement on public policy issues. We take action on the basis of existing resolutions and policy statements adopted by our leadership as well as the values of Reform and Progressive Judaism. We have been called upon to speak out on a wide range of issues, from cabinet nominations to international relations, from health care and reproductive rights to environmental regulations, from stranded refugees to issues before the U.S. or Canadian Supreme Court, in our evolving understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion, and in connection with legislation pending in Federal, State and Provincial governments. Over the years, we have witnessed the importance and impact of women's advocacy on these issues of concern in the massive public participation of millions of people in Women's Marches across the globe and in the individual grassroots actions of civil engagement through texting, phoning and postcarding together or from our homes. Being a part of WRJ amplifies our individual voices through collective action and deepens the impact of our collective action through our individual engagement with Social Action, Social Justice and Advocacy.

The scope and speed of this activity is overwhelming. It's difficult to know where and how to bring our Reform Jewish values into the public arena. If we try to do everything, we will be immobilized but doing nothing is not an option. To be effective, we need to prioritize and focus our energy and maximize our capacity to mobilize our members. To increase our capacity, we need to expand our financial and other resources to do the important social justice work at hand. To increase our impact, we need to emphasize education as well as action and work with our partners inside and outside of our Movement, and across city, state, province and WRJ District lines.

We will continue to organize, mobilize, seek partners, preach, teach, and lift up our voices to secure the America and Canada of our dreams...as WRJ women always have done. WRJ will continue to do what it does best – educate and organize WRJ women to be effective leaders and advocates for the values we share.

## Establishing Priorities

In setting priorities, WRJ will consider numerous criteria to determine which issues will take precedence over others. At times, we may rely on the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism or other Reform affiliates and coalition partners to lead on an issue. On high priority issues, WRJ may actively mobilize our members. We will remain flexible, as these criteria will shift at different times. We understand that difficult choices are always a part of advocacy work, as we balance the plethora of critical issues at stake in the current political arena with our limited capacity. Therefore, we consider the following factors in setting our priorities:

- Does WRJ and/or others in the Reform Movement already have policy on the issue?
- Do WRJ and its members and constituents have a unique interest in an issue, or will they be impacted directly (e.g., issues such as women's rights, equal pay, women's health, and reproductive rights)?
- Is the issue one that is imminent and critical?
- What degree of threat exists to our values and interests?
- Are other partners better situated to take the lead and assure coverage for an issue and, if so, will they be able to engage our members? By way of example, on Israel matters we can expect activity to be driven by others in the Reform Movement, including ARZA and the URJ Israel Leadership Network, the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) and the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC). On issues of anti-Semitism and extremism we can expect activity to be driven by the civil rights community such as ADL, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Jewish Federations.
- Are there coalitions we can join and/or other partners already working on the issue, or would WRJ need to create a coalition ourselves to be effective?
- Will our participation have an impact? Is the issue one which has real momentum and the possibility of moving our agenda forward?
- Does WRJ have any particular expertise or contacts that will be helpful on the issue?
- Will our absence on an issue be a missed opportunity or will it disappoint our membership if we do not prioritize the issue?
- Can WRJ effectively engage our membership around the issue?

## High priority issues

On high priority issues, WRJ will track and monitor the issue, prepare educational resources and action alerts to educate our members and constituents about the issue and opportunities to act, and use action alerts, social media and other tools to mobilize them to individual and collective action. Applying the criteria above to the wide range of issues about which WRJ cares deeply, the following issues are presumed to be high priorities:

- ✦ **Pay Equity and Fair Wages** – WRJ has been deeply involved in addressing these issues internally in the Reform Movement and its institutions and will continue working on this both internally and externally.
- ✦ **Women's Health and Reproductive Rights** – WRJ watches Supreme Court nominations closely for threats to the constitutional protections outlined in *Roe v Wade*. WRJ will continue to oppose state or federal restrictions that limit, and support policies that guarantee, access to birth control and safe abortion services. WRJ will work to assure women's reproductive health

and 'reproductive self-determination' through the Affordable Care Act or alternative health care plans and will oppose religious claims that would undermine women's health and reproductive rights.

- ✦ **Violence Against Women** – WRJ monitors and addresses issues related to domestic violence, date rape and campus violence, spousal and child abuse, trafficking, and the use of firearms in committing domestic violence.
- ✦ **Economic Justice** – WRJ continues to support labor rights, minimum/fair wage proposals, paidleave, and other issues including workplace discrimination that have high impact on women and families.
- ✦ **Israel** – WRJ will continue to work with our Israeli partners, including Women of the Wall, IRAC, and IMPJ to guarantee equal rights for women and religious pluralism in Israel, and to promote ideals of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the IMPJ and Israeli society.
- ✦ **Immigration Reform and Rights for Refugees and Asylum Seekers** – These issues particularly tug at Jewish hearts given our own history, and WRJ speaks out on these issues, working with others in the Reform Movement and the greater Jewish community.
- ✦ **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, specifically including Racial Justice** – WRJ is committed to doing the essential work of DEI within WRJ, in our Movement and in our Jewish, local and national communities, and in ourselves, working with partners in the Reform Movement and the greater community. While at any given time, focus may be on one or more particular vectors of DEI, WRJ understands DEI and Racial Justice work to be continuing work of ongoing improvement as we continue to educate ourselves and bend the arc of history toward justice, inclusion and belonging.

### Secondary Priority Issues

We cannot predict what issues will rise in priority due to events in our world or the needs of our communities. Where WRJ has policy, such as with regard to our Environment, we may not be as visible as on other issues, but we will be engaged. We will continue to advocate and lend our name to existing efforts through Congressional sign-on letters, amicus briefs, and sharing information produced by other partners through WRJ communication channels. We also will encourage our members to be engaged locally or on a District level on these issues where there are ongoing activities or local partnership opportunities, or Advocacy Opportunities in support of other WRJ Districts.

### Providing Education and Taking Action

The WRJ Advocacy Plan comes to life in different ways, reflecting our lay leaders and staff, the activity in our Movement, and the issues, challenges, and opportunities that confront us at a given time. For example, in 2021-22, WRJ will be active participants and partners in the RAC's Racial Justice Campaign and will be engaging in an internal DEI initiative.

The types of Advocacy education and action activity in which WRJ engages include, for example:

- **Education** – Provide issue pages on website and share information in the WRJ Advocacy Yammer group; produce action alerts and issue briefings

via webinars and workshops at conferences, virtually and otherwise; write blog posts, Strategies articles for the Weekly Digest and WRJ blog, and other longer-form pieces about issues; publish a regular Advocacy e-newsletter.

- **Conferences & Workshops** – Use opportunities when Reform Jewish women are gathered, either independently or in broader fora to raise awareness, and to provide social action, social justice, and advocacy training and other educational programs.

- **Coalitions, Partnerships and Cooperation** – Partner with others on issues of concern at the national, state, provincial, and local levels; provide resources to assist WRJ women to engage locally and at the District level. For example, this includes our representatives at the United Nations and at the RAC Commission on Social Action, our engagement with RAC's various campaigns, and our partnering with subject-matter experts or representatives of particular voices such as Keshet and the Women's Rabbinic Network.

- **Public Statements** – Statements, Resolutions, and signing onto Amicus Briefs, letters, testimony, etc. are among the ways that WRJ raises its voice in public collective action. The scope of these is always broader than our High Priorities, often reflecting legislation or court cases that arise, or emergent issues that call for response. We also provide our members with information about petitions, rallies, and other individual action opportunities.