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Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy Guide 2014

This WRJ guide is provided to help your sisterhood take the resolutions from our most recent Assembly and put them into action. It has program ideas and advocacy suggestions to involve your members in our newest areas of social action.

To review WRJ resolutions and statements, including those from recent Assemblies, you can visit the [Resolutions and Statements](#) page on our website.

Resolutions:

- ❖ [Voting Rights](#) (2013)
- ❖ [The School to Prison Pipeline](#) (2013)
- ❖ [Employee Rights](#) (2011)
- ❖ [Sustainable Consumption and Productions: Learning to Live Together](#) (2011)

How to be a Successful Advocate:

The Religious Action Center has many resources to help shape your sisterhood's skills and goals for Jewish social action:

- [How to be a Chai-Powered Lobbyist](#)
- [Why Advocacy is Central to Reform Judaism](#)

Review the resolutions with your sisterhood and **devote a meeting** to discussing what steps you want to take to bring WRJ social justice to your community.

Monitor the [WRJ blog](#) and look out for the **Weekly Digest newsletter** for social action ideas and updates.

2013 Resolution on Voting Rights

A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted. (Talmud, B'rachot 55a)

Women of Reform Judaism urges its affiliates to call upon the United States Congress to amend the section of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court struck down, reinstating a preclearance¹ requirement based on revised criteria that will satisfy the new guidelines established by the Court; and to monitor activities in their local provincial or state governments, oppose any efforts to restrict voting rights, and encourage voting by supporting nonpartisan voter registration and “Get Out the Vote” drives.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- ❖ **Educate your sisterhood and your community** on any provincial, state, or local election laws that affect voting. By running educational programs, you can **equip people with the information and skills they need** to be effective.
- ❖ **Run a voter registration drive:** depending on in what state or province you live, you can collect voter registration cards from your local Board of Elections, and get as many people you can registered to vote. **Be strategic** with where and when you run the drives: supermarkets and schools are high-traffic areas. Think about **partnering with other sisterhoods in your area**, or with a **women’s group from a local church, mosque, or other faith group**. With different connections in the community, you are likely to double your impact. Also, **be cognizant of timing**, as in some states you have to be registered by a certain point before the election to be able to vote. For more information on Get Out the Vote efforts, the Religious Action Center prepared a [GOTV Guide](#).
- ❖ A lot of programming and advocacy will happen around **Election Day**: Organize your sisterhood to **coordinate rides for people who need assistance** getting to the polls; volunteer as an **election monitor**; **work with non-partisan organizations** dedicated to Get Out the Vote initiatives, such as [Rock the Vote](#).
- ❖ The Reform Movement played an important role in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—we are dedicated to passing a new law to reinstate the preclearance requirement. Using the **attached talking points**, you can craft **Op-Eds** and **Letters to the Editor** to submit to your local newspapers. Additionally, these talking points can be used for direct advocacy to your Congressional Representatives and Senators, either for letters, phone calls, or meetings.
- ❖ *It is important to note that this is a complicated legal issue. Be aware that many of the challenges to the current law are being channeled through the judicial system.*

¹ Preclearance: certain municipalities, localities or states are required to have the Department of Justice review and approve all changes to election law. These areas have had issues with voting in the past, and are mostly in the Southern states. This resource from the New York Times shows [The Formula Behind the Voting Rights Act](#).

- ! *Also, please be aware that all participation in elections must be non-partisan. When volunteering as a sisterhood or synagogue, you may not work for a campaign or endorse a candidate. As an individual, you are free to support whomever you choose.*

2013 Resolution on the School to Prison Pipeline

R. Hanuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children. (Talmud, Shabbat 119b)

This resolution² calls on sisterhoods to: examine the policies of their local school districts and schools, and encourage them to create tolerance policies with disciplinary actions that consider the circumstances surrounding an incident; urge school districts, schools, and police departments to require and provide training about children and the appropriate role of discipline in schools to any and all school resource officers and security personnel; work to make certain that school districts and schools are not channeling students into the criminal justice system inappropriately; study all of the issues around the school to prison pipeline including the policies of local prosecutors and juvenile courts to find ways to work with local officials to prevent the pipeline from continuing; provide mentoring and tutoring, offer other programs to at-risk children in their local schools, or refer students to appropriate community resources to help interrupt the school to prison pipeline and support local public schools.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- ❖ **Plan an educational workshop for your synagogue on current issues in schools**, if you know that a problem such as this is occurring locally. As the resolution indicates, the first step is to keep abreast of the policies in your local district, particularly ones that suggest the presence of a school to prison pipeline.
- ❖ **Volunteer with your school**: tutor students, participate in a mentorship program. You can do this through the school or with a community organization that works in your schools.
- ❖ **Fundraise** for the school, school district, or organization that you are working with to benefit students.
- ❖ **Partner** with other local Jewish and women's groups, or local faith groups (think about women's groups at churches in your area, for example) to do broader outreach. Together you can **attend school board meetings, coordinate advocacy**, and engage members in other community-based programs.

² Explanation of 'school to prison pipeline:' this terminology refers to recent trends in which, instead of using the usual school administrative processes for minor disciplinary problems, school resource officers – who are often members of a police department – arrest students and place them into the criminal justice system. This sends students down a path that will give them criminal records and make it more difficult for them to get jobs and participate fully in society as adults.

- Keep tabs on what is happening in your schools, and if there are potential policy changes or important developments around the issue of the school to prison pipeline, using the **attached talking points**, you can write **Op-Eds or Letters to the Editor** from your sisterhood or synagogue, or do **direct advocacy** to your school board officials or local representatives.

2011 Resolution on Employee Rights

*You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery.
The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning (Leviticus 19:13).*

WRJ calls on all its affiliates to educate their members and congregation members on the issues at stake in the right to form unions and to engage in collective bargaining; to oppose legislation aimed at barring workers from forming unions or restricting the rights of unions to bargain over the terms or conditions or benefits of employment or retirement; and to join with other organizations to support the right of workers to organize unions and the right of those unions to petition the government, to bargain collectively, and to support their members.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- ❖ Coordinate an educational workshop for your sisterhood and your congregation: learn about the current federal, state, provincial, and local issues and legislation that pertain to employee rights; share the importance of the Jewish perspective and prominent history on this issue.
- ❖ If there is employee rights related legislation moving, either at your local or on the national level, **organize direct advocacy to your elected officials**. This can take many forms: letter-writing, petitions, call-in days, or in-person meetings with staff. One item to keep in mind is whether or not you want to organize advocacy from a singularly Jewish perspective or from an interfaith perspective. This will help shape who important partners will be when you plan for this advocacy. Use the **attached talking points** for guidance on how to articulate the WRJ/Jewish perspective. [Interfaith Worker Justice](#) has many resources for different faith perspectives on employee rights.
- ❖ Encourage your synagogue (and other places, like your own workplace) to **use fair-trade and union-made products**.
- ❖ Support strikers in your local community—learn about the issue that they are striking about, and work with other local organizations to consider how your sisterhood can offer support.

2011 Resolution on Sustainable Consumption and Production: Learning to Live Together

The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land (Leviticus 25:23-24).

Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its affiliates to: mobilize their members and congregational members to improve knowledge and understanding of the environmental and social impacts of our consumption and production choices, practices and policies, and to make them more sustainable and socially responsible; encourage religious and public schools to include information about sustainable and responsible living in their established curricula; form partnerships with other like-minded organizations to identify and develop coordinated actions and grassroots initiatives to build public support for government and business policies and practices that protect and promote human and environmental health and well-being, encourage sustainable livelihoods and lifestyles, and reduce the ecological footprint; support changes in government and business policies at all levels that move us toward a more sustainable economy; encourage individuals and organizations in the fields of science, research, and education to define, develop, and disseminate the innovative solutions needed to transition to sustainable economies; continue to support the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the 2012 UN review of the Earth Summit during the Rio+ 20 meeting with an emphasis on promoting and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy

- ❖ **Organize an educational workshop** for your sisterhood and/or congregation; consider screening a documentary on this topic such as *[Food, Inc.](#)* or *[King Corn](#)*.
- ❖ **Start a book club** for your sisterhood and other members of your community and start with *[The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic](#)* to deepen your knowledge and start a dialogue about Judaism and food justice close to home.
- ❖ When possible, use reusable or biodegradable silverware, shopping bags, and the like; encourage your sisterhood, congregation, and people in your networks to do the same.
- ❖ Participate in **event management** at your synagogue, workplace, or other places you frequent; be conscience of **where the food is coming from, how much waste is produced and how extra food is taken care of.**

- ❖ Consider efforts that could be centered around your Jewish community: consider starting a **community garden**; if that is not possible, look into **Community Sustained Agriculture**, and see if your sisterhood could host one; check the rules for your community and look into **whether your synagogue could start to compost**.
- ❖ Partner with education-based non-profits to bring food justice into schools
- ❖ Start a **Challah for Hunger** program in your synagogue: bake challah to sell and the proceeds go to a food bank or a local anti-hunger organization.

Attachments:

1. Talking Points for Voting Rights
2. Talking Points for School to Prison Pipeline
3. Talking Points for Employee Rights
4. Talking Points for Sustainable Consumption and Production: Learning to Live Together
5. For more information: Organizations and Websites

Talking Points: Voting Rights

- ❖ Reform Jewish Women have long been dedicated to the right of all citizens to vote, including as strident advocates of the 19th Amendment. In 1948, NFTS (now WRJ) passed a resolution entitled “Human Rights” denouncing the poll tax as an obstacle to the franchise.
- ❖ More than any other segment of the white population, **Jews played an active role in the dramatic civil and voting rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s**, a movement that ultimately granted citizens of color unfettered access to the franchise.
- ❖ Given the historic role of our Movement in the civil rights struggle, allegations of voter disenfranchisement and evidence of higher numbers of disqualified votes for citizens of color compel us to speak out. **It is our duty to ensure that all citizens are afforded the opportunity to vote and have their votes counted.**
- ❖ Current developments in the arena of voting rights call us, as women of faith, to speak up against the laws that would curb voter’s access to the ballot:
 - ❖ Since 2010, more than 30 states have introduced for example, such laws, which promulgate complex identification requirements, shorten the voting period, and increase the ability to challenge a ballot.
 - ❖ While ensuring the integrity of the voting process is important, almost no instances of voter fraud have been confirmed over the past 10 years.
 - ❖ Denying anyone the right to vote because of complex and difficult requirements is unjust.
 - ❖ The so-called voter ID laws effectively target the poor, communities of color, the elderly, and students.
- ❖ **When, in 2013, the Supreme Court struck down Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County, Ala. v. Holder*, the formula for “preclearance” was declared unconstitutional.**
 - ❖ The Court ruled that Section 4(b) went beyond the power of Congress to enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments, therefore jeopardizing the appropriate balance of power between the federal government and the sovereignty of the states. The justices in the majority also objected to the formula, deciding it was based on out-of-date information, according to the Court.
 - ❖ This ‘preclearance’ formula had ensured that states and localities with a history of voting discrimination had to submit planned changes to voting procedures to the Department of Justice in advance of making any changes, allowing for governmental review and assessment of potential negative impact on voting rights.
 - ❖ New legislation would supplement the existing statutes in the Voting Rights Act, but also would replace what the Court struck down with a new formula to determine preclearance

that would pass constitutional muster, but would also be effective in protecting voting rights.

- ❖ **Those jurisdictions previously governed by the preclearance provision now have license to change voting laws in potentially discriminatory ways.** Shortly after the Supreme Court decision was announced, *The New York Times* reported that, “Texas announced shortly after the decision that a voter identification law that had been blocked would go into effect immediately, and that redistricting maps there would no longer need federal approval.”
- ❖ **We can make a difference by contacting our Representatives and Senators and asking them to support a bill that will instate a new formula that would require certain areas to go through the “preclearance” process.**

Talking Points: School to Prison Pipeline

- ❖ The School to Prison Pipeline is a **recent phenomenon**: instead of using the usual school administrative processes for minor disciplinary problems, school resource officers – who are often members of a police department – arrest students and place them into the criminal justice system.
- ❖ **This sends students down a path that will give them criminal records** and make it **more difficult for them to get jobs and participate fully in society** as adults.
- ❖ **Reform Jewish women have long been dedicated to the rights children and students.**
- ❖ While all communities want safe schools, zero tolerance policies prevent a nuanced approach that examines all of the circumstances surrounding an event in determining penalties. Such policies can result in overreactions to some school transgressions. For example, schools have expelled or given long suspensions to students who bring in a knife to cut a cake, or bring cough drops or over-the-counter pain medication to the building.
- ❖ These expulsions leave children at greater risk of falling into the reach of the criminal justice system.
- ❖ **Some schools are quick to expel or bring criminal charges against students with behavioral or learning disabilities.** In this era of high stakes testing for schools, it is advantageous for schools to remove students who perform badly and bring the school's statistics down. This provides extra incentive for the school to take extreme measures.
- ❖ Some schools set up barriers that discourage at-risk students from returning to school. All of this increases the likelihood that the most vulnerable children will be lost from the school systems and end up in prisons instead.
- ❖ **We should urge the school board/principal to implement tolerance policies that are good for students and for teachers.** Such policies should discourage misbehavior, but also provide disciplinary solutions that do not continue the school to prison pipeline.
- ❖ Community activists as well as the local school board/principal should work with local, community organizations and resources to provide the extra educational and leadership support the students may need.

Talking Points: Employee Rights

- ❖ In many states, “**right-to-work**” laws create an impediment to effective union **representation**. Although the National Labor Relations Act authorizes employers and unions to enter into collective bargaining agreements that require employees to pay union dues after they become employed, these agreements are not allowed in states with right-to-work laws.
- ❖ **Those who oppose right-to-work laws point out that union security agreements require employees to pay only core dues**—dues that cover the expenses for negotiating and enforcing collective bargaining agreements—and not expenses for political activities or organizing other employees.
- ❖ Because unions are obligated to bargain on behalf of all members of the bargaining unit and to represent all bargaining unit members in grievance proceedings—whether or not they pay dues—**right-to-work laws make it financially more difficult for unions to effectively represent workers**.
- ❖ **The ability to organize and to engage in collective bargaining can make a significant difference in the lives of American workers**. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the union wage premium—the degree to which union wages exceed non-union wages—is 15.5 percent when adjusted for comparable experience, education, region, industry, occupation and marital status. For minorities, this premium is even greater: 20.9 percent for African Americans and 23.2 percent for Hispanics.
- ❖ **The right to organize is not just an economic issue; it is also a human rights issue**. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which WRJ supported from the beginning, affirms that

“[E]veryone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”
- ❖ Regardless of whether we agree or disagree with the positions taken by any one union, **WRJ supports the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining**.
- ❖ Unions protect employees’ interests in safe working conditions, good wages and benefits, and reasonable policies, including the requirement of cause for dismissal. **The rights to join unions and to bargain collectively are included in our cherished right to the freedoms of association, speech, assembly, and to petition the government**.
- ❖ As members of Women of Reform Judaism, we strongly encourage elected officials to oppose any legislation that would hinder collective bargaining, unionization, and the rights of all individuals in the workplace.

Talking Points:
Sustainable Consumption and Production: Learning to Live Together

- ❖ WRJ, formerly NFTS, has **consistently demonstrated care and concern regarding the effects of the environment on people and nations**, with resolutions on topics from environmental pollution to energy conservation to children's health and the environment to global warming, with the earliest dating back to 1969.
- ❖ **In 2006, WRJ endorsed the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals**, which, in seeking to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, address concerns of equitable distribution, sustainability, and global development.
- ❖ Resources are the backbone of every economy. However, our current resource use is such that **we jeopardize the chances for future generations and developing nations to have access to their fair share of scarce resources that are imperiled.**
- ❖ **Our resource use has serious consequences on the environment, pushing our shared but finite planet's ability to sustain its growing population.** These effects risk being exacerbated once the developing world takes up growth and resource use similar to the industrialized countries. There is a growing understanding and concern that global security depends on sustainable practices and development.
- ❖ **Attention to sustainability and improving people's lives while minimizing harm to nature ties together many interconnecting goals such as: addressing climate change; global health; women and children's issues; and food, water, and energy shortages.** Of immediate concern is the lack of available food caused by unsustainable production, inefficient transportation, and inequitable distribution of food. Attention also must be focused on the harm caused by industrial pollution and improper waste management as well as on the destructive practices and socio-political impacts of mining industries in the developing world.
- ❖ Addressing climate change requires us to learn how to live within the ecological limits of the earth so that we will not compromise the ecological or economic security of those who come after us. **Genesis 2:15 emphasizes our responsibility to protect the integrity of the environment so that its diverse species, including humans, can thrive: "The human being was placed in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it."**
- ❖ **Jewish tradition teaches us that human domain over nature does not include a license to abuse the environment.** The Talmudic concept *bal tashchit*, "do not destroy," asserts God's ownership of the land. From this basic concept it follows that any act of destruction is an offense against the property of God.
- ❖ **As Reform Jewish women, we encourage legislation that pursues sustainable consumption and production goals in order to create a more equitable and a more earth-conscious global society.**

For More Information: Organizations and Websites

Voting Rights:

Organizations:

- ❖ [League of Women Voters](#)
- ❖ [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People \(NAACP\)](#)
- ❖ [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- ❖ [FairVote.org](#)
- ❖ [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights \(LCCHR\)](#)

Articles:

- ❖ *WRJ blog*: [Social Action at Assembly: Resolution on Voting Rights](#)
- ❖ *The Huffington Post*: [POLLSTER UPDATE: The Data Behind The Supreme Court's Voting Rights Act Decision](#)
- ❖ *The New York Times*: [Supreme Court Invalidates Key Part of Voting Rights Act](#)
- ❖ *ProPublica*: [Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know About Voter ID Laws](#)
- ❖ *Ballotopedia*: [State by State Voter ID Law](#)

School to Prison Pipeline:

Organizations:

- ❖ [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- ❖ [Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- ❖ [Children's Defense Fund](#)
- ❖ [Advancement Project](#)
- ❖ [NAACP – Legal Defense Fund](#)

Articles:

- ❖ *WRJ blog*: [Social Action at Assembly: Resolution on the School to Prison Pipeline](#)
- ❖ *Religious Action Center*: [Resources and Legislative Summary on Crime and Criminal Justice](#)
- ❖ *Religious Action Center*: [Resources and Legislative Summary on Education Issues](#)
- ❖ *The Huffington Post*: [Nation's 7th Largest School District Takes Huge Step To Curb 'School To Prison Pipeline'](#)
- ❖ *Rolling Stone*: [The School to Prison Pipeline: A Nationwide Problem for Equal Rights](#)
- ❖ *Rethinking Schools*: [Editorial – Stop the School to Prison Pipeline](#)
- ❖ *The New York Times*: [Seeing the Toll, Schools Revise Zero-Tolerance](#)

Employee Rights:

Organizations:

- ❖ Interfaith Worker Justice:
 - Resources on planning a [successful educational workshop](#)
 - Faith Community Guide to [Supporting Hospitality Workers](#)

- ❖ **National Employment Law Project**
- ❖ **Family Values at Work**
- ❖ **The National Partnership for Women and Families**
- ❖ **United States Bureau of Labor Statistics**
- ❖ **Jewish Labor Committee**

Articles:

- ❖ *RAC blog:* [L'Dor V'Dor: Champion the Poor and the Needy](#)
- ❖ *The New York Times:* [Wisconsin Supreme Court Hears Arguments on Collective Bargaining Law](#)
- ❖ *The New York Times:* [Court Considers 'Neutrality Agreements' Between Unions and Employers](#)
- ❖ *Salon:* [New labor movement emerges in Scott Walker's Wisconsin](#)

Sustainable Consumption and Production: Learning to Live Together

Organizations:

- ❖ **Hazon**
- ❖ **Teva Learning Center**
- ❖ **Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)**
- ❖ **United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform**

Articles:

- ❖ *Religious Action Center:* [Resources and Legislative Summaries on Issues Pertaining to the Environment](#)
- ❖ *The Atlantic:* [A Report Card for Humanity: 1900-2050](#)
- ❖ *United Nations:* [Trends in Sustainable Development: Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production](#)
- ❖ *The Nation:* [How Resource Scarcity and Climate Change Could Produce a Global Explosion](#)