

Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy Guide 2016

This WRJ guide is provided to help your sisterhood take the resolutions from our 2015 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 Highlighted in this Guide:

- ❖ [Pay Equity \(2015\)](#)
- ❖ [Paid Family and Medical Leave \(2015\)](#)
- ❖ [Distracted Driving \(2015\)](#)

Social Justice and the Reform Movement

For more than 100 years, inspired by Jewish traditions and values, WRJ has pioneered social action in the Reform Movement and the Jewish community. From advancing women's leadership and equality in Jewish life and in society at large to championing numerous critical social justice issues, WRJ has been at the forefront of major efforts in the work of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.

- ❖ [WRJ and Social Justice](#)
- ❖ [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 newsletter and additional Advocacy Update emails for social action ideas and updates.

[2015 Resolution on Pay Equity](#)

Jewish tradition teaches the importance of paying fair wages as a matter of justice. In Leviticus 19:13, we are taught that to withhold a worker's wages is to defraud her, an act akin to robbery. In Genesis 1:27, we learn that all human beings are created b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of the divine, and are thus deserving of equal rights and treatment. Together, these teachings compel us to fight for fair wages for all people.

Given the profound injustice of unequal pay, Women of Reform Judaism reaffirms its commitment to achieving pay equity and calls upon its sisterhoods to: urge the swift adoption of legislation that would provide women who face sex-based wage discrimination with a straightforward, accessible path for recourse; work with synagogue leadership to enact just compensation policies for clergy and staff at all levels; implement sisterhood or congregational programs to empower women with tools to address pay inequity; and join with others to advocate for pay equity in their Jewish community and in their broader local community.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy:

- ❖ **Plan an educational workshop** for your sisterhood or congregation on the issue of women's pay equity. Because pay equity impacts not just women, but the entire family, consider partnering with your congregation's brotherhood, preschool families, or others. At the workshop, you can **show this video of Lilly Ledbetter**, winner of the Jane Evans Pursuit of Justice Award, speaking at WRJ's 2015 Assembly. You can also **have a discussion** using [WRJ's living Talmud on pay equity](#), which explores Jewish values related to women's equality and wage discrimination.
- ❖ **If your sisterhood has a book club, read Lilly Ledbetter's book *Grace and Grit*.** Ledbetter's story has become one of the most important and prominent narratives in the current fight for paycheck fairness. Use [WRJ's discussion guide](#) to help initiate your group's conversation about the book.
- ❖ By mentoring women in the workforce, we can share our experiences to help them strengthen key skills and expand their professional networks. **Start a mentorship program for young women in your congregation or for college students who will soon enter the workforce.**
- ❖ **Look into your congregation's paycheck fairness policies.** WRJ women can take the lead in their communities by ensuring their congregations examine their own paycheck fairness, and they can extend that investigation into other, local Jewish communal institutions.
- ❖ **Advocate for the Paycheck Fairness Act**, which is legislation that would make it more difficult for employers to hide wage discrimination, reward them for good pay practices, and help train women and girls in salary negotiation. **Run a sisterhood advocacy program or day** during which participants call their Members of Congress or write letters urging them to support this important legislation **using the attached talking points and [WRJ's gender wage gap legislative guide](#).**

- ❖ **Research the gender wage gap and equal pay laws in your own state** by using [this database](#). If there are potential policy changes or important developments around the issue, using the **attached talking points** and [WRJ's gender wage gap legislative guide](#), you can write **Op-Eds** or **Letters to the Editor** from your sisterhood or synagogue, or **engage in direct advocacy** with your local lawmakers.
- ❖ **Mark your calendar for Equal Pay Day**, which is the day each year that symbolizes on average how far into the year women must work to earn what their male counterparts earned in the previous year. In 2016, equal pay day will be observed on April 12.

Talking Points: Pay Equity

- ❖ Women of Reform Judaism has long been dedicated to women's rights, economic equality, and workplace fairness. In 2015, WRJ launched a pay equity initiative to begin a new conversation about women's equality in the workplace, in society, and in our personal lives to ensure that the next generation of women will not face the same injustices women face today.
- ❖ Women's pay equity is a problem that affects us all, because when a woman loses income, not only does her economic security diminish, but also that of her family. Women are the heads of more than 15 million American households, and around 30 percent of those households have incomes that fall below the poverty line. Decreasing the wage gap and achieving pay equity for women would mean that fewer families would live their lives in poverty and would ensure a better future for millions of children.
- ❖ In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed so that employers no longer could legally pay men and women different salaries for performing equal work. With this legislation and other important civil rights protections, the wage gap has narrowed, but is nowhere near closed.
- ❖ In 2009, The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was the first bill President Barack Obama signed into law. Under this law, each discriminatory paycheck (rather than simply the original decision to discriminate) resets the 180-day limit to file a claim of wage discrimination.
- ❖ In September 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau released new data announcing that women on average are paid only 79 cents for every dollar paid to men. At this rate, women will not reach full pay equity until the year 2059. The wage gap is greater for women of color. African American women are paid only 60 cents and Latinas are paid a mere 55 cents for every dollar paid to white men. Pay equity also varies by location, ranging from 65 cents for every dollar in Louisiana to 90 cents for every dollar in Washington D.C.
- ❖ Although specific legislation to combat wage discrimination already exists, the persistent gap between men's and women's salaries indicates that action is still needed.
- ❖ The Paycheck Fairness Act (S. 862/H.R. 1619) would take steps to correct pay discrimination by closing loopholes in the Equal Pay Act, and would bar retaliation against workers who disclose their wages. This bill would strengthen the Equal Pay Act to ensure that it provides effective protection against sex-based pay discrimination, allowing women to receive the same remedies in court for pay discrimination as those subjected to discrimination based on race or national origin.
- ❖ **WRJ calls upon its sisterhoods to advocate for the passage of laws that address gender wage discrimination.** We can make a difference by contacting our Members of Congress and telling them to support the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Additional Resources and Information on Pay Equity

- ❖ [The National Partnership for Women and Families](#)
- ❖ [The National Women's Law Center](#)
- ❖ [The American Association of University Women](#)

2015 Resolution on Paid Family and Medical Leave

“To vex people who are coping with difficulties is an iniquity and a cause for punishment. Those people [workers] are sufficiently burdened already, as a matter of course, without that added affliction.” (Rabbi Judah ben Samuel of Ratisbon, 13th Century).

Given its longstanding commitment to economic justice and the well-being of families, Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its sisterhoods to: support the concept of paid family and medical leave policies while assessing the feasibility and impact of specific proposals at all levels of government; help build coalitions and advocate for the passage of paid family and medical leave laws; and urge their congregations and all arms of the Reform Movement to provide paid family and medical leave to their employees and set an example for their communities.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy:

- ❖ **Plan an educational workshop** for your congregation on the importance of paid family and medical leave. Because this is an issue that not only impacts women, but the entire family, **partner with your congregation’s brotherhood, preschool families, or others.**
- ❖ **Consider organizing a screening of the film [The Raising of America](#)**, which addresses how our larger society structures opportunities for healthy child development, which is an issue that is intertwined with paid family and medical leave.
- ❖ Look into your synagogue’s paid family and medical leave policy, and **urge your synagogue to provide for paid family and medical leave to their employees** and set an example for their communities if they do not do so already.
- ❖ **Advocate for the FAMILY Act (H.R. 1439/S.786)**, which is legislation that would create a national paid family and medical leave program that would guarantee people paid time off when serious illnesses or injuries arise or new children arrive. **Run a sisterhood advocacy program or day** during which participants call their Members of Congress or write letters urging them to support this important legislation **using the attached talking points.**
- ❖ **Research the paid family and medical leave laws for your own state** by using [this interactive map](#). If there are potential policy changes or important developments around the issue, using the **attached talking points**, you can write **Op-Eds** or **Letters to the Editor** from your sisterhood or synagogue, or **engage in direct advocacy** with your local lawmakers.

Talking Points: Paid Family and Medical Leave

- ❖ **It is time to establish national paid family and medical leave.** According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, only 13 percent of the workforce has paid family leave through their employers, and less than 40 percent has personal medical leave through an employer-provided disability program.
- ❖ **The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), legislation which WRJ strongly supported** has protected millions of people from losing their jobs when serious medical needs arise. However, FMLA only covers 60% of the workforce, and it only guarantees *unpaid* leave, which many people cannot afford to take.
- ❖ **Women of Reform Judaism has long been dedicated to economic justice and worker justice**, as demonstrated by our support for universal healthcare, paid sick leave, and pay equity.
- ❖ Though we've seen significant progress toward worker justice, **too many workers still must choose between their health or the health of their families and their jobs and financial security.**
- ❖ **A federal paid family and medical leave insurance program would not only benefit employees and their families, but it would also benefit businesses and the economy.** When people have to decline pay or leave a job when a serious medical or caregiving need arises, this often limits their ability to afford the most basic necessities. In addition to hurting workers and their families, this hurts businesses that depend on revenue from consumer purchases, and it stifles economic growth.
- ❖ **Paid leave helps keep families on track to meet new expenses due to health events.** In the year following a birth, new mothers who take paid leave are more likely than those who take no paid leave to stay in the workforce and 54% more likely to report wage increases.
- ❖ **The *FAMILY Act (H.R. 1439/S.786)*** would provide workers with up to 12 weeks of partially paid leave when they need it for their own serious health condition, including pregnancy and childbirth; the serious health condition of a child, parent, spouse or domestic partner; the birth or adoption of a child; and/or for particular military caregiving and leave purposes. The program would be funded through small employee and employer payroll deductions, rather than putting the full cost of providing paid leave on employers. It is modeled on successful state programs and reflects the needs of our changing workforce.
- ❖ **WRJ calls upon its sisterhoods to advocate for the passage of paid family and medical leave laws.** We can make a difference by contacting our Members of Congress and telling them to support the *FAMILY Act*.

Additional Resources and Information on Paid Family and Medical Leave and Advocacy

- ❖ [The National Partnership for Women and Families](#)
- ❖ [A Better Balance](#)
- ❖ [MomsRising](#)
- ❖ [Center for American Progress](#)

[2015 Resolution on Distracted Driving](#)

“Consider three things, and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you, a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all of your deeds written down in a book.” (Pirkei Avot 2:1)

Given the prevalence and clear dangers of distracted driving, Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its sisterhoods to: encourage members to pledge not to text or use a hand-held cell phone while driving and to limit hands-free phone conversations only to instances of absolute necessity; launch a congregation-wide campaign to encourage others—including adults, teens, and soon-to-be drivers—to take the pledge; educate members about the dangers of distracted driving through programming and partnerships with others in the synagogue and community; partner with their synagogue’s religious school, youth group, and other community groups to educate students about the dangers of distracted driving; urge the passage of legislation to promote safe driving; and work with the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) to educate drivers about the impact of distracted driving and encourage individuals to pledge not to use cell phones while driving.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy:

- ❖ **Organize an educational workshop** on the dangers of distracted driving, and consider making it a joint workshop with your congregation’s youth group or religious school. There are ample educational materials available on distraction.gov.
- ❖ **Have your sisterhood members pledge** not to text or use a handheld cell phone while driving, and to limit hands-free phone conversations only to instances of absolute necessity by using [WRJ’s online pledge. Launch a campaign](#) to encourage congregation members to educate themselves on distracted driving and pledge the same.
- ❖ In addition to partnering with your congregation’s youth group, **partner with a local school or youth organization** to continue educating around distracted driving. You can also partner with your [local NFTY Region](#) in order to reach more new drivers.
- ❖ [Research the laws on distracted driving in your state](#). If your state does not have adequate distracted driving laws, advocate for their passage. You can do this by writing letters or setting up meetings with your politicians.

Talking Points: Distracted Driving

- ❖ **Distracted driving occurs when a person’s attention is diverted from the roadway and primary task of driving.** These types of distractions include texting, using a cell phone or smart phone, eating and drinking, grooming, and adjusting a radio or CD player.
- ❖ Because text messaging requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far **the most alarming distraction.**
- ❖ **Distracted driving is a deadly behavior.** According to AAA, distraction contributes to 16% of all fatal crashes, leading to around 5,000 deaths every year.
- ❖ AAA also found that distraction “latency” lasts an average of 27 seconds. **This means that even after a driver stops their distracting activity, they are not fully engaged with the task of driving.**
- ❖ **Teenagers are among the drivers most impaired by distraction.** In one study, teen drivers were distracted almost a quarter of the time they were behind the wheel. WRJ supports partnering with a congregation’s religious school, youth group, and NFTY in order to educate teen drivers on the dangers of distracted driving.
- ❖ **There is no federal law that addresses distracted driving.** Instead, almost all traffic regulation is mandated by individual states.
- ❖ **Currently, 46 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands ban text messaging for all drivers.** All but five have primary enforcement, which means that an officer can ticket the driver for the offense without any other traffic violation taking place. Of the four states without an all-driver texting ban, two prohibit text messaging by novice drivers, and one restricts school bus drivers from texting.
- ❖ **Currently, 14 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands prohibit all drivers from using handheld cellphones while driving.**
- ❖ **We encourage legislation that promotes safe driving and deters and appropriately punishes distracted driving.**
- ❖ **One of the best ways to address and prevent distracted driving is through education. WRJ calls upon its sisterhoods to create and engage in programs that will educate congregations and the wider community around the dangers of distracted driving, and to have people pledge not to drive while distracted.**

Additional Resources and Information on Distracted Driving and Advocacy:

- ❖ Distraction.gov
- ❖ [Hands Free Info](#)
- ❖ [Governors Highway Safety Association](#)
- ❖ [Association for Safe International Road Travel](#)
- ❖ [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#)