



Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy Guide 2018

This WRJ guide is provided to help your sisterhood put the most recent resolutions into action. It includes program ideas, talking points, and advocacy suggestions to involve your members in our newest priorities for social action.

To review WRJ resolutions and statements, you can visit the Resolutions and Statements page on our website.

Resolutions and Statements Highlighted in this Guide:

- [Child Marriage](#) (2018)
- [Affordable Housing](#) (2018)

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](#)

Review the resolutions with your sisterhood and **devote a meeting** to discussing what steps you should 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.

WRJ Child Marriage Advocacy Guide

2018 Resolution on Child Marriage

*When will redemption come? . . . When we grant to every person the rights we claim for ourselves.
(Gates of Prayer, p. 211)*

Given the devastating impact of child marriage on children around the world and in North America, Women of Reform Judaism calls upon its sisterhoods, women's groups, and individual members to: educate themselves and their members about the impact of child marriage locally, nationally, and globally; call on the United States and Canada to establish 18 years of age as the federal minimum age for marriage, with no exceptions; support state and provincial legislation, which would make 18 the minimum age of marriage, with no exceptions; work with elected officials in states or provinces that permit child marriage with the consent of the parents or judicial approval to pass legislation to require adequate safeguards to ensure that minors have legal standing and the right to oppose or prevent the marriage; support organizations that promote an end to child marriage in the United States, Canada, and globally.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy:

- Become informed by holding programs on the dangers of child marriage for girls. Useful resources can be found in the following places:
 - UNICEF's [child marriage information page](#) and [data website](#)
 - The [International Center for Research on Women website](#) includes extensive resources, including background information, [fact sheets](#), and several reports detailing frameworks for ending child marriage
 - [Girls Not Brides](#) has many resources, including a donation pages for [many organizations working to end child marriage](#), and [guides on how to take action](#) to get various levels of government to end child marriage.
- Celebrate the [International Day of the Girl Child](#) on October 11th.
- Support state, provincial, and local legislation banning child marriage and eliminating exceptions to age minimums for marriages with parents' or judges' approval. It is encouraged to support partial measures towards a long-range goal of no exceptions. Even if legislation does not support child marriage with no exceptions, we can still promote legislation that helps push towards this goal. Here are a few examples:
 - Florida just passed House Bill 335 which bans marriages for anyone under 17 years old, with restrictions. This was a compromise from the previous Florida Senate bill which made 18 the minimum age for marriage, with no exceptions.
 - This past summer, Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York [signed a law which eliminated the state's exemptions](#), banning all marriage before 17 and allowing marriage at 17 only with a judge's permission.
- Push for foreign aid reform. Women and children are among the poorest of the global population. In much of the world women are not free to earn an income, feed their families, or protect themselves and their children from violence. U.S. foreign assistance needs to be

invested in economic opportunities for women, to lift them, their families, and communities out of poverty.

Talking Points: Child Marriage

- Child marriage is a human rights violation that is particularly harmful to young girls. Child brides are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases than are adult women and their pregnancies face higher risks, including death, during delivery. They are often separated from their families and communities and become isolated. Because they usually cannot continue in school, early marriage traps them in ongoing poverty.
- This problem is not only international. According to the non-profit [Unchained at Last](#), it is estimated that nearly one quarter of a million children under the age of 18, some as young as 10 years of age, were married between 2000 and 2010 in the United States.
- In Canada, the legal minimum age of marriage is 16, with no exceptions, according to the 2005 Civil Marriage Act and the 2015 Criminal Code. The minimum age of marriage is set by federal law, but provinces can legislate on marriage and common law unions. While no one can marry before the age of 16, provinces have different policies for whether a child needs their guardians' consent to marry if they are under 18 or 19.
- Making 18 the minimum age, with no exceptions, protects minors from the possibility of having partners forced upon them by their parents. Exceptions allow parental approval to trump existing law and potentially push a child into an unwanted marriage.
- Marriage, whether voluntary or involuntary, involving girls and young women is a problem, both internationally and domestically. Human Rights Watch notes that "The emerging consensus of international human rights standards is that the minimum age of marriage should be set at 18." A minimum age of 18 provides an "objective rather than subjective standard of maturity which safeguards a child from being married when they are not physically, mentally or emotionally ready...and will also help ensure that children are able to give their free and full consent to marry."
- The consequences of child marriage are devastating. In the United States, according to a New York Times article, child marriage is associated with increased occurrences of heart disease, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, death related to pregnancy, and mental health disorders. Women who marry under the age of 19 are fifty percent more likely to drop out of school and subsequently end up in low-paying jobs.
- Women of Reform Judaism has a long history of resolutions in support of the health, education, and well-being of children. In 2009, WRJ issued a [Board Statement on Child Marriage](#), that urged support of the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009, which focused on diplomatic and programmatic initiatives to fight child marriage primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The bill received unanimous bi-partisan support in the Senate yet failed to pass in 2009 and failed again after being reintroduced in 2011. The United States lacks a federal law establishing a minimum age for marriage, and states have not adequately filled this gap. Women of Reform Judaism urges federal and state officials to address this issue with legislation, and to work with other nations and the United Nations to protect girls.

Additional Resources and Information on Child Marriage

- [Human Rights Watch](#)
- [Unchained at Last](#)
- [Girls Not Brides](#)

WRJ Affordable Housing Advocacy Guide

2018 Resolution on Affordable Housing

“If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend them sufficient for whatever they need.” Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

Women of Reform Judaism, reaffirming its ongoing commitment to equity, affordable housing, and economic justice, and believing that these issues go hand in hand, therefore calls upon its sisterhoods, women’s groups, and individual members to: partner with local advocates and agencies (both public and private) to educate themselves and their members about, and to advocate for, affordable housing in their communities; urge their elected officials to increase the supply of affordable housing and rental assistance; urge their elected officials to increase public sector investment in new affordable housing, urge their elected officials to promote private sector investment in new affordable housing and housing financing options that will encourage private sector development of affordable housing, urge their elected officials to provide better access to affordable housing to families with children, veterans, seniors and other vulnerable low-income populations.

Recommended Sisterhood Programming and Advocacy:

- Organize a housing-themed event for Sukkot. Sukkot reminds us of the importance of permanent housing. Use this as an opportunity to educate members on urgency and importance of increasing affordable housing.
- Work with local veteran outreach and service organizations and agencies, nonprofit organizations or other partners to identify underutilized housing that can be converted into low income or veteran housing. [Learn how Temple B'rith Kodesh](#) in Rochester, NY created its RAC award-winning program called Housing for Homeless.
- Partner with local non-profits that help homeless individuals and families transition into permanent housing or find better paying jobs by collecting furniture and household items for their new homes or gently used professional attire for interviewing for jobs.
- Look for housing court volunteering programs in your city to help ensure unrepresented litigants know their rights to try to avoid eviction. For instance, [New York City has a housing court navigator program](#).
- Organize a screening of the documentary film [Class Divide](#), which explores the effects of hyper-gentrification in New York City’s West Chelsea. The film uses this example to examine the interplay of housing and economic inequality more broadly.

Talking Points: Affordable Housing

- Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) has long advocated for equitable communities: communities that respond to the needs of their citizens and reflect their values, that treat all members fairly and equitably, without discrimination, and that provide them with opportunities for success.

- Housing affordability is an on-going crisis which continues to reach new heights across North America. According to the PEW Charitable trust, most low-income people put about 50 percent of their income towards housing. Rents are rising while wages are flat. The supply of affordable housing and rental assistance has not kept pace. As a result, record-breaking numbers of households cannot afford a decent place to call home.
- Currently in the US, according to the Urban Institute, there are only 21 units of housing affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income Americans. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities tells us that housing vouchers help 5.3 million people in 2.2 million households afford decent housing in the private market. The vast majority of these people are seniors, people with disabilities, or families with children. Yet federal housing assistance only serves one quarter of those who qualify for it.
- In the United States, beyond changes to the structure of many federal housing programs, no significant investment in new housing affordable to the lowest income people has been made in more than 30 years. Since the creation of the Section 8 programs (vouchers) in the early 1970s, no new federal program has the deep income targeting necessary to meet the needs of people with the greatest housing affordability burdens.
- Better access to affordable housing is one of the single most effective ways of combating childhood poverty. Affordable housing allows families to spend funds on other priorities such as food and medicine and can give children access to better schools and a safer environment, advantages that can lead to better academic outcomes and higher cognitive achievement.

Additional Resources and Information on Affordable Housing

- [National Coalition for the Homeless](#)
- [National Low-Income Housing Coalition](#)
- [National Council of State Housing Agencies](#)
- [National Housing Law Project](#)