

DEPARTMENT ON PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

GUIDE FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION for use with the Resolutions Adopted by the 43rd Assembly, December 2001 and the Statement Issued by the WRJ Executive Committee, January 2002

Following lively and penetrating discussion, delegates to the 43rd Women of Reform Judaism Assembly passed four resolutions on important current issues: health - both mental and physical, economic justice, electoral reform, and peace in Israel. Several issues of major concern were later addressed in a human rights statement issued by the WRJ Executive Committee in late January. This *Guide for Advocacy and Action* provides recommendations to help your sisterhood act on the important issues on which WRJ took positions in these resolutions and the statement, and which are currently on the front burner of the civic agenda.

WRJ resolutions, grounded in Jewish values, are the basis for all critical issues action, advocacy, and community services and so are the bedrock for the work of our organization. New resolutions often build on and expand the coverage of those of previous years. All resolutions and statements adopted by WRJ since its first biennial convention in 1915 are available [online](#).

The issues covered in this guide include:

- ✓ Mental health parity
- ✓ Civil liberties
- ✓ Electoral reform
- ✓ Social Security and Medicare
- ✓ Peace in Israel
- ✓ Humanitarian intervention in Sudan
- ✓ Trafficking in people

For information about implementing programs or taking action based on prior resolutions, watch for WRJ action alerts (by e-mail or posted on the website).

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Help your sisterhood leaders and members to become familiar with the WRJ resolutions. Devote a half hour at each board meeting to review and discuss a specific recent resolution.
- Urge the Program Committee to hold a meeting on the resolutions, with emphasis on WRJ positions on hot issues in order to develop ideas for sisterhood membership meetings and study sessions.
- When holding programs, provide speakers with relevant resolutions and other WRJ resources on the subject. Introduce the program by providing information about WRJ's interest in the subject and action taken by WRJ and your sisterhood.
- Establish a critical issues committee. Use the resolutions as a guide to monitor and advocate regarding issues on the local, state/provincial and national levels. As issues arise, use the [WRJ Social Justice homepage](#) to check the resolutions and present the issues to your sisterhood in terms of WRJ positions.
- Maintain an ongoing sisterhood critical issues table in your congregation, especially during the *Oneg Shabbat*, to inform your members and keep them up-to-date. Use [Or Ami programs](#) as a resource.

- Develop community service projects that respond to the issues delineated in the resolutions.

ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

Most WRJ resolutions involve advocacy components at the federal level. Several of the resolutions, as described below, also require close monitoring and advocacy at the state, local and provincial levels.

- Follow weekly news magazines and the local newspapers as useful sources of information about issues on the federal and local agendas.
- Keep clipping files on current and emerging issues to provide you with background information for writing letters or calling your legislators.
- Participate in community coalitions that support positions taken by WRJ.
- Keep an up-to-date card file with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of local, state, and provincial officials. Provide them as needed so that sisterhood members and congregants can respond quickly to emerging issues.
- Provide sample letters and language to sisterhood members for telephone calls to appropriate officials when issues needing response arise.
- Respond quickly to WRJ, [Commission on Social Action](#), [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism \(RAC\)](#), and [Canadian Council for Reform Judaism \(CCRJ\)](#) action alerts.

RESOURCES: YOUR TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY

All WRJ resources are available through the [WRJ website](#).

- [WRJ Resolutions and statements](#) adopted since 1915.
- [About Social Justice at WRJ](#), discusses WRJ's views on various issues and historical involvement.
- [Or Ami "Light of My People" Award for Excellence in Sisterhood Programming](#), includes brief descriptions of outstanding sisterhood programs that are excellent models for replication.
- The [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism \(RAC\)](#), maintains a comprehensive website on the issues.
- The [URJ Canadian Council for Reform Judaism](#), National Social Action Committee, is an excellent resource on Canadian issues.

SOME IMPORTANT ADVOCACY INFORMATION

Call your members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121. The White House can be reached at 202.456.1111. Write to your members of Congress as follows:

To a Senator

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

To a Representative

The Honorable (Full Name)
United States House of
Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator (last name)

Dear Representative (last name):

Sincerely yours,
(your name, include address)

Sincerely yours,
(your name, include address)

To Write to the President:

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Very respectfully yours,
(your name, include address on the letter)

43RD ASSEMBLY, DECEMBER 2001, RESOLUTIONS

COMPLETE HEALTH: MENTAL AND PHYSICAL addresses four health issues that have a significant impact on our families, congregations, and communities:

1. Barriers to the effective care of mental illness -- calls for sisterhood programming to destigmatize mental illness, increase awareness that such disorders are medical concerns and provide a welcoming and supportive atmosphere as well as supportive services. It also calls for extensive advocacy at all governmental levels for treatment opportunities and research on treatment and prevention, as well as parity between physical and mental health insurance coverage.
2. Bullying behavior -- concerned about the consequences of bullying on the bullies and their targets, the resolution urges sisterhoods to support congregational efforts to develop programs to prevent bullying among the children of the congregation.
3. Genetic diseases among Ashkenazi Jews -- because the lack of awareness in the Jewish community about inheritable diseases among the Ashkenazi population is of serious concern, the resolution urges WRJ affiliates to educate members, the congregation, and community about these diseases and the availability of genetic counseling, testing, and new treatments. It also calls for advocacy of funding for research on testing and treatment.
4. Stem cell research -- calls for federal funding for embryonic stem cell research unlimited by the date of cell line development.

Mental Health: Programming and Community Service

- The Union for Reform Judaism Department on Jewish Family Concerns has prepared a guide for congregational programming and study, *Caring for the Soul: R'fuat HaNefesh*, edited by Rabbi Richard F. Address.
- Set up study groups to examine the current literature describing the new research on, understanding of, and approaches to mental illness (see Resources, below). This could include sessions on the book *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasar. Encourage members to view and discuss the film of the same name.

Mental Health: Advocacy

- Monitor the press and all other media for references to mental illness. Maintain a clipping file for use in study groups and advocacy.
- Work with like-minded local community groups to ensure that your area has community-based coordinated comprehensive systems of care for people with serious mental illness. If the community has implemented this on a limited basis, advocate expansion and enhancement as well as support services for caregivers. Work with the same groups to seek housing that is coordinated with the community-based care programs.
- Respond to action alerts calling for increased funding for the treatment of mental illness and for research on its prevention and treatment.
- Monitor and respond immediately to action alerts from WRJ and the RAC, calling for federal parity between physical and mental health insurance coverage, both public and private.
- Follow the media on issues regarding conditions and treatment of mentally ill offenders in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Include this information in an article in the sisterhood newsletter.
- Join advocacy groups to call for improved treatment and conditions and urge increased governmental attention to youth in the system, as well as the need for increased funding for community-based treatment programs.

Mental Health: Resources

- In 1999, the Surgeon General issued a comprehensive report on mental illness. The [Executive Summary](#) is available online.
- Another authoritative source is the [National Alliance for the Mentally Ill \(NAMI\)](#). The Website includes a wealth of information.

Bullying: Programming and Community Service

- Establish a sisterhood committee to learn about programs and resources in your community to prevent and deal with bullying.
- Provide the results of the sisterhood review of resources in the community to the temple professionals. Develop lists of mental health professionals to whom they can refer the parents of young victims of abusive bullying.
- Urge your rabbis, religious school directors and preschool directors to increase awareness among congregants and teachers about bullying and its dangers and the availability of programs dealing with it in the community.
- Confer with the temple professionals to plan a program on bullying for the sisterhood.
- Encourage the development of social skills training programs for the youngsters in religious school.

Genetic Diseases Among Ashkenazi Jews: Programming and Community Service

- Hold a program on genetic diseases among the Ashkenazim for your sisterhood and congregation. Invite a genetics counselor, knowledgeable about the subject, from a local medical center. Ask your rabbi to introduce the program.
- Prepare the portion of the resolution on genetic diseases as an article for your sisterhood and temple newsletter. It is essential to get wide dissemination of the subject because of its importance to young couples.

- Participate in the organizing, implementing and publicizing of community genetic testing programs.

Genetic Diseases Among Ashkenazi Jews: Advocacy

- Respond to WRJ action alerts on the subject of genetic diseases.
- Speak with the rabbi about the possibility of including information about screening for genetic diseases when counseling young couples.

Genetic Diseases Among Ashkenazi Jews: Resources

- [The Center for Jewish Genetic Diseases](#) has absorbed the National Foundation For Jewish Genetic Diseases and has extensive informational resources.

Stem Cell Research: Programming, Advocacy, and Resources

- Hold a workshop on embryonic stem cell research. Invite a scientist working in the field and the rabbi to discuss the Jewish implications of such research. This is primarily an advocacy issue, but because it is essential to be informed about the subjects on which we advocate, it is important to hold a workshop, with associated reading materials.
- Respond quickly to WRJ and RAC action alerts on stem cell research. Circulate alerts widely. Strong religious grass roots reactions may be very important on this issue.
- CNN's website has an article, "[Scientists, senators testify on stem cell research.](#)"

ECONOMIC JUSTICE deals with Social Security, Medicare, and minimum wage issues. It calls for programs to educate members about the issues and for advocacy of legislation that will insure the long-term financial viability of Social Security and Medicare through responsible readjustment rather than radical restructuring. The resolution also calls for insurance coverage of prescription drugs for the elderly and a raise in the minimum wage to a livable level, without a proviso enabling states to drop out of the increase.

Economic Justice: Programming and Community Service

- Publish the resolution in the sisterhood newsletter and follow up with articles on the issues.
- Set up a study group on Social Security and Medicare. Use resources from advocacy groups such as the Coalition on Human Needs and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (see Resources below).
- Hold a program on Social Security and Medicare. Contact the RAC for the names of speakers in your area.
- Establish a sisterhood committee of retired attorneys, social workers, and human resource specialists to provide help to elderly persons in the congregation and the community who are having difficulties with the Social Security or Medicare systems.

Economic Justice: Advocacy

- Ask the sisterhood critical issues chair and committee to monitor the media on the subjects of Social Security, Medicare, coverage for prescription drugs and the minimum wage. Report any government activity in these areas.
- Watch for and respond rapidly to action alerts from WRJ or the RAC on any of these concerns.
- Work locally for the living wage principle.

Economic Justice: Resources

- The [Coalition on Human Needs](#) is comprised of national organizations working together to advance public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. It publishes outstanding papers on the issues covered by this resolution.
- Informative issue briefs on these concerns can also be found on the [RAC website](#).
- For specific Social Security and Medicare issues, see the [National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare](#) website.
- The [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) provides a full range of in-depth publications on economic issues. It is an excellent resource for study group materials.

[ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES](#) deals with the issues raised by recent elections, which revealed numerous flaws in election procedures, uncovered widespread problems of voting inequality and highlighted the abuse of the democratic process through unregulated campaign contributions from special interest groups and individuals. The resolution calls for educating members about the issues regarding the present electoral process and the remedies needed to restore confidence in the integrity and fairness in the system. It urges advocating legislation that will improve voter education, ensure compliance with voting rights laws and reduce the error rates produced by voting machinery, ensure accessibility and convenience for all voters, provide clear standards for casting and counting votes and ensure that valid absentee ballots from people overseas and those in the military are counted. It also urges sisterhoods to support the return of full voting rights to felons who have been released from incarceration and to work for the passage of a campaign finance system that curbs the influence of money in the political system and places the public interest first.

Elections In the United States: Programming And Community Service

- Read and discuss the resolution at a sisterhood Board meeting. Use it as a springboard to develop a program on election reform. Invite speakers from the local People For the American Way and League of Women Voters organizations to address electoral reform issues currently on the agenda.
- Ask the sisterhood Critical Issues Committee to follow electoral reform and electoral administration reform issues in the media and the press and set up a clippings file. Allocate three to five minutes at each meeting for brief comments about the issues as reflected in the media.
- Hold a forum on the return of full voting rights to felons who have been released from incarceration. Invite speakers from the NAACP or The Sentencing Project (see Resources below).

Elections In the United States: Advocacy

- Monitor and respond to alerts regarding legislation on electoral reform from WRJ, the RAC and the community groups with which you are working on this issue. Even though the campaign finance reform legislation became law this spring, there are still many issues, as described above, that need to be addressed.
- When attending community events on electoral reform, speak up about the return of federal and state voting rights to felons who have been released from incarceration.
- Adapt the resolution for use as an op-ed piece and submit it to your local newspaper.

Elections In the United States: Resources

- [*Common Cause*](#), an organization that seeks to hold "power accountable," is an excellent source for information about electoral issues.

SEEKING PEACE addresses support of Israel's quest for peace in the changing Middle East. It calls on sisterhoods to offer educational programs on the history of the founding of the State of Israel so members can respond knowledgeably to propaganda and lies about Israel. "Seeking Peace" urges sisterhoods to seek out opportunities for dialogue with Muslims and Arab individuals living in North America interested in building communities of shared concerns.

Seeking Peace: Programming and Community Service

- Set up study groups and programming on the history of the State of Israel, from its founding to current times, to build a knowledge base on Middle East issues. Invite your rabbis to lead the study groups and ask them to recommend additional local speakers for programs. Check with the Association of Reform Zionists of America, ARZA, (see Resources, below) for publications and recommended speakers.
- Help to plan and participate in community interreligious programs, making sure to invite local Muslim and Arab individuals. Focus on subjects of shared interest, based on shared values.

Seeking Peace: Advocacy

- Read and discuss the resolution at a sisterhood board or program meeting. Emphasize each member's potential importance in conveying accurate information in support of Israel.
- Attend community meetings on the Middle East.
- Monitor and quickly respond to WRJ and ARZA alerts on issues related to Israel and the Middle East.

Seeking Peace: Resources

- [ARZA](#) represents the American Reform Jewish community on all issues related to Israel and Zionism and can provide you with excellent resource materials.
- [ARZA-CANADA](#) is the branch of ARZA in Canada.
- The [Israel Religious Action Center \(IRAC\)](#) brings together public education, legal and political action and civic advocacy to further religious pluralism, social justice and civil liberties in Israel. It is an on-the-spot and on-the-moment resource.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STATEMENT, JANUARY 2002

[HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES](#) addresses three separate human rights issues based on previous WRJ human rights and civil liberties resolutions.

1. Understanding the need to prevent future terrorism and protect American security, the Executive Committee urges United States sisterhoods to become informed about the nation's anti-terrorism legislation and administrative orders and examine them within the context of the Bill of Rights.
2. Urges United States sisterhoods and its affiliates worldwide to become knowledgeable about slavery and trafficking, call for the end of slavery and trafficking and support legislation in behalf of the people of Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.
3. Urges United States sisterhoods to study and become informed about the permanent International Criminal Court as an instrument of law and protection of the human rights of all humanity; calls upon United States officials to participate in international deliberations on the development of the Court; and urges Canadian sisterhoods to applaud Canadian efforts to achieve worldwide ratification of the ICC.

Civil Liberties: Programming and Community Service

- Set up ongoing study groups to examine United States anti-terrorism legislation and administrative orders in terms of constitutionally guaranteed rights. Invite sisterhood and congregation members to participate, as well as interested attorneys, who may want to facilitate the discussion.
- Monitor and clip articles on the issues and follow programs on PBS and C-Span that cover civil liberties.
- Hold a program on the issue of civil liberties infringements to inform the sisterhood and the congregation. Invite speakers from your local [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#) or [People for the American Way \(PFAW\)](#).
- Urge your congregation's rabbi to give a sermon or program on the issues.

Civil Liberties: Advocacy

- Monitor and respond to alerts from WRJ, the RAC, ACLU, and PFAW, as well as other like-minded groups.
- Participate in community efforts with like-minded local civil liberties groups, such as the ACLU and PFAW, to inform your senators and representatives about concerns regarding infringements on civil liberties.

Civil Liberties: Resources

- You will want to look at the [RAC Website](#).

- The American Civil Liberties Union has a wealth of information regarding civil liberties issues [on its website](#).
- Another excellent source is the [People for the American Way](#).

Warfare and Slavery Worldwide: Programming and Community Service

- Develop programs and workshops to inform sisterhood and congregation members about slavery and trafficking in people. Human Rights Watch, which has offices on the east and west coasts, can provide information about possible speakers, films, and other resources (see Resources below).
- Follow the media and seek other resources to become informed about countries that have made an effort to end trafficking in people and to curb the use of slaves and child labor.
- Urge sisterhood members to look for the [GoodWeave](#), formerly RUGMARK, label when purchasing rugs. This label indicates that the manufacturer does not use child labor.
- Work with other women's organizations to develop an *ad hoc* coalition to learn about the needs of trafficked women, and particularly those of women enslaved as prostitutes in your communities.

Warfare and Slavery Worldwide: Advocacy

- Work with local coalitions to call for the end of slavery and trafficking in people by holding community meetings on the issues, submitting op-ed pieces to your local papers and letter writing campaigns to your members of Congress seeking legislation to deal with the issues.
- If your work with the local women's organizations (see Programming and Community Service, above) has revealed that there are formerly trafficked or enslaved women in your community needing services, contact The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking for guidance on seeking community services specific to their needs (see Resources, below)
- Respond to action alerts calling for legislation and intensive diplomatic efforts to stop genocidal acts and human rights abuses wherever they occur, to increase humanitarian aid to the people of Sudan, and to seek an end to violence against the people of Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

Warfare and Slavery Worldwide: Resources

- [Human Rights Watch](#), dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world, has a wealth of information on human rights issues. If you enter "trafficking and slavery" in their search box, you will be provided with a tremendous list of resources, which you can access, on the organization's campaign to oppose the trafficking of women and children.
- [GoodWeave](#), formerly RUGMARK, is a global organization working to end child labor and offer educational opportunities for children in India, Nepal and Pakistan.

The International Criminal Court: Programming and Community Service

- Establish a study group to look into the history, purpose, need for and current development of the International Criminal Court.

- Work with other Jewish and civic organizations to hold a forum on the International Criminal Court. Contact the NGO Coalition for an International Criminal Court (see Resources, below) and the Political Science Departments of your local universities to find out about potential speakers in your area.

The International Criminal Court: Advocacy

- Respond to WRJ and RAC alerts regarding the court.