



# WRJ Advocacy Plan 2017

## 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. In recent days, we have been called upon to speak out on a wide range of issues, from cabinet nominations to international relations, from health care to environmental regulations, from stranded refugees to issues before the highest Court in the land. We have also witnessed the importance and impact of women's advocacy on these issues of concern, as many millions of people participated on January 20<sup>th</sup> in Women's Marches across the globe.

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 will need to prioritize and focus our energy and maximize our capacity to mobilize our members. To increase our capacity, we will need to expand our financial and other resources to do the important social justice work at hand.

In the coming months, we will need to organize, mobilize, seek partners, preach, teach, and lift up our voices to secure the America 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 lie ahead as we balance the plethora of critical issues at stake in the current political arena with our limited capacity. Therefore, we will 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, the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), and the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ). 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 action alerts to educate our members and constituents, and use social media to mobilize them to 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 is already committed on this issue and has taken a lead on a multi-year initiative to address this issue within the Reform Movement and its institutions.
- Women's Health and Reproductive Rights – WRJ will watch 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 will monitor and address 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 will continue to support labor rights, minimum/fair wage proposals, paid leave, and other issues 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.
- Immigration Reform and Rights for Refugees and Asylum Seekers – These issues particularly tug at Jewish hearts given our own history, and WRJ will continue to speak out on these issues, working with others in the Reform Movement and the greater Jewish community.

### Lower Priority Issues

On lower priority issues where WRJ has policy, we may not be as visible as on other issues. However, 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 on these issues where there are ongoing activities or local partnership opportunities.



## Next Steps for Immediate Action

### Spring 2017

- Social Justice workshop track and keynote at the Fried Leadership Conference (March 2017)
- Launch Social Justice Fund (March 2017)
- WRJ advocacy training and networking programs at the RAC Consultation on Conscience (April 2017)
- Explore partnerships and joint workshops at Reform Movement conferences (CCAR –March 2017; WRN – June 2017).
- Begin Webinar series
  - Overview of Advocacy Plan
  - First 100 Days Overview
  - Supreme Court Nominee

### Summer 2017

- Pay Equity – Implement initiative through Jewish Women's Foundation of New York grant.
- Continue Webinar Series
  - State and Local Advocacy Training
  - Listening Skills; Managing Difficult Conversations
  - Issue Updates
- Develop tool kit for District Area Days, sisterhood programs, and other opportunities to encourage local training, advocacy days, and issue briefings.

### Fall 2017

- URJ Biennial – Pay Equity Workshop
- Continue Webinar Series
  - Pay Equity Training
  - Issue Updates
  - Speak Truth to Power: When and How Religious Non-Profits Can Take Public Policy Positions

### Spring 2018

- Social Justice presence at Fried Leadership Conference (March 2018)

### Fall 2018

- District Conventions – provide resources for social justice training and issue briefings.

### Spring 2019

- WRJ Social Justice Conference, Washington D.C.

### Ongoing

- Education – Provide issue pages on website; produce action alerts and issue briefings via webinars and workshops at conferences.
- Conferences & Workshops – Use opportunities when Reform Jewish women are gathered to raise awareness, provide advocacy training and other educational programs.
- Coalitions – Partner with others on issues of concern at the national, state, provincial, and local levels; provide resources to assist WRJ women to engage locally.

