



# WOMEN <sup>OF</sup> REFORM JUDAISM

## WRJ High Priorities and Advocacy Plan: From Education to Action

(Updated: June 2022)

### 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. We have been called upon to speak out on a wide range of issues, from economic justice to international relations, from health care and reproductive rights to environmental regulations, from stranded refugees to issues before the U.S. or Canadian Supreme Court. Our positions reflect our evolving understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and strategically connect with legislation pending in federal, state and provincial governments.

Over the years, we have witnessed the impact of women's advocacy on issues of concern in the massive public participation of millions of people in Women's Marches worldwide and in organizing individual grassroots actions of civic engagement. Being a part of WRJ amplifies our individual voices through collective action and meaningfully engages individuals with social action, social justice, and advocacy.

Informed by our fundamental Jewish values, our understanding of issues continually evolves and the way they play out in the public arena changes over time. The changing landscape requires periodically updating our language and learning new ways to approach issues we have worked on in the past. Advocacy work is not stagnant, nor is it just external, it involves internal work as well – it changes us and opens our ears, our eyes, and our minds to each other and the world around us.

The scope and speed of this activity can be 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 need to prioritize and focus our energy and maximize our capacity to mobilize our members. To increase our capacity, we need to expand our financial (and other) resources to do the important social justice work at hand. To increase our impact, we need to emphasize education as well as action and work with our partners inside and outside of the Reform Movement, and across city, state, province, and WRJ District lines.

We will continue to organize, mobilize, seek partners, preach, teach, and lift our voices to secure the United States, Canada and the world of our dreams...as WRJ women have always done. WRJ will 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 considers 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 Movement affiliates and coalition partners to lead on an issue. On high priority issues, WRJ may actively mobilize its members. We will remain flexible, as these criteria will shift at different times. We understand that difficult choices are always a part of advocacy work, as we balance the plethora of critical issues at stake in the current political arena with our limited capacity. Therefore, we consider the following factors in setting our priorities:

- Does WRJ or do 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 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? For example, on Israel matters, we can expect activity to be driven by others in the Reform Movement, including ARZA and the URJ Israel Leadership Network, the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), and the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC). On issues of antisemitism 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 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 and prepare educational resources and action alerts to inform our members and constituents about the issue. WRJ will provide opportunities to act and use action alerts, social media, and other communications tools to mobilize individual and collective action.

Applying the criteria above to the wide range of issues about which WRJ cares deeply, the following issues are current high priorities:

- **Economic Justice and the Reform Pay Equity Initiative** – WRJ remains deeply involved in addressing pay equity, particularly in the Reform Movement and its institutions. WRJ supports labor rights, pay equity, minimum/fair wage proposals, paid leave, childcare, family leave, and the fight against workplace discrimination, among other issues that have a significant impact on women and families.

- **Reproductive Health & Rights** – WRJ watches Supreme Court actions and nominations closely for threats to the constitutional protections outlined in *Roe v Wade*. WRJ opposes state or federal restrictions that limit, and support policies that guarantee, rights and access to birth control and safe abortion services. WRJ will work to assure reproductive health and ‘reproductive self-determination,’ including through the Affordable Care Act or alternative healthcare plans. While WRJ respects the diversity of religious views on these matters, WRJ believes that the religious views of some people, particularly employers, legislators, pharmacists, or medical personnel, should not be imposed on others; rather we believe that women should be free to make decisions related to their reproductive health and rights based on their own beliefs and moral agency.
- **Gender-based Violence** – WRJ monitors and addresses issues related to domestic violence, date rape and campus violence, sexual assault, spousal and child abuse, trafficking, the use of firearms in committing domestic violence, as well as all other situations of gender-based violence.
- **Israel** – WRJ works with our Israeli partners, including Women of the Wall, IRAC, and IMPJ, to guarantee equal rights for women and religious pluralism in Israel, and to promote ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the IMPJ and Israeli society.
- **Global Affairs** – WRJ is a recognized Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the United Nations and brings a gendered lens to issues of international importance including such matters as climate change, global health, immigration reform, rights for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the rights and well-being of Jews wherever they live. These issues particularly tug at Jewish hearts given our own history, and WRJ speaks out on these issues, working with others in the Reform Movement and the greater community.
- **Civil Rights, Racial Justice & DEI** – WRJ is committed to doing the essential work of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) within WRJ, in our Movement, in our communities, and in ourselves, working with partners in the Reform Movement and the greater community. While at any given time, focus may be on one or more particular vectors of DEI, WRJ understands civil rights, racial justice and DEI work to include an openness and commitment to ongoing education and advancement, as we continue to educate ourselves and bend the arc of history toward justice, inclusion, and belonging.

### Secondary Priority Issues

We cannot predict what issues will rise in priority due to events in our world or the needs of our communities. Where WRJ has policy that is not tied to a High Priority, we may not be as visible as on other issues, but we will be engaged. 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 or on a District level on these issues where there are ongoing activities, local partnership opportunities, or advocacy opportunities. We encourage WRJ Districts to share their advocacy activities and priorities with us and each other, including through WRJ’s District Advocacy Representatives Network, so we can support each other and call attention to our collective work.

## Providing Education and Taking Action

WRJ takes an "Education to Action" (E2A) approach to our advocacy work. The E2A philosophy of engagement and activism recognizes and values all types of advocacy work, ranging from educational programs to hands-on activities, to lobby visits with legislators. Education is the key that unlocks the door to effective action and activism. WRJ values and encourages education as an essential part of social action, social justice activity, and advocacy work.

The WRJ Advocacy Plan comes to life in different ways, reflecting our lay leaders and staff, the activity in our Movement, and the issues, challenges, and opportunities that confront us at a given time. For example, in 2022-23, WRJ will launch WRJ Says STOP: An Initiative Against Sexual Harassment and Assault and will be active participants and partners in the RAC's Civic Engagement Campaign, "Every Voice Every Vote."

The types of advocacy education and action activity in which WRJ engages include, for example:

- **Education** – Provide issue pages and Advocacy Guides on our website and share information in the WRJ Advocacy Hub Yammer group; produce action alerts and issue briefings via virtual and in-person webinars and workshops; write blog posts, articles for the Weekly Digest, and other longer-form pieces about issues; publish a regular Advocacy Matters eNewsletter.
- **Conferences & Workshops** – Use opportunities when Reform Jewish women are gathered, either independently or in broader fora to raise awareness, and to provide social action, social justice, and advocacy training and other educational programs.
- **Coalitions, Partnerships and Cooperation** – Partner with others on issues of concern at the national, state, provincial, and local levels; provide resources to assist WRJ members to engage locally and at the District level. For example, this includes our representatives at the United Nations and at the RAC Commission on Social Action, our engagement with RAC's various campaigns and state networks, our involvement in coalitions such as the Jewish Abortion Access Coalition (JAAC), and our partnering with subject-matter experts or representatives of particular voices such as Keshet and the Women's Rabbinic Network.
- **Public Statements** – Statements, Resolutions, Amicus Briefs, letters, testimony, etc. are among the ways that WRJ raises its voice in public collective action. The scope of these is often broader than our High Priorities, often reflecting legislation or court cases that arise, or emergent issues that call for immediate response. WRJ also provides our members with information about petitions, rallies, and other individual action opportunities.