

## Taking Action on Ballot Initiatives

Many of the issues most important to NCJW sections and members will be decided by state and local ballot initiatives during the 2012 election cycle. Working for or against ballot initiatives is a permissible lobbying activity with respect to NCJW's status as a 501(c)(3) organization. Below are some common questions NCJW members ask about working on these ballot measures.

- ▶ **Can I advocate for or against a specific ballot initiative?** Yes. Even though ballot initiatives usually appear alongside candidates for public office on the ballot, working for or against ballot measures is a permissible lobbying activity, not a prohibited political activity.
- ▶ **Is a ballot initiative the same thing as a referendum?** Yes. Ballot initiatives, referenda, state constitutional amendments, and bond measures are all legislative proposals that appear on the ballot for approval by the voters. When considering these measures, voters act as law-makers and their votes determine whether or not a policy or proposal is made law.
- ▶ **What's the difference between advocating for an initiative and advocating for a candidate?** Advocating for a ballot initiative is issue-based advocacy that advances our organizational mission. As a 501(c)(3) organization, working on ballot initiatives is a permissible component of our advocacy work. On the other hand, 501(c)(3) organizations like NCJW are prohibited from supporting or opposing candidates for public office. You can work on a legislative measure appearing on the ballot. You cannot comment on candidates included on the same ballot. If you would like to work on a ballot initiative in your state, please contact the NCJW Washington office at [action@ncjwdc.org](mailto:action@ncjwdc.org) or 202 296 2588 to ensure that all of your activities comply with our tax-exempt status.
- ▶ **How do I know what initiatives are on the ballot in my state?** There are many great sources to help you find out what initiatives will be on your ballot in November. Most county websites offer a sample ballot. Here are a few additional sources:
  - ▶ **Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC)** provides progressive information on state initiatives around the country. In addition to comprehensive lists of what is on the ballot in each state, BISC provides resources, research, and strategy for working on those initiatives as well. Visit BISC online at: <http://www.ballot.org/>
  - ▶ **Ballotpedia**, like Wikipedia, is populated with information created by its users. As such, the information on the site has not been vetted for accuracy or bias. However, Ballotpedia does provide a fairly comprehensive list of current initiatives that can serve as a good starting place for your research. Visit Ballotpedia online at: <http://ballotpedia.org/>
  - ▶ **Ballotwatch**, a project of the Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California has state ballot initiative guides available online at: <http://www.iandrinstitute.org>
  - ▶ **Project Vote Smart** is a non-partisan organization that provides a [comprehensive list of statewide ballot initiatives](#) around the country. Visit Project Vote Smart online at: <http://www.votesmart.org/>
  - ▶ **The National Conference of State Legislatures** maintains a searchable database of ballot measures online at: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=16580>

As always, you must notify the NCJW Washington office about all election-related activities at 202 296 2588 or [action@ncjwdc.org](mailto:action@ncjwdc.org) to have your activity or event approved.