

SPA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

NCJW's resolutions guide our position and help us to identify the various issues on which we advocate. In addition, to increase our effectiveness, NCJW prioritizes issues to allow more in-depth attention to select issues on which NCJW can make a difference. The public policy committee, with guidance from the Washington office, identifies focus issues that are featured on www.ncjw.org. The focus issues fall under four main categories:

- ▶ Reproductive Rights
- ▶ Individual and Civil Rights
- ▶ Well-being of Women, Children, and Families
- ▶ Religion-State Separation

Within each of these categories, NCJW will identify on no more than two focus issues on which high priority will be placed. A focus issue is one on which increased effort will be expended in terms of legislative advocacy, grassroots advocacy, website development, etc. The basis for determining focus issues include:

- ▶ Does it fit within NCJW's mission and resolutions?
- ▶ Does NCJW have a special niche to fill in the coalition?
- ▶ Can we take a leadership role?
- ▶ Will it give us visibility and advance NCJW's organizational goals?
- ▶ Will the issue be relevant for a long enough time (i.e., at least six months)?

The focus issue selection will be reviewed periodically, especially at the beginning of new sessions of Congress. NCJW will also continue to monitor and speak out on other issues of concern, but will not expend as many resources on these issues. SPAs should use NCJW's priority-setting process as a guideline for choosing which federal and state issues on which to work. In addition, it may be helpful to you to select from among the focus issues those that may appeal to your sections' interests. For example, if your sections are very active on domestic violence prevention (perhaps by working with a local shelter), you may want to heighten your legislative efforts on the federal Violence Against Women Act or possible state laws to protect domestic violence victims.

NCJW will send out regular action alerts and updates on federal focus issues and sometimes on other issues. Please be sure that members from your state are signed up to receive these alerts directly from NCJW (go to <http://action.ncjw.org/ncjw/home.html>). Please do not forward these alerts and never forward another organization's federal alerts as is. On state issues, you may find it useful to pull language from another organization's alerts or extract information from federal alerts (which often are mirrored in state issues) as you craft your own NCJW state alerts. If you have a coalition or coalition partner that has capability for advocates to send automatic letters through Capwiz or Get Active or a similar service, you might want to take advantage of their service; in this circumstance edit the alert to the basics and link and note at the top that is from a coalition partner. (It is not ideal, but is important for NCJW response to the issue). See the instructions of handling national and state alerts for more details.

Here are some ideas of what you can and should do on an issue:

- ▶ Educate the sections
- ▶ Involve and motivate sections to take action
- ▶ Join local or state coalitions – or form one if needed!
- ▶ Plan state lobby days
- ▶ Lobby state and federal legislators

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ▶ Check www.ncjw.org often so you can stay current on the issues
- ▶ Analyze upcoming legislation that can be impacted by or that directly impacts sections' community service projects
- ▶ Find out what programs are planned in the sections for the upcoming year. Did any past programs that drew large crowds relate to current legislative issues?
- ▶ Write letters-to-the editor of your local newspaper, especially the Jewish press
- ▶ Use the Op-Ed page of your city, local, and Jewish press to help convey NCJW's perspective on various issues
- ▶ Check the legislative schedule. Which bills are being supported by legislators friendly to NCJW's issues?
- ▶ Gather a history of what has been successful in the past by consulting with previous SPAs and reviewing formats of past state legislative institutes
- ▶ Confer with single-issue coalition partners. Find out which issues are moving in your state.
- ▶ Reach out to local or state affiliates of organizations with which NCJW works at the national level and build coalitions on issues if they do not already exist in your state
- ▶ Keep the sections informed about issues and coalition activities
- ▶ Ask section members to accompany you to coalition meetings and events
- ▶ Communicate with SPAs in other states. What are they doing? What's working? What's not?
- ▶ Talk to the SPA coordinator(s) and the Washington office regularly
- ▶ Establish relationships with your federal and state legislators and their respective staff members
- ▶ Offer NCJW expertise, research, etc. to legislators to assist them with the legislation they are sponsoring
- ▶ Offer to speak to sections on issues and/or advocacy and ask to be placed on the agenda of section meetings so you can speak directly to members about the issues
- ▶ Publicize your efforts through section bulletins
- ▶ Gather contact information from other organizations and when appropriate, place them on your mailing list
- ▶ And, importantly, even in the face of adversity be sure to keep smiling, enjoy what you're doing, and remember that you are making a difference!