



Vision for America

For more than a century, the National Council of Jewish Women has been at the forefront of social change — championing the needs of women, children and families — while courageously taking a progressive stance on such issues as child welfare, women’s and human rights, and reproductive freedom. Today, poverty, injustice, and violence are ongoing challenges we face as Americans and as citizens of the world. They are significant, but not insurmountable. Together, with a commitment to social justice, peace, and human rights, we can leave our children a better nation and a safer and more inclusive global community in which to prosper.

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

Advance the Well-Being of Women, Children, and Families

Throughout its 118-year history, NCJW has demonstrated a profound commitment to improving the quality of life for women, children, and families. While this commitment has taken a variety of forms over the years, central to it is the belief that a democratic society must provide for the needs of those unable to provide for themselves. As such, NCJW advocates for human services that are coordinated, comprehensive, accessible, and sufficiently funded. In order to demonstrate a real commitment to the well-being of women, children, and families, our leaders must:

► **RENEW OUR COMMITMENT TO SHARED ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

While the American Dream promises economic opportunity and hope for a better future, many people in this country face a very different reality. Poverty — not prosperity — is the reality for millions of individuals and families who must make difficult daily choices between food, rent, medical bills, and other basic expenses. NCJW believes that the moral test of a nation is how it treats its most vulnerable members. Sadly, in recent years, the United States has failed that test, diverting critical federal dollars to two wars and ill-advised tax cuts while ignoring the growing need for human needs programs here at home. NCJW believes that, as moral documents, the budget and tax code must provide sufficient funds for human needs programs that promote the well-being of women, children, and families. These priorities must be apparent even as our nation seeks to reduce the federal deficit. Further, NCJW supports laws, policies, and employment practices — such as paid sick leave, paid family leave, and a living wage — that encourage self-sufficiency and allow workers to meet both family and work responsibilities.

► **PROTECT FAMILIES FROM PREDATORY BUSINESS PRACTICES**

The recent housing crisis and economic recession made abundantly clear the need for better regulation of financial products in the US marketplace. Whether an unaffordable mortgage with escalating payments or a predatory consumer loan that charged 400 percent interest, whole communities have been devastated by the promotion of faulty financial products. In 2011, NCJW responded to this dangerous new trend by passing a resolution in support of “consumer protection laws that promote and enhance public health and welfare.” The creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, a new entity whose sole purpose is to look out for the interests of consumers, is one such law. By monitoring the behavior of banks and non-bank businesses like pawn shops and payday lenders, the Bureau will help consumers exercise their rights and avoid fraud and deception. NCJW

is committed to seeing this kind of consumer protection reemphasized across all sectors of the US economy, from food and drugs to toys and cars.

► **PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOR ALL AMERICANS**

Recognizing that the health of the nation — its economy, security, and overall well-being — depends on the health of all of its people, NCJW supports quality, comprehensive, confidential, nondiscriminatory health care coverage and services that are affordable and accessible for all. In 2010, NCJW was proud to have played a critical role in the enactment of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), the groundbreaking new health care law that will improve access to, and reduce the cost of health care nationwide. Today, NCJW is committed to seeing the promise of the ACA fulfilled and will continue to work to improve the law so that the US health care system finally provides universal access to comprehensive care for all — no matter where one lives — a system that covers, among other health concerns, the full range of reproductive health care services and mental health, and emphasizes prevention. In addition, NCJW believes that a key component to any effective health care system is prevention. To that end, in 2010, NCJW adopted a new resolution to emphasize this critical point, committing to work for “laws, policies, programs, and services that promote wellness.”

► **WORK TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Throughout its history, NCJW has worked for laws, policies, programs, and services that protect every woman from all forms of abuse, exploitation, harassment, and violence. NCJW was active in the coalition supporting the original enactment of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Today, NCJW works to ensure that VAWA's promise is fulfilled. In 2009, NCJW launched Higher Ground, a national effort to end domestic violence by improving the economic status of women. Grounded in the understanding that economic security is critical to women's safety, Higher Ground educates and mobilizes advocates, community members, and decision-makers to promote progressive policy solutions that champion women's economic autonomy.

More than 10 years after VAWA's enactment, nearly one in four women still experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood. In 2010, during a single day, domestic violence programs served more than 70,000 adults and children in the United States. However, a significant number of requests — more than 9,500 — went unmet that day because domestic violence agencies lacked the funding and staff to meet the demand. In order to build upon the successes of the programs made possible by VAWA, this critical work must receive full funding in the federal budget each year, and states and localities must make ending domestic violence a priority.

Worldwide, women are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking. NCJW supports the elimination of human trafficking and has a long history of opposition to this practice. Today, NCJW continues to condemn the trade in human beings that exploits thousands, predominantly women, each year for sexual exploitation, forced labor, and domestic servitude.

Ensure Reproductive Health and Rights

NCJW was an early supporter of abortion rights and access to the full range of family planning options. Today, the organization continues to advocate for reproductive health and rights at the local, state, national, and international levels. For NCJW, ensuring that women and young people have access to reproductive health care, information, and options is a moral imperative and is essential to preserving religious liberty. While opponents of these rights are often motivated by their religious beliefs and seek to codify those views through legislation and public policy, NCJW believes no one religious belief should be imposed on us all. To do so threatens the nation's commitment to religious liberty. NCJW is committed to the protection of every woman's right to reproductive choices. We call on our leaders to:

► **FUND EFFECTIVE SEX EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

NCJW supports comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education in public schools. Young people need accurate information about contraceptive options in order to make informed and responsible life decisions, particularly given our nation's extremely high rates of unintended pregnancy — the US teen pregnancy rate continues to be one of the highest in the developed world, more than twice as high as rates in Canada. Likewise, NCJW supports efforts to eliminate all federal funding for misleading and ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Abstinence-only curricula do not teach about birth control and often contain false information about its effectiveness. In addition, such programs stress marriage as the only appropriate context for a sexual relationship, marginalizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth since same-sex marriage is not a legal option in many states, nor is it currently recognized by the federal government.

The US public education system must not make LGBT youth feel further ostracized, particularly when anti-LGBT bullying pervades many school environments. As a faith-based organization committed to the separation between religion and state, NCJW is particularly concerned that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, using federal taxpayer dollars, often seek to impose one particular religious viewpoint about sex and relationships on all students, regardless of their individual religious traditions.

► **PROTECT WOMEN’S ACCESS TO SAFE AND LEGAL ABORTION**

As the leading pro-choice Jewish organization, NCJW continues to work for the protection of every female’s right to reproductive choices — including safe and legal abortion — and for the elimination of obstacles that limit reproductive freedom. In the years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision affirmed the constitutional right to abortion, subsequent court decisions and legislation have eroded that right and severely limited access to this legal medical procedure.

Funding restrictions that unfairly impede access for low-income women and others who depend on federal programs for health coverage are discriminatory and should be repealed. NCJW strongly urges repeal of restrictions on abortion funding for Medicaid recipients; federal employees, as well as America’s servicewomen, and their dependents; American Indians and Alaskan Natives; low-income women in the District of Columbia; Peace Corps volunteers; and women in federal prisons. NCJW also opposes efforts that deny women access to abortion-inclusive health insurance coverage. Such proposals have been offered at both the state and federal levels by legislators seeking to make comprehensive health coverage unavailable in either private plans or subsidized plans to be offered in the new state-based insurance marketplaces (“exchanges”) under the Affordable Care Act.

NCJW also opposes measures that seek to curb women’s reproductive rights in other ways. Several states have sought to impose restrictions to abortion access based on arbitrary deadlines or fetal characteristics like a heartbeat or the alleged ability to feel pain — restrictions based on ideologically motivated views, rather than sound scientific or medical evidence. They include mandatory waiting periods, counseling, doctor’s appointments, and ultrasound or sonogram procedures; bans on abortion care after 20 weeks gestation; abortion bans after a fetal heartbeat can be detected; and targeted restrictions on abortion providers. NCJW believes that these efforts wrongly interfere with decisions that women have the right to make in consultation with their health care provider and in keeping with their own health needs, beliefs, and religious traditions.

► **SECURE AND PROTECT CONTRACEPTIVE ACCESS FOR WOMEN IN THE US AND ABROAD**

NCJW is committed to ensuring that all women, regardless of age, income, religion, race, or geographic location have access to the full range of contraceptive options, including emergency contraception. NCJW supports full funding of Title X, the federal family planning program, including support of America’s largest Title X provider, Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Further, NCJW advocates for equitable health insurance coverage of contraceptives, including emergency contraception. We are proud to support the decision by the Department of Health and Human Services to include contraceptive

services and supplies as a preventive service for women under the Affordable Care Act. And, while we respect the need to accommodate various religious views in the workplace, NCJW believes that refusal clauses that allow workers and institutions to deny services to others must include safeguards so that any one worker's religious beliefs do not infringe on the rights of others.

Recently, US international family planning policies have been dominated by an extreme ideological agenda that has diminished the scope and effectiveness of critical, life-saving family planning work by US agencies and by international organizations dependent on US funds. That's why NCJW was pleased to support President Obama's decision to repeal the harmful Global Gag Rule, an unjust restriction on US international family planning assistance. The organization continues to advocate for permanent repeal of this harmful policy. NCJW also opposes legislative efforts to eliminate funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the entity charged with ensuring universal access to reproductive health care and information. In October 2011, the world population will reach 7 billion. As such it is all the more important that the US continue to be a leader in making certain that future generations of women, children, and families can access needed health care in their communities.

Promote a Fair and Independent Judiciary

Decisions made by the federal courts impact every aspect of our lives, from the quality of the air we breathe to our ability to access basic health care. The courts serve as the critical backstop and protector of the fundamental rights and freedoms that define our democracy, including religious freedom, civil rights, and our right to privacy. The president nominates individuals to lifetime seats on federal district and circuit courts as well as to the Supreme Court; the US Senate must confirm these nominees. In recent years, the Senate has not confirmed enough pending nominees, creating judicial emergencies around the country. The term judicial emergencies describes courts that have been unable to run at full capacity for an extended period of time and have an excess caseload due to a lack of judges. NCJW believes that the Senate should work to promptly confirm nominees to fill judicial vacancies and should seek to confirm those individuals who have a proven commitment to core constitutional values like equality, religious liberty, and privacy.

Ensure and Advance Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Since its founding, NCJW has been a tireless advocate for civil rights and liberties for all. NCJW works for the enactment and enforcement of laws and regulations that protect civil rights and individual freedoms. NCJW believes that a democratic society and its people must value diversity and promote mutual understanding and respect for all. NCJW supports equal opportunity in the public and private sectors through programs such as affirmative action and through vigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. In addition, NCJW seeks to end all discrimination against individuals on the basis of race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. We call on our leaders to:

► **ADVANCE WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

NCJW believes that employment laws, policies, and practices should provide equal pay for work of comparable worth and equal opportunities for advancement. In recent years, NCJW has worked successfully for passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, a law that reversed the effects of a Supreme Court ruling that made it more difficult for victims of discrimination to obtain relief through the courts. NCJW supports strengthening of the Equal Pay Act, which is critical to achieving equality for women in the workplace.

► **PROMOTE EQUALITY FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDERED PERSONS**

NCJW supports equal treatment under the law for LGBT persons and an end to discrimination of all kinds based on sexual orientation and gender identity. To that end, the organization worked for many years to expand hate crimes laws to cover those victimized because of their disability, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, a goal finally achieved in 2010. Because there is no federal protection for workers discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, NCJW continues to work to pass legislation to ensure that all people — regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity — are ensured protection from discrimination in the workplace. Similarly, NCJW has worked to end discrimination in the military against lesbian and gay soldiers and enlistees. While the repeal of the odious “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in the military was a victory, NCJW continues to speak out for speedy and full implementation of the repeal and an end to discrimination in the armed services. NCJW is also committed to ending bullying and discrimination against LGBT students. And as a strong advocate for marriage equality, NCJW has celebrated the enactment of various state laws legalizing same-sex marriage and favors repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the federal law

that denies federal benefits to married same-sex couples and allows states to refuse to recognize same sex marriages originating in states where such unions are legal. NCJW also opposes efforts to amend the US or state constitutions to define marriage in order to deny rights to same-sex couples.

► **PROTECT AND EXPAND VOTING RIGHTS**

NCJW has long supported strong voting rights legislation and enforcement, working for election laws, policies, and practices that ensure easy and equitable access to the electoral process and which guarantee that every vote counts and can be verified. NCJW opposes recent efforts in the states to make voting more difficult by eliminating same-day registration and imposing onerous photo ID requirements. Further, NCJW believes that, as a matter of simple justice and civil rights, residents of our nation's capital deserve full voting representation in Congress.

► **BALANCE CIVIL LIBERTIES AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

NCJW supports the protection of every individual's right to privacy. The organization believes that it is possible — and essential — that national security be protected without sacrificing the core individual freedoms and liberties that are basic to our democracy.

► **ACHIEVE JUST, COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM**

Throughout its history, NCJW has been involved in service and advocacy on behalf of new immigrants. Today, NCJW works for comprehensive, humane, and equitable immigration and naturalization laws, policies, and practices that facilitate and expedite legal status for more individuals. A comprehensive reform approach should provide opportunities for hard-working undocumented immigrants to earn legal status and citizenship, aid in family reunification by reducing the waiting periods that keep immigrant families apart, and establish humane border policies. NCJW also supports the intermediate step of allowing immigrants brought to the United States as children to become eligible for citizenship if they complete college or serve in the armed forces. Further, NCJW rejects policies that would inflict severe penalties on undocumented immigrants and criminalize assistance provided to them by religious and other social service groups. Such policies have served to drive undocumented immigrants further underground and to increase discrimination against legal residents and citizens with foreign-sounding names. They hurt businesses and industries that depend on immigrant clients and workers and make ordinary anti-crime efforts by police nearly impossible by sowing fear in immigrant communities. NCJW also opposes draconian state laws that usurp the federal role in immigration law enforcement and penalize immigrants.

Promote Religious Freedom and Strengthen the Separation between Religion and State

NCJW believes that religious liberty and the separation of religion and state are constitutional principles that must be protected and preserved in order to maintain a democratic society. NCJW opposes public policies that attempt to enshrine one religious belief on all, such as mandating school curricula to include “intelligent design” or requiring abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in public schools. In addition, NCJW opposes policies such as school vouchers that directly or indirectly funnel tax-payer money to sectarian education.

NCJW maintains that government funding of religious institutions threatens the First Amendment by putting the government in the position of endorsing or rejecting religious groups when allocating humans-needs funding. Religious organizations, such as the Jewish Federations and Catholic Charities, have a long history of providing critical social services to individuals in need. Many of these groups have established separate tax-exempt nonprofit entities to provide service, not to engage in religious activity. While clearly allowed to retain their religious identity, all such federally funded nonprofits must be forbidden from discriminating on the basis of religion in the dissemination of their services and in their hiring practices. NCJW vigorously opposes federal funding for faith-based institutions that discriminate.

Support a Secure Israel and Peace in the Middle East

NCJW is committed to the survival and security of the State of Israel and the establishment of a just and permanent peace, which are central to the Jewish people and vital to the interests of the United States. Dating before the inception of the State of Israel and continuing today, NCJW has been active within Israel working to advance the empowerment, status, and rights of all women; promote the well-being of all children in Israel; and support equality, pluralism, and inclusion. NCJW values and supports the close relationship between the United States and Israel built on shared democratic values and mutual understanding and respect. In addition, NCJW works for policies and programs that promote peaceful co-existence within Israel and between Israel and its neighbors and also works to counter attempts to delegitimize Israel through boycotts, divestment, sanctions, and other such tactics.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the United States has rendered crucial support, providing economic and military aid as well as leadership on the peace process at the international level. NCJW is gratified that US

leaders, regardless of party affiliation, have long considered the security of Israel to be critical to the strategic interests of the United States and have repeatedly described Israel as America's closest ally in the Middle East. NCJW calls upon our leaders to ensure diplomatic, economic, and military assistance to Israel by the United States and to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Advance Human Rights and Peace

NCJW has long advocated that all individuals have the right to live in a world at peace. An early supporter of the United Nations, NCJW has had status at the UN as a nongovernmental organization with full representation for many decades. As far back as 1898, Hannah G. Solomon, NCJW founder and then president, wrote to President McKinley advocating an end to the Spanish-American War. Over a century later, NCJW still speaks out for peace and human rights and against human trafficking and genocide, believing that human rights and dignity are fundamental and must be guaranteed to all individuals. Our leaders must:

► TAKE DECISIVE MEASURES TO END GENOCIDE IN SUDAN

NCJW believes that as a nation we are obligated to do everything in our power to immediately end the genocide in Darfur, as well as greater Sudan. As a Jewish organization, NCJW knows the high cost of inaction and silence in the face of genocide. NCJW supports US and international pressure on Sudan and intervention in Darfur to end the genocide, which is why, in 2007, NCJW divested its funds from companies with connections to the government of Sudan. Since Southern Sudan seceded from Sudan and formed a new state recognized by the international community, the Sudanese government in the north has started another wave of war crimes against its people in order to quell any further secession. With murders numbering in the hundreds of thousands and millions of refugees displaced from their homes, NCJW stands firm that the international community is obligated to put an end to the flagrant human rights violations still occurring in Sudan.

► RESTORE HABEAS CORPUS

NCJW believes that the United States must obey international law and restore its moral authority by treating every suspect and every prisoner of war with dignity. NCJW believes that the United States should honor the Geneva Conventions and supports the restoration of habeas corpus. NCJW celebrated the restoration of justice in the case of *Boumediene v. Bush*, in which the Supreme Court ruled in June 2008 that detainees in US military facilities had the legal right to challenge the reason for their imprisonment before an independent court of law. However, habeas remains under attack. In February 2009, the Obama administration filed a motion in support of the

Bush policy that denied habeas corpus rights to prisoners who sued to challenge their detention at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan. NCJW continues to fight for constitutional rights and civil liberties and against inhumane policies perpetrated in the name of national security.

► **END GUN VIOLENCE AND THE DEATH PENALTY**

The United States has higher rates of gun violence than any other developed nation in the world. Firearms and automatic weapons have been used in school shootings, murders, and domestic violence. NCJW supports legislation to close the gun show loophole, eliminate the sale of assault weapons, and restrict areas in which firearms can be carried. The United States also holds the dubious distinction of being the only developed country that still implements the death penalty. NCJW opposes the death penalty and supports its abolition.

► **SUPPORT GLOBAL MEASURES TO ELIMINATE ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

One of NCJW's long-held principles is that discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity must be eliminated. Around the world, gender discrimination remains a pervasive and dangerous political and cultural norm. Accordingly, NCJW urges Congress to swiftly ratify the United Nations' (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a treaty that provides a framework for addressing international violence against women, as well as women and girls' access to education, economic opportunity, and political participation. CEDAW has been affirmed by 96 percent of UN members in the 30 years since its adoption; and despite a history of strong support by key congressional committees, the US remains only one of seven member countries to not have ratified this key convention.

► **END CHILD MARRIAGE**

To ensure social justice and advance global women and girls' equality, NCJW supports efforts to prevent child marriage. This gross human rights violation deprives women of their autonomy, cuts off women and girls' access to education, often leads to domestic and sexual violence, continued poverty among women, and unplanned and mistimed pregnancies that present high maternal and infant health risks.

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