

NATIONAL COUNCIL *of* JEWISH WOMEN

Vision for America

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MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN SINCE 1893

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.

Today, and not for the first time in our history, we find our country in crisis. From Congress to the courts to state houses, the advances NCJW has made by putting our values into action for health care, reproductive health, rights and access, social welfare programs, and other critical areas are in danger of being rolled back, and chances for moral and ethical advances are fleeting.

At a time of increasing health, wealth, and education disparities, funding for the social safety net, public education, and health care for our nation's most vulnerable is at risk while lawmakers, instead prioritize tax breaks for the wealthiest. Rising anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and racism are creating a climate of fear in our communities and informing hurtful policies affecting the rich tapestry of people and faiths that make up our great nation.

For 125 years, NCJW has boldly imagined a world where women, children, and families are fully valued and supported. Through education, advocacy, and community service, NCJW has worked to make this vision a reality at all levels of government and in communities across the United States. We've stayed true to our values throughout our history. And despite the current unease and anxiety, our goals remain clear and our resolve is firm: This is our Vision for America.

Ensure Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice

Since NCJW's founding in 1893, we have supported access to family planning and reproductive health care. NCJW was an early advocate for safe and legal abortion rights and access, and we continue our advocacy today at the local, state, and national levels. Our Jewish values teach us to respect the dignity and decisions of all people, and as such, we aim to create a world where everyone, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, or immigration status, is able to control their body, sexuality, and future. We call on our leaders to:

- **Protect abortion access in practice, not just principle**

Though *Roe v. Wade* affirmed the constitutional right to abortion, subsequent court decisions and legislation have severely eroded access to abortion care as well as enforced other systemic barriers such as racial discrimination and documentation status. NCJW opposes all measures that restrict access to safe abortion, shutter licensed clinics, and prevent patients from receiving care. These measures ignore scientific and medical evidence, and include mandatory waiting periods, counseling, and ultrasounds; abortion bans after 20 weeks gestation or a detected fetal heartbeat; and targeted restrictions of abortion providers.

Women with fewer resources shouldn't have inferior access to health care.

Funding restrictions that impede abortion access for low-income women — who are disproportionately women of color — are racist, discriminatory, and immoral. NCJW calls for the repeal of the Hyde Amendment and all other restrictions on abortion funding for those who depend on federal programs for their health care, including Medicaid recipients, federal employees, military members and their dependents,

indigenous people and Alaskan Natives, low income residents of the District of Columbia, Peace Corps volunteers, and incarcerated women.

Abortion is a part of comprehensive health care, and NCJW opposes efforts to deny insurance coverage of abortion care. NCJW works to ensure that private and public insurers provide a full range of medical services, including abortion, contraceptives, and emergency contraception.

- **Use a reproductive justice frame of analysis**

NCJW is a reproductive rights organization that uses a reproductive justice analysis. Reproductive justice is a framework created by women of color to describe the ways societal factors such as racism, poverty, environmental degradation, and state violence rob women of color of control over their reproductive lives. When social systems prevent individuals from raising their families as they choose, they are being denied a reproductive right. NCJW's approach to reproductive issues centers on the leadership of those who are most directly impacted by discrimination.

- **Promote access to contraceptives in the United States and around the world**

NCJW supports full funding of Title X,

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the federal family planning program, and all of its providers, including Planned Parenthood health centers. We support the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act’s inclusion of contraceptive services and supplies as an important medical service, and oppose any health care reforms that would cut coverage of contraception.

NCJW opposes the Global Gag Rule, which forbids any international family planning provider receiving US funding from providing abortion care, referring patients to abortion providers, or even discussing the option of safe abortion, as well as the domestic gag rule, which places these same restrictions on domestic providers.

NCJW also opposes efforts to defund the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the global initiative to expand access to reproductive health care and information to all people.

- **Safeguard religious liberty by protecting reproductive health**

For NCJW, protecting an individual’s ability to make their own health care decisions in accordance with their needs and personal beliefs is tied to religious

freedom. We strongly oppose attempts to use “religious liberty” as a cudgel against patients seeking medical care as well as protections for employers that refuse to cover contraception, medical providers that deny treatment to women seeking abortion, and doctors who refuse to treat certain patients or provide reproductive health care services.

- **Fund effective comprehensive sex education in public schools**

NCJW supports comprehensive, LGBTQ inclusive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, consent-based, sex positive sex education in public schools.

Young people have the right to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Sex education must be scientifically based, culturally fluid, and comprehensive. NCJW supports efforts to defund dangerous abstinence-only programming, which fails to teach about contraception or lies about its effectiveness, uses shame-based language to demean young people’s curiosities and sexual expression, marginalizes LGBTQ youth, and has proven to be ineffective.

Support Economic Justice and Provide for Human Needs

NCJW believes that the moral test of a nation is how it treats its most vulnerable people. Our founder Hannah G. Solomon asserted, “We must add our voices to those who cry out that there is a standard below which we will not allow human beings to live, and that standard is not at the freezing nor starving point.” Since she spoke those words, NCJW has championed policies that improve the lives of those living in poverty – disproportionately women, children, transgender individuals, indigenous people, individuals with disabilities, and people of color. All individuals have the right to live with dignity, provide for their families, and fully participate in society. Our workplace policies should ensure that workers can make a living wage, balance work and family responsibilities, and organize collectively in defense of their rights. We call on our leaders to:

- **Fully fund human needs programs**

Federal investments must provide for basic human needs. Programs that must be fully funded include health care, lifelong education, opportunities to work, income supplements when work is not possible or pays too little, and affordable necessities, including food, housing, and caregiving for children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities – without imposing work requirements or other conditions for receiving assistance. Federal budgets represent our nation’s priorities, and they must reflect our moral commitment to protect low-income people, invest in broadly shared prosperity, increase revenues, and seek responsible savings from reducing waste in the Pentagon and elsewhere. So too should our tax plans help low and moderate-income individuals instead of harming them by gutting critical human needs programs to provide tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans and corporations.

- **Support comprehensive health care coverage for all**

The health of a nation depends on the health of its people. NCJW supports high quality, affordable, accessible, and comprehensive health care coverage for all. NCJW was proud to play a role in the enactment of the Affordable Care Act, and supports efforts to build on and improve the law. NCJW continues to work towards universal access to comprehensive care, including reproductive health care services and mental health care as well as laws, policies, programs, and services that promote wellness and prevention of illness.

- **Provide comprehensive paid family and medical leave and paid sick days**

No one should be forced to choose between earning a paycheck and caring for an ill parent, child, or themselves, but only 17% of US workers have access to paid leave. Women in particular, especially

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single mothers, women of color, and low-wage earners, suffer from a lack of adequate paid leave policies. It is time for our national workplace policies to recognize the needs of working families by providing 12 weeks of comprehensive paid family and medical leave and seven job-protected paid sick days per year.

- **Set the federal minimum hourly wage at \$15 for all workers**

Many individuals living in poverty work full time jobs but still do not earn a livable wage that covers basic needs. Minimum wage earners are disproportionately women and people of color, and nearly a third of minimum wage earners have children. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 and eliminating the tipped minimum wage will lift incomes and benefit families.

- **Close the wage gap**

The average woman earns 80 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and the

gap is even wider for women of color.

NCJW advocates for measures that would help close the gap, including updating and strengthening existing equal pay legislation, barring retaliation against workers who disclose their own wages to co-workers, and prohibiting employers from seeking a job applicant's salary history.

- **End workplace discrimination**

Thirty states do not have nondiscrimination policies protecting LGBTQ employees from being fired for their sexual orientation or gender identity. Pregnant workers are frequently pushed out of their jobs or denied reasonable accommodations. NCJW advocates expanding and strengthening employment nondiscrimination laws, including protections for pregnant workers, at the federal, state, and local levels.

Promote a Diverse, Fair, and Independent Judiciary

Judges confirmed to lifetime seats on federal courts have the power to impact almost every aspect of public policy. They make decisions every day about health care, bodily autonomy, voting rights, the environment, law enforcement, and civil rights that impact our daily lives. Judges confirmed to lifetime seats must be open-minded, fair, and independent individuals. There is no place for ideological extremists on the federal bench. NCJW is a leader in the fight to ensure the federal bench reflects the communities it serves with diverse judges who will safeguard equality and justice for all. Through BenchMark: NCJW's Judicial Nominations Campaign, we build an educated electorate on the federal courts and the judges who sit on them. We utilize state-based Courts Matter coalitions to engage and mobilize NCJW's grassroots across the country. We call on our senators to confirm judges who will:

- **Protect constitutional rights for all Americans, especially reproductive rights and religious liberties**

Federal courts are the ultimate arbiter of our most cherished rights and no place for judges who will diminish protections for historically disadvantaged groups while favoring corporations and the powerful. We need judges who will support the constitutional values and protections of everyone.

- **Be independent and qualified**

The Senate must insist on nominees who will uphold the rights of all people and embrace judicial independence.

We need federal judges who will serve as a check on politicians in all branches of government if they break the law or violate the Constitution.

Nominees must be selected after consultation with home-state senators.

The "advice and consent" procedure outlined in the US Constitution includes White House consultation prior to the nomination.

Because each federal judge wields so much power, nominees must be able to demonstrate that they will be impartial arbiters of the law. The nonpartisan American Bar Association (ABA) evaluates judicial nominees based on objective assessments of candidates' competence, integrity, and temperament. The Senate Judiciary Committee should honor these reviews.

- **Diversify the federal bench**

Courts should reflect the communities they serve. Diversity in the courts inspires confidence in the judicial system and ensures balanced decisions.

Ensure and Advance Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

NCJW knows that to pursue justice, we must promote equal opportunities and end discrimination. A democratic society must value a diversity of voices and promote respect for all. NCJW advocates for policies that protect equal rights under the law, and seeks to end discrimination based on race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status, and gender identity. We call on our leaders to:

- **Fight back against hate crimes**

Jews, Muslims, transgender individuals, and other marginalized communities have seen a rise in hate crimes in recent years. Hate crime laws must be properly enforced to protect the rights of all who are vulnerable, with full funding and training for law enforcement to identify and respond to hate crimes. NCJW supports mandatory hate crime data collection to better support communities impacted by hate and to inform policy.

- **Support equal rights for LGBTQ individuals**

States across the country have introduced harmful legislation and initiatives that seek to repeal nondiscrimination protections, limit LGBTQ individuals' access to health care, and restrict transgender individual's access to gender specific facilities like restrooms. NCJW works to end to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, which are currently not protected by federal law. In addition to advocating for federal, state, and local antidiscrimination laws, NCJW is committed to ending bullying and discrimination against LGBTQ students, opposing attempts to use "religious liberty" laws as a smokescreen for discrimination against LGBTQ

individuals, and supporting full and equal access for all.

- **Balance civil liberties and national security**

NCJW supports the protection of every individual's right to privacy, and believes that national security must be protected without sacrificing the core individual freedoms and liberties that are basic to our democracy.

- **Fix our broken criminal justice system**

Over two million Americans, including a million women, are currently incarcerated in a criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates people of color. Federal, state, and local governments must take action to end racial bias, police violence, and unnecessarily harsh sentencing practices.

- **Protect the rights of individuals with disabilities**

Inclusion and rights of people with disabilities is a critical component of the Jewish ideal of a just world. NCJW opposes attempts to weaken the Americans with Disabilities Act and defund critical programs that support people with disabilities, such as Medicaid and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Promote Civic Engagement

Since our founding, NCJW has worked to promote voting rights, advocating for women's suffrage, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Motor Voter Act, and more. NCJW believes that our vote is our voice, and our democracy is at its strongest when every voice is heard. We support policies that ensure easy and equitable access to the ballot box. We call on our leaders to:

- **Protect and expand voting rights**

In 2013, the Supreme Court gutted crucial portions of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), and states responded with a flood of new restrictions making it harder to vote. Burdensome and unnecessary restrictions on voter registration disproportionately impact people of color, young people, the elderly, non-native English speakers, and those living in rural areas. NCJW opposes voter suppression laws, and supports legislation that would renew the protections of the VRA.

- **Modernize voting and voter registration**

Making registration more accessible increases turnout, which in turn makes

our democracy more responsive and representative. NCJW supports

legislation that would modernize our election systems and make it easier to register and cast a ballot, including automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration, and online voter registration.

- **Support increased voter education**

NCJW believes voters should have the opportunity to engage with the political process in a meaningful way. We support voter registration drives, community discussions of civil issues, candidate forums, and other voter education initiatives.

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Promote Religious Freedom and Strengthen the Separation between Religion and State

Religious liberty and the separation of religion and state are key constitutional principles that protect our rights in a democratic society. The United States was founded on the principle of freedom of religion, as well as freedom from religion; many came to this country fleeing religious persecution, and religion has flourished in the US precisely because of the wall separating religion and state. However, some religiously affiliated groups have twisted the concept of “religious liberty” to justify discrimination against women, LGBTQ individuals, and religious minorities, including Jews. NCJW advocates for a strong separation between religion and state. We call on our leaders to:

- **Oppose federal funding for religious institutions that discriminate**

While many religious organizations, including NCJW, have a long and proud history of providing social services, the government should not be in the position of funding religious activity. Religiously affiliated providers of social services can and should establish separate nonprofit entities, but federal funds should not go to religious organizations that can discriminate against whom they hire and serve.

- **Maintain the separation of religion and state**

NCJW strongly supports measures that sustain the separation of religion and state, such as the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits nonprofit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.

- **Keep religion out of public education**

Every family should be able to freely decide if and how their children should receive religious education. NCJW opposes educational policies that try to impose the religious beliefs of one group on all students, such as abstinence-only education or “intelligent design” classes that question scientific consensus on the theory of evolution. NCJW opposes school voucher programs that funnel taxpayer dollars to private schools, religious organizations, or schools with discriminatory policies toward students, teachers, and/or other school personnel. Public funds should go to public schools.

Welcome Immigrants and Refugees

The Torah teaches us, “Welcome the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.” Welcoming immigrants and refugees is a moral imperative. As Jews, we feel a particular urgency to fight back against xenophobia. Many Jews remember our own families’ experiences as refugees from war, displacement, and religious persecution. More than a century ago, NCJW established an agency at Ellis Island to support and aid immigrant families, with partner offices in 250 cities providing job training and legal aid for immigrant women. Today NCJW continues to advocate for the rights of immigrants and refugees. We call on our leaders to:

- **Enact comprehensive immigration reform**

NCJW supports comprehensive immigration reform that provides opportunities for undocumented immigrants to earn legal status and citizenship. This includes expedited family reunification by reducing the waiting periods that keep immigrant families apart, the establishment of humane border security policies, ending family detainment and detention, and maintaining robust protections for those seeking asylum in the US.

- **Support a solution for Dreamers and those with temporary status**

NCJW supports legislation that would provide Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients – individuals brought to the US as children – and their families a path to citizenship. We also support a permanent solution for individuals with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), many of whom have lived in the United States for decades and now face deportation back to countries that are unable to accommodate their return.

- **Oppose anti-immigrant policies**

NCJW opposes policies and directives

that seek to limit legal immigration to the United States and target individuals and communities as “illegal” or dangerous.

- **Oppose increased interior enforcement and border security measures**

Increased raids, immigrant detention, and deportation cause entire communities to live in fear. Policies that punish “sanctuary cities” – jurisdictions whose law enforcement agencies choose not to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement – make us all less safe by making it more difficult and risky for immigrants and their families to step forward as victims or witnesses of crimes.

- **Provide human needs services for all, including health care, regardless of immigration status**

Hunger and illness don’t discriminate based on immigration status, and neither should necessary human services.

Currently, undocumented immigrants contribute billions of dollars in state and local taxes, and must continue to have access to human services, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and federal financial aid for higher education without

fear of jeopardizing their path to citizenship. NCJW opposes barriers to immigrants' ability to obtain the health care coverage they need, including reproductive health care.

- **Welcome and support refugees**

The world is currently facing the worst refugee crisis in history, with 22.5 million refugees — over half of whom are children. Yet for 2019, the US agreed to

admit only 30,000 — the lowest number in modern history. The US must commit to accepting more refugees and fully fund programs to support their resettlement.

The current administration has sought multiple times to block refugees and immigrants from majority-Muslim countries from coming to the United States. NCJW opposes these xenophobic policies.

End Gun Violence

The United States has higher rates of gun violence than any other country in the developed world. On average, 96 Americans are killed by guns every day. NCJW supports common sense gun safety measures that will reduce violence and save lives. We call on our leaders to:

- **Pass common sense public safety laws**

NCJW supports public safety measures to reduce gun violence, such as requiring gun buyers to pass a criminal background check; closing the private sale loophole; banning military-style assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and bump stocks; and criminalizing gun trafficking.

- **Keep guns out of the hands of abusers**

Survivors of domestic violence are more than five times as likely to be killed by their partner if they own a gun, but the vast majority of states permit convicted domestic abusers to keep their guns. And many dating partners trapped in abusive relationships are unable to access the same protections as married or cohabitating partners, such as access to protective orders and protection from

gun violence. Stalking survivors face similar obstacles. Lawmakers must close loopholes that leave survivors of violence vulnerable.

- **Limit guns in public spaces**

In recent years, the gun lobby has promoted a state legislative agenda that would ultimately allow anyone to carry a gun anywhere — without a permit — even if they have a violent criminal record and haven't undergone any training. Expanding the areas where guns can be carried and the circumstances in which they can be used is only associated with greater harm. Lawmakers must ensure there are limits on gun-carrying in our schools, public parks, and in our other most vulnerable spaces.

Stop Gender Based and Sexual Violence

Intimate partner violence, sexual assault, harassment, and stalking affect millions of people. On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million individuals. The numbers can be even higher for members of transgender and gender-queer communities as well as for native women. We call on our leaders to:

- **Expand the protections of the Violence Against Women Act**

NCJW helped draft and pass the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA), the first federal law addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, and other kinds of intimate partner violence.

But the promise of VAWA has yet to be fulfilled. Dating partners are without protections afforded to other current or former intimate partners, although stalking is a crime according to the federal government, the classification varies state to state, leaving survivors vulnerable. Sexual violence, including sexual harassment and sexual assault, continues to be a pervasive problem on college campuses, in the US military, and in the workplace.

- **Create safe, respectful, and equitable workplaces**

Though some employees are protected from workplace sexual harassment, it remains a widespread problem, affecting workers in every state, in every kind of workplace setting and industry, and at every level of employment. Women, particularly women of color and immigrant women,

are overrepresented in low-wage jobs, which often lack legal protections and critical supports like higher wages, fair and predictable schedules, access to health insurance, and paid time off, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation. NCJW supports updating our laws to: protect employees of small businesses and independent contractors; strengthen employees' ability to hold employers and individual harassers accountable; restrict employer-imposed secrecy; restore survivors' voices; and require sexual harassment prevention strategies, among others.

- **Combat sexual violence on campus**

Schools, colleges, and universities should be places of learning and development, not fear and injustice.

Title IX was meant to guarantee that students of all genders have an equal right to learn, and it should be interpreted accordingly. NCJW supports legislation that would combat campus sexual assault and protect survivors.

End Human Trafficking

NCJW is committed to ensuring that everyone lives free from coercion, violence, and exploitation. We call on our leaders to:

- **Treat victims like survivors, not criminals**

Survivors of human trafficking are victims of a terrible crime, but all too often the criminal justice system treats them as criminals. A criminal record can make it extremely difficult to access housing, employment, emergency food, aid, or shelter, and social services. NCJW supports legislation that would protect trafficked minors from prosecution and vacate the criminal records of trafficking survivors.

- **Provide inclusive, survivor-centered, and trauma-informed services for survivors**

Members of marginalized communities, such as immigrants, homeless individuals, young people, LGBTQ individuals, and people of color are more

likely to be trafficked and less likely to receive adequate services and care.

Anti-trafficking policies must take into account discrimination against survivors by first responders, the criminal justice system, service providers, and society at large.

Trafficking survivors are the experts of their own experience and are crucial to informing service delivery, public policy, law enforcement, and advocacy efforts.

Decisions made without the cooperation and consent of survivors are less likely to succeed and might even leave them more isolated, distrustful, and vulnerable to abuse. NCJW supports survivor-led efforts to help states and local governments develop and implement comprehensive survivor-centered programs and policies.

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