

WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Guide to Writing Public Policy Resolutions

“I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and have taken hold of thy hand, and kept thee, and set thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations.”

Isaiah 42:6

Women’s League for Conservative Judaism, the women’s organization of the Conservative/Masorti movement, has been engaged in creating and acting upon public policy and social action resolutions for over 60 years. Using the words of the Prophet Isaiah and other ancient sources to guide us, we have individually and collectively made our voices heard on contemporary issues that affect Jewish life and the greater welfare of the world. The body of adopted resolutions, which can be viewed on our website ([www.wlcj.org/world affairs/resolutions](http://www.wlcj.org/world%20affairs/resolutions)), provides the authority for Women’s League’s support of a wide range of public policy issues.

What are resolutions about?

Women’s League has developed an amazing body of public policy resolutions that reflect the pulse of this vibrant organization on a wide range of issues in the United States, Canada, Israel, and

other parts of the world. Resolutions are considered and adopted at biennial conventions as well as at annual meetings.

A sampling of the topics addressed by resolutions adopted at the 2008 convention include: Autism Awareness, Energy and Its Responsible Use, Funding for TALI Schools in Israel, Hekhsher Tzedek, and Pre-Nuptial Agreements.

How do you develop a resolution?

The resolution process begins in February prior to convention. Notice is sent to region presidents, sisterhood presidents, bulletin editors, and other members requesting that they submit topics for consideration to the resolutions committee. Draft resolutions are written in committee. Any sisterhood member can participate in the process by contacting the Women's League public policy chair.

Resolutions can come from a variety of sources. Region public policy chairs are canvassed for any areas that may be of concern to the region sisterhoods. Any sisterhood or sisterhood member in good standing can submit resolutions for consideration.

GUIDELINE 1

The resolutions process begins by selecting a topic that is of interest or concern. The topic selected must be of national or international scope; examples would be public welfare (e.g. health warnings on labels), education policy funded by federal mandate (e.g. Headstart, No Child Left Behind), defense (e.g. U.S. sanctions), food safety (e.g. USDA regulations on ground beef, standards for federally funded school lunches, women's health/coverage for mammograms).

As a national organization we do not entertain issues of local concerns, however, sisterhood members certainly can choose a local issue and advocate policy positions to locally elected officials.

GUIDELINE 2

Check to see if your topic has been addressed previously by Women's League. Start by going to the website at www.wlcj.org. Click on World Affairs & Public Policy and then click on Resolutions from the drop down menu. All resolutions to date are listed alphabetically by topic. Check to see if your topic has been addressed by an earlier resolution. You can amend an existing resolution or you can draft a totally new resolution addressing the topic further.

GUIDELINE 3

Research your topic for its timeliness and relevance for consideration, whether you are amending an existing resolution or offering a new resolution. You can use the web (citing only reputable websites), newspapers, newsletters from organizations, updates from elected officials, etc.

When researching a topic please consider:

- Timeliness (Will this still be an issue at convention?)
- Importance (Is this an issue that affects us nationally?)
- Does the issue have the support of the Jewish "defense" organizations (e.g. ADL, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations)?
- Do you know any other organizations working on this issue?

What is the latest information on the topic? You can begin your search with Google or another search engine for background information from qualified and accurate resources that will become your substantiating argument for the resolution. Other published sources may provide additional background information for you.

GUIDELINE 4

Send your topic statement and the substantiating background information to the Women’s League public policy chair and executive director. The resolution committee, composed of staff and region public policy chairs, will review the information and then contact you. The committee may request additional information and/or ask you to help write the resolution. You will not be alone; an experienced writer is available to help anyone interested in getting started! You do not need to be at the convention in order to participate in resolution writing.

The resolutions committee informs the Women’s League executive committee and board of directors of the topics of the draft resolutions.

Input from the field is gathered during the summer prior to convention when draft resolutions are sent to the region public policy chairs for their review and circulation to their sisterhood presidents for input and comment. Timely response is essential. The commented drafts are then returned to the working committee and the draft resolutions are either accepted as is or are edited to reflect the input received.

Draft resolutions will be available on the members-only pages of the Women’s League website. Region presidents, public policy chairs, and all convention delegates receive electronic copies prior to convention. Hard copies are made available at the convention caucus.

GUIDELINE 5

Resolutions are written in a specific, formatted style. For example, using the resolution on Pre-nuptial Agreement (2008), the formatted language looks like this:

a. TITLE, which identifies the subject of the resolution:

Agunah/Pre-Nuptial Agreement (2008)

b. BACKGROUND, which gives a short summary of the research on the topic. Background information usually describes the current state of the issue without judgmental statements:

Background

In Judaism, the act of marriage is identified as kiddushin attesting to the reverence with which marriage is held. Most rabbinic scholars consider marriage between two Jews as being an anticipated life-long commitment. Yet, some marriages do fail and Judaism provides for the dissolution of the marriage by means of divorce.

Today in the United States, statistics show a civil divorce rate of 50% over all and an estimated 30% to 40% divorce rate among Jews. Divorce can not only be emotionally traumatic, but also a complicated and often devastating legal proceeding. For Jews, civil divorce must be accompanied by a halachically determined religious divorce known as a get. Without a get, a Jewish woman is considered bound to the original marriage contract, and is identified as an agunah, a “chained” woman.

The designation as an agunah prevents the woman from entering into any future Jewish marriage. It is in the spirit of equity and justice for women that Women’s League for Conservative Judaism addresses the realistic protection of women entering marriages. A program such as Making Marriage Work (MMW) of Beth Am Congregation of San Diego, California, offers a successful model worthy of emulation.

c. SERIES OF “WHEREAS...” clauses that tell why the resolution is necessary. (To shape a whereas clause, substitute the word “Whereas” for “Since” in your thinking.)

Whereas, the identification of the status of an agunah still exists in a significant number of Jewish marriages given the civil divorce rate,

Whereas, Conservative/Masorti Judaism offers and has implemented prenuptial measures to alleviate this problem, and,

Whereas different forms of prenuptial measures exist: the incorporation of the Lieberman clause (a moral obligation of the couple to come before the beit din in wanting a divorce) in the ketubah, the signing of a separate document apart from the ketubah, called the t'nai b'kiddushim, with a letter of intent in the native language of the couple signed on a separate occasion.

d. "BE IT RESOLVED" STATEMENT that sets forth the Women's League position and a series of action statements:

Therefore, be it resolved that Women's League for Conservative Judaism seeks to have its members:

- 1. Become aware of all conditions for a valid and equitable Jewish marriage;*
- 2. Promote the inclusion of the Lieberman clause in the ketubah in North America with an accompanying letter of agreement;*
- 3. Engage in a comprehensive understanding of marriage through sisterhood and region education programming; and*
- 4. Encourage congregational rabbis to incorporate the prenuptial agreements as part of pre-marriage counseling.*

GUIDELINE 6

All registered convention delegates have an opportunity to attend a scheduled caucus and to make a final review of the resolutions. The caucus at convention is divided into general, Canadian, and UN resolutions. Once the topic and language have been reviewed and approved in the caucus sessions, resolutions proceed to a plenary session of the convention or the annual meeting where they are presented for adoption.

Only resolutions that have gone through the process described are eligible for consideration at the convention or the annual meeting.

Closing

Approved resolutions are added to the resolution compendium on the Women's League website.

Resolutions are only effective if we make them important and use them for presentations and action by region and sisterhood leadership.

For more information and to keep abreast of news that impacts your world, sign up for Women's League's Ba'Olam: The World Affairs Newsletter and Action Alerts (womensleague@wlcj.org). Check the Women's League website (www.wlcj.org) frequently for news and updates.

Be sure that your sisterhood and region utilize Women's League resolutions and materials as they formulate a public policy agenda and projects for the year.



**WOMEN'S LEAGUE
FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 820
New York, New York 10115

212.870.1260

fax 212.870.1261

info@wlcj.org

www.wlcj.org