

### TIPS FOR INTRODUCING STATE LEGISLATION

Do you have an idea for a new piece of legislation or policy on a critical issue that is missing in your state legislature? Good news, there is something you can do! Working with your NCJW section, coalition partners, and lawmakers, introducing legislation in your state capitol is not as hard as it may sound. Check out the tips below along with [NCJW's action plan worksheet](#) to help you get started.

#### Do Your Homework:

Before you even start to think about drafting legislative language or adapting other state bills or coalition template language, and finding a state lawmaker to sponsor and introduce the bill, it's important to do your research. *Contact the NCJW Washington office, visit the state legislature's website, and seek advice from lawmakers and state policy experts.*

- ▶ Does the issue you intend to address fit within NCJW's Resolutions?
- ▶ What are the current state laws on this issue?
- ▶ Is this something that must be passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor to take effect in your state?
- ▶ Has this legislation been introduced in the past? If so, what happened?
- ▶ Is this issue of interest to particular lawmakers?
- ▶ What is the political climate in your state?
- ▶ Is there (or could there be) organized opposition to this legislative effort?
- ▶ Have other states passed this legislation?
- ▶ What will the legislation, if passed, cost the state? If there's an associated cost, you might want to meet with budget committee staff to discuss the implications.
- ▶ What are the chances for success of your effort? *If the chances for success are minimal, consider related legislation that is a smaller step forward toward your goal. It's a great opportunity to start changing the conversation.*

#### Understand Your State Legislative Cycle:

Check online to learn about your state legislative cycle. Build relationships with legislators and key staff if you don't already know them. Call to introduce yourself, and schedule an in person meeting. Contact the NCJW Washington office for more information.

- ▶ Do you know the key dates of the legislative year?
- ▶ Are there certain dates for bill introduction, budget hearings or other committee hearings that may be relevant?
- ▶ Do you know who the committee chairs and other important legislators are?

#### Establish NCJW Credibility on the Issue:

If NCJW isn't already a known entity on the issue, learn all you can by attending workshops, joining coalitions working on the issue, and hosting issue related programs.

- ▶ Are there key existing organizations and/or social justice secular and religious organizations within your state? If so, set up meetings with them to get to know the people already involved and to learn more about the issue.
- ▶ Is there an existing coalition? If so, reach out about joining. If there isn't a coalition in your community, [start one](#).

#### Engage Partners in Your Effort:

There is strength in numbers. Engage partners from the outset to enhance support for your bill.

- ▶ What groups are working on the issue? Who is the lead group?
- ▶ Is there a coalition working on this issue?
- ▶ Who are likely potential partners? Who aren't the "usual suspects" but have a self-interest? Think about casting a wide net. Depending on the issue, you may want to consider the following communities: Jewish, faith, law enforcement, teachers, women of color, victims' rights, etc.

### **Choose a Bill Sponsor:**

Once you fully understand the pros/cons, financial implication(s), and breadth of support for your idea, it's time to look for a bill sponsor to introduce the legislation in the legislature.

- ▶ Look online for state legislation on the same issue and find the sponsor(s) and supporter(s) of those bills. Determine if the lawmaker(s) is still serving in the legislature.
- ▶ If the above isn't an option, start with legislators and staff with whom you already have a connection. Ask if they know of a lawmaker(s) who might like to sponsor your legislation or if they would like to do so.
- ▶ If you don't have contacts with lawmakers or their staff, look for lawmakers who support NCJW's issues.

### **Draft Bill Language:**

Your bill sponsor may have some familiarity with and expertise on your issue. Legislative language will often be generated by the lawmaker's staff.

- ▶ If possible, work with another organization that has the capability to help write or edit bill language.
- ▶ Look to see if other states have similar legislation.
- ▶ Utilize your NCJW network, including SPAs and the Washington office, for template or similar legislation.

### **Build Community Support for the Bill:**

It's helpful to look for like-minded organizations that would be supportive of your effort. It's also important for you to educate and inform your community.

- ▶ Engage other members and NCJW sections in your state if applicable.
- ▶ Work with your existing coalition and/or reach out to other existing coalitions that would likely support your effort.
- ▶ Reach out to your local Jewish Community Relations Council and Federation to engage the Jewish community.
- ▶ Utilize local and state Jewish and general press.
- ▶ Host a community program.
- ▶ Utilize local radio to spread the word and educate your community.
- ▶ Raise awareness on social media.

### **Be Prepared:**

Once you've got a legislator ready to support your bill, it's time to get prepared.

- ▶ Be ready to respond to any amendments.
- ▶ Plan, build, and sustain support for the legislation through grassroots outreach and lobby visits with legislators and/or their staff.
  - Write [letters to the editor](#) and [op-eds](#) about the bill.
  - Take out ads in local press.
  - Host community education programs to encourage support for the legislation.
- ▶ Anticipate the need to re-evaluate your plan and pieces evolve.

### **Celebrate!**

Though you may not see results right away, civic engagement is powerful and should be celebrated. Remember to recognize the small victories and the efforts of everyone involved as you journey towards your final social change goal.

*For more information, please contact NCJW Grassroots Associate, Leanne Gale, at [leanne@ncjwdc.org](mailto:leanne@ncjwdc.org).*