



## Vision for America

At the start of a new legislative session, we take stock of how far we have come as a nation and how far we still must go. Poverty, injustice, and violence: these are the types of 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 America and a safer 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. This is our policy agenda for the future of our communities.

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

Throughout its 115 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 fulfill its obligation to 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. In the US, poverty — not prosperity — is the reality for millions of individuals and families who daily make difficult choices between food, rent, medical bills, and other basic expenses. NCJW believes that the moral test of a nation is how it treats its weakest people. Sadly, in recent years, the US has failed that test, diverting critical federal dollars to the Iraq war 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 dollars for human needs programs that promote the well-being of women, children, and families. 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.

### ► **Establish a Health-Care System that Works 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. Unfortunately, the US has a long way to go with approximately 47 million Americans — including nearly 9 million children — without health insurance. The cost of health care is rising so significantly that even individuals who are covered spend more than they can afford or purchase less coverage than they need, and the health-care landscape is bleaker still for minorities. NCJW seeks a health-care system that provides universal access to comprehensive care for all — no matter where one lives, a plan that covers, among other health concerns, the full range of reproductive health-care services and mental health, and emphasizes prevention.

### ► **Work to End Violence Against Women**

Throughout its history, NCJW has worked for the elimination of, and protection from, all forms of harassment, violence, abuse, and exploitation against women. 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. 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. Last year, in a single day domestic violence programs served more than 53,000 adults and children in the United States. However, a significant number of requests — more than 7,700 — 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. Further, 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.

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## Ensure Reproductive Health and Rights

NCJW was an early supporter of abortion rights and access to the full range of family planning options. Today, we continue to advocate for reproductive health and rights at the local, state, national, and international levels. 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 religious liberty for all. 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**

Studies show that comprehensive sex education is effective and supported by a vast majority of adults in the US. NCJW supports comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education in public schools. NCJW also supports the elimination of federal funding for misleading and ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Young people need accurate information about contraceptive options in order to make informed and responsible life decisions. Abstinence-only curricula do not teach about birth control and often contain false information about its effectiveness. Further, as a religiously affiliated organization committed to the separation between religion and state, NCJW is particularly concerned that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, using federal taxpayer dollars, frequently seek to impose one particular religious viewpoint about sex 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 the repeal of restrictions on abortion funding for Medicaid recipients, federal employees and their dependents, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, low-income women in the District of Columbia, Peace Corps volunteers, and women in federal prisons.

► **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, and for voluntary international family planning. Further, NCJW advocates for equitable health insurance coverage of contraceptives, including emergency contraception. In addition, NCJW believes that refusal clauses that allow workers to deny services to others must include safeguards so that any one worker's religious beliefs do not infringe on the rights of others. Globally, US 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 international organizations dependent on US funds. NCJW strongly supports the repeal of the global gag rule, and the restoration of funds for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which works to ensure universal access to reproductive health and information.

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## Promote a Fair and Independent Judiciary

The composition of the federal courts, impacted substantially by a president's nominations, is essential to the delivery of justice in our nation. The courts serve as the critical backstop and protector of the fundamental rights and freedoms that define our democracy, including religious freedom, the rights of minorities, and the right to be free from governmental intrusion over matters of personal choice. The impact of federal judicial nominations is felt well beyond the term of any one president, shaping our rights for generations. NCJW strongly believes that a president must fulfill his or her constitutional obligation to seek advice and consent from the Senate in the matter of federal judicial nominees by engaging in true consultation. Further, NCJW believes that the most basic requirement for a lifetime seat on the federal bench is a proven commitment to constitutional rights, including reproductive rights and religious liberty. Over the past eight years, the independence of the judiciary has been threatened by appointments made based on extreme ideological grounds. We implore the new administration to reverse this destructive trend.

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## 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. To this end, our leaders must:

### ► **Safeguard and Enforce Anti-Discrimination Protections**

NCJW supports equal opportunity for all in the public and private sectors through programs such as affirmative action. In addition, NCJW seeks an end to all discrimination against individuals on the basis of race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. As such, NCJW has worked for many years to expand hate crimes laws to cover those victimized because of their disability, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. NCJW works for laws and policies that provide equal rights for same-sex couples and opposes efforts to amend the US or state constitutions to define marriage in order to deny rights to these couples. 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. Strong federal anti-discrimination legislation must be passed to prevent discrimination in the workplace based on gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

### ► **Protect and Expand Voting Rights**

NCJW has long supported strong voting rights legislation and enforcement. NCJW works for election laws, policies, and practices that ensure easy and equitable access to the electoral process and that every vote counts and can be verified. Further, NCJW believes that, as a matter of simple justice and civil rights, residents of our nation's capital deserve voting representation in Congress.

### ► **Balance Civil Liberties and National Security**

NCJW supports the protection of every individual's right to privacy. Therefore, NCJW opposes warrantless domestic surveillance and believes that other parties, such as telecommunications companies, must be held accountable for violations of civil liberties. NCJW 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**

NCJW has been involved in service and advocacy on behalf of new immigrants throughout its history. Today, NCJW works for comprehensive, humane, and equitable immigration and naturalization laws, policies, and practices that facilitate and expedite legal status for more individuals. Toward this end, NCJW supports comprehensive

immigration reform and rejects the enforcement-only approach that separates families and punishes those seeking opportunity and a better life. NCJW rejects a punitive-based approach 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, to increase discrimination against legal residents and citizens with foreign-sounding names, and to hurt businesses and industries that depend on immigrant clients and workers. A comprehensive reform approach would 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.

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## 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. In addition, 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 human-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 nonprofits must be forbidden from discriminating in the dissemination of their services and their hiring decisions. As such, NCJW vigorously opposes federal funding for faith-based institutions that discriminate.

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## 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 US. Dating before the inception of the State of Israel and continuing today, NCJW has been active within Israel in the fields of education and literacy as well as women's empowerment. NCJW values and supports the close relationship between the US and Israel built on shared democratic values and mutual understanding and respect. In addition, NCJW works for policies and programs that promote the peaceful co-existence within Israel and between Israel and its neighbors.

Since the State of Israel was established in 1948, the US has rendered crucial support, providing foreign and military aid as well as leadership on the peace process at the

international level. NCJW is gratified that US leaders from both parties have long considered the security of Israel to be critical to the strategic interests of the US 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 US and recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

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## 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 NGO status 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, advocating 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 Darfur

NCJW believes that as a nation we are obligated to do everything in our power to immediately end the genocide in the Darfur region of 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. In the wake of 400,000 murders and the displacement of 2.5 million more refugees, strong international intervention is critically needed.

### ► Restore Habeas and End Torture

NCJW believes that the US must obey international law and restore its moral authority by treating every suspect and every prisoner of war with dignity. NCJW believes that the US should honor the Geneva Conventions and supports the restoration of habeas corpus. Additionally, NCJW abhors the use of torture and the degrading treatment of prisoners. It is essential that America restore and bolster constitutional rights and civil liberties, ending unjust and inhumane policies and practices perpetrated in the name of national security.

### ► End Gun Violence in Our Neighborhoods through Gun Control

The US 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 laws, policies, and programs to restrict and regulate firearms and prevent gun violence.

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