



# LEGISLATION/ PUBLIC POLICY

## ADVANCEMENT GUIDE

 Visit [www.GFWC.org/membership/club-manual/](http://www.GFWC.org/membership/club-manual/) for updates and more information.

## Legislation/Public Policy

More than 100 years of GFWC advocacy has garnered such results as child labor laws, women's suffrage, pure food and drug statutes, rights for people with disabilities, and domestic violence programs. Today, GFWC extends this record of national significance with an organized and effective framework. Our goals include:

- Educating members about the political process, policy issues, and pending legislation.
- Encouraging civic engagement among members.
- Mobilizing members to advocate for GFWC policy priorities.

*Advocacy in Action: The GFWC Legislation and Public Policy Advancement Guide* supports member advocacy efforts, based on GFWC Resolutions and priority issues.



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## GFWC AND PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

Advocacy and educating our members and the public about public policy issues affecting our communities is the core of our efforts. The IRS details what constitutes lobbying and what is considered public education and advocacy. An organization will be regarded as attempting to influence specific legislation if it contacts the elected official, whether member of Congress, state legislature or city council, and asks to support or oppose that specific bill. If the organization asks the general public to support or oppose a specific legislative proposal, that action is also lobbying. Both forms are allowed, but the expenses must be reported on the IRS 990 and there are spending restrictions. GFWC must be nonpartisan in our outreach efforts. It is perfectly legal for a nonprofit organization to lobby, as long as lobbying is not a substantial part of the organization's activities.

## THE GFWC LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER

GFWC's Legislative Action Center is an exciting policy tool that allows members to stay informed on legislation, spread the word on important issues, and take action by contacting your elected officials. In addition, GFWC is able to track and promote national legislation that is relevant to the mission and scope of GFWC Resolutions and member interests. This is a vital piece in promoting GFWC as a national



leader on the major issues that face our nation. To access the Legislative Action Center, visit [www.GFWC.org](http://www.GFWC.org) and select 'Take Action' under the Public Policy tab.

### GFWC RESOLUTIONS

GFWC Resolutions must be national or international in scope and germane to the work or interests of GFWC members. There are more than 200 resolutions, addressing issues such as conservation, education, women's health, children's welfare, the United Nations, crime prevention, and support of the arts. Each resolution is reviewed every four years by the GFWC Resolutions Committee. The Executive Committee reviews all Resolutions Committee actions before they are presented to the membership.

#### **How to Submit a Resolution**

The Executive Committee, State Federations, GFWC Community Service Program chairmen, Standing Committee chairmen, Special Committee chairmen, and the international Liaisons chairman may submit resolutions to the Resolutions Committee.

Before submitting a resolution, review the current GFWC Resolutions to make sure a similar one does not already exist. Download a PDF of the GFWC Resolutions at [www.GFWC.org](http://www.GFWC.org), or purchase printed copies through the GFWC Marketplace at [www.GFWC.org/membership/marketplace](http://www.GFWC.org/membership/marketplace) or 1-800-443-GFWC (4392). If there is not already a similar one, you can submit a proposed resolution to your State Federation for consideration at your next State Convention. Resolutions passed at State Conventions are forwarded to GFWC. Specific procedures for pursuing resolutions at the State level are outlined in your State Federation's bylaws.

In order for a resolution to be considered by voting delegates at the GFWC Annual Convention, all proposals must be submitted to the GFWC Resolutions chairman by **November 1**. Only emergency resolutions which address timely issues are accepted after November 1. Proposed resolutions must be typed and submitted with supporting documentation.

For more information about the resolutions process, review the GFWC Standing Rules at [www.GFWC.org/what-we-do/governance/](http://www.GFWC.org/what-we-do/governance/).

#### **Annual Review of Resolutions**

All resolution proposals to be voted on at the GFWC Annual Convention are presented to GFWC members in the *Call to Convention*, which is included as part of the March+April issue of *GFWC Clubwoman Magazine*. These proposed changes are discussed and debated by Convention delegates during GFWC Annual Convention business sessions. The resolutions and amendments are adopted or lost by a majority vote. Once adopted, resolutions become the basis for GFWC public policy initiatives. Resolutions are considered active until their purpose has been accomplished or rescinded by Convention delegates.

#### **Ways to Guide GFWC Public Policy Positions**

- Educate club members on GFWC Resolutions.
- Involve club members in developing GFWC policy positions by participating in the resolutions process of your State Federation and GFWC.
- Encourage your club members to subscribe to the Legislative Action Center.
- Read and discuss proposed resolutions and amendments published in the *Call to Convention*.
- Send a club delegate to meet with your elected State Officials about club positions on public policy issues.



### **RESOLUTIONS AND ADVOCACY**

Only with a resolution on the books can GFWC advocate for or against an issue. Resolutions can be used as tools for advocating important issues at the local, state, and national levels. If a particular subject is not addressed by a resolution, members cannot use GFWC's support to advocate for or against the issue, but may advocate as concerned individuals.

**Advocacy Do's and Don'ts**

As a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization, GFWC may advocate for or against specific issues, but by law cannot endorse or oppose candidates. You can certainly support candidates as an individual, but not on behalf of GFWC.  
**DO:**

- Advocate for various bills, issues, and ballot measures.
- Take action by contacting elected officials through the Legislative Action Center
- Volunteer and attend voter registration drives.
- Hold nonpartisan public education sessions about political issues.
- Sponsor candidate forums, ensuring that all candidates are formally invited to participate.
- Educate all candidates on GFWC Resolutions.

**DON'T:**

- Endorse or oppose a candidate or political party.
- Oppose GFWC Resolutions.\*
- Use official club funds, facilities, in-kind donations, publications, or activities on behalf of a candidate or political party.
- Ask candidates to sign a pledge on any issue.
- Increase the volume or amount of incumbent criticism as election time approaches.

\*A state federation that has a differing opinion on any adopted resolutions may register a minority opinion with GFWC. If a State Federation takes legislative action on an issue that it has a minority opinion on, it must clearly state that its action represents the GFWC minority vote.

**THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

**HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW**

The diagram on the following page illustrates the legislative process in the U.S. Congress. In practice, more experienced senators or representatives can employ additional procedural maneuvers to gain or block the passage of legislation.

**Introducing Legislation**

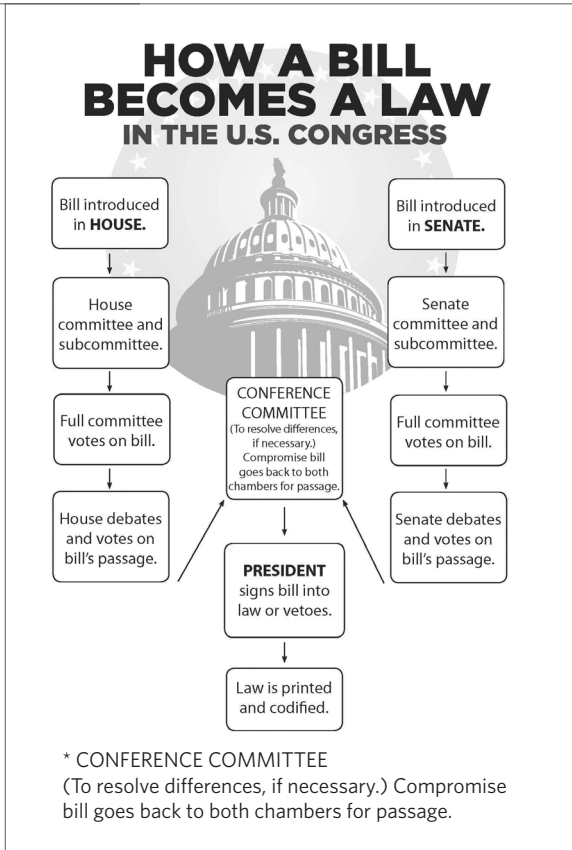
The senator or representative who introduces a bill (or amendment) is known as the bill's *primary sponsor*. Other senators or representatives may show their support for the bill by signing on to it as a *cosponsor*. As a GFWC member, one the most effective ways you can influence legislation is by encouraging your senator or representative to sponsor or cosponsor a bill or amendment.

**Forms of Legislative Action**

Congressional work is initiated by introducing a proposal in the form of a bill (the most common form of legislation), joint resolution, concurrent resolution, or simple resolution. Once introduced, the bill is assigned a legislative prefix and number, based on the bill's version, its form, and whether it originates from the House or Senate. The bill is then referred to the appropriate committee by the House or Senate leadership.

**Committee Action**

Committees give the most thorough consideration to proposed measures. This is one of the best times for GFWC members to be heard. For information on current committees, go to [www.House.gov](http://www.House.gov) and [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov). Once a committee considers a bill, a series of actions must be taken before the body can recommend a favorable



vote on the bill, including official reports, hearings, and mark-up. Usually, a committee will assign the bill to one of its subcommittees to carry out these actions.

### **Floor Action**

A bill is ready for floor action after it is reported out of committee and placed on a legislative calendar. Consideration by the full House or Senate is known as *floor action*. If a bill passes one chamber, it is sent to the other chamber and referred to the appropriate committee. The bill follows the same route to passage in either chamber.

### **Conference Committee**

Since amendments may be offered at subcommittee markup, full committee markup, and on the floor, the bill emerging from the first chamber may be significantly different from the version passed by the second chamber. A House-Senate conference committee must reconcile the differences before the bill can be signed into law by the President. Once the House and Senate pass a bill in identical form, or if the chamber where the bill originated agrees to the changes made by the second chamber, the measure moves to the President for signing.

### **Presidential Action**

When a bill is sent to the President, it may be signed into law or vetoed. If the President vetoes a bill, it is returned to the house from which it originated. **Two-thirds of both chambers must override the veto for the measure to become law.**

## **ADVOCACY STRATEGIES**

HOW GFWC CLUBS CAN ADVOCATE:

- Decide on an issue of importance to all members.
- Seek out information.
- Hold a letter-writing campaign.
- Invite an elected official to attend a meeting to discuss the issue. Invite the general public to attend. (Don't worry; if the official is speaking on a specific issue, it is not considered an endorsement.)
- Make an appointment with a state or national legislator in his or her home office to discuss GFWC's top legislative priorities.
- Hold a legislative day. Plan a visit for your club to local or state legislatures to advocate for an issue or piece of legislation that is important to you and your community.
- Encourage women's involvement in the legislative process; become familiar with the women's caucuses; educate yourself and others on the effects of budget cuts on programs to benefit women and children.

### ISSUE EDUCATION

The following activities will help create an educated network of advocates in your club:

- Establish a club legislative committee or appoint a Legislation/Public Policy chairman to follow national policy issues.
- Create a news clipping service on issues of interest to members. Ask members to find articles and email them to club members. Use the articles to foster discussion and debate about public policy issues at meetings.
- Institute a series of member study groups to learn about public policy issues affecting their families and community.
- Plan a club program on how bills become laws or how to communicate ideas and opinions to legislators.
- Participate in issue-awareness programs and nonpartisan issue panels and forums in your community.
- Create club programs to educate members and the community of government at all levels as well as the responsibilities of elected and appointed officials.
- Develop a community public policy directory listing public officials and their staff, government agencies, and other civic and advocacy organizations.

## GFWC PUBLIC POLICY COMMUNICATIONS

United grassroots action takes form when national issues and initiatives are communicated from GFWC through *News & Notes*, *GFWC Clubwoman Magazine*, and legislative email alerts. Below are ways that your club can take action on GFWC public policy issues and initiatives:

- Appoint a club Legislation/Public Policy chairman or designate a member to be responsible for presenting public policy information to your club.
- Invite a national, state, or district Legislation/Public Policy chairman to a club meeting to discuss GFWC's impressive history of advocacy and current advocacy efforts.
- Reprint information from GFWC in your club newsletter, and/or forward it to members via email.
- Study and discuss the issues and plan how your club will follow through with action.
- Encourage club members to contact their senators and representatives through phone calls, emails, or letters.
- Inform GFWC at **GFWC@GFWC.org** about the overall success of your club's grassroots legislative efforts.

## PROCLAMATIONS

Bring attention to an advocacy issue by presenting a proclamation to your state or local government, asking to recognize a specific awareness day, week, or month (e.g., Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October). You can also request a proclamation for a club or State Federation anniversary, or for Federation Day on April 24.

### **Proclamation Guidelines**

- Proclamations generally consist of two to five statements about the organization or event being recognized. These can be both general and specific, depending upon the goals of the proclamation.
- Consider the many layers of the event when writing your proclamation—it may be recognized at the local, state, and national level.
- After the two to five statements of fact (which are preceded by the word WHEREAS), include the phrase THEREFORE RESOLVED, then include language that presents the organization or event being recognized. Don't forget to include the date. You may opt to have additional resolutions, which are included with the phrase AND FURTHER RESOLVED.
- When presenting the proclamation to officials, have them sign in descending order of rank. You may request as many signatures as you like, though each agency should be presented with a separate proclamation. Ask for a state/city/county seal to mark your proclamation as official.

## COALITIONS

### **What is a Coalition?**

A coalition is a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest that agree to work together toward a common public policy goal.

### **Coalition Essentials**

#### *Broad Membership*

- Include a broad membership, but avoid adding partners just to have a large group.
- Select member organizations and individuals that are committed to the coalition's goals and strategies.

#### *Communication and Trust*

- Establish effective and open lines of communication.
- Build trust within the group.
- Address communication and trust early and often.

#### *Goals and Objectives*

- Define the goals and objectives of your coalition so that each member fully and specifically understands their roles and commitment.
- Set specific time periods for reviewing and accomplishing goals.

- Discuss the coalition's ability to attain goals and potential obstacles.
- List, clarify, and periodically revisit expectations and ground rules to maintain good working relationships, monitor progress, and allow for adjustments.

*Leadership*

- Establish coalition leaders who are committed to the coalition and its goal.
- Choose leaders who are willing to go beyond their organizational interests to promote the coalition's goals.

*Identifiable Needs*

- Identify the needs of coalition partners including strengths, weaknesses, and reasons for participation.
- Discuss how each organization fits into the coalition. What needs are shared? What goals are shared? What are the differences?

*Problem Solving*

- Engage the entire group in problem solving.
- Consider several alternative solutions that meet coalition members' needs.
- Praise in public; criticize in private.

## ADVOCACY TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

### **Tips for Calling your Legislator's Office**

- While it is usually best to write your senators or representative, when a vote is scheduled to take place immediately, you should call his or her office to make your views known.
- Always give your full name and address.
- Unless you are a personal friend of the senator or representative, it is not necessary to speak directly with him or her. Leave a message with the legislator's staff member who handles the issue in question.
- Try not to argue; just express your opinions.
- State the action you want your senator or representative to take.
- Seek assurances the message will be transmitted to your senator or representative, and request a response in writing.
- Keep your call short and to the point.

### **Tips for Writing your Legislator**

- Identify yourself early in the email or letter.
- Give a reason for writing and refer to the specific legislation.
- Explain how the issue in question directly affects you, your community, and/or your family.
- Use as many relevant facts as possible and back them up with sources, if available.
- Be specific about the action you want your legislator to take.
- Include relevant key points, but keep the correspondence short.
- Address no more than one issue in your letter.
- On the envelope and in the salutation, address your legislator as *The Honorable, Senator, Representative, or Congressman/Congresswoman*.

### **Tips for Meeting with your Legislator**

- Write or call ahead to schedule an appointment.
- Be well-prepared to present your case.
- Assume that the senator or representative knows few details about the issue.

- Identify yourself as a constituent and emphasize the fact that you are speaking for others, if appropriate.
- Consider preparing a succinct, one-page fact sheet document for your senator or representative, and in-depth briefing materials for his or her staff members.
- Provide the legislator with GFWC informational materials, such as the GFWC Brochure or GFWC Mini Tri-fold.
- Be sympathetic to the time demands made on senators and representatives.
- If it is not possible to meet with the legislator directly, meet with a staff member.
- Do not get into arguments.
- Relate the issue to your personal situation and the impact it has on your community.
- Make your presentation short, to the point, and factual.
- Always follow up promptly after a meeting.
- Once established, keep a line of communication open by periodically writing with new information on this or other pertinent issues.

Find your senators' or representative's contact information at [www.House.gov](http://www.House.gov) or [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov).

## **MAKE AN IMPACT THROUGH PUBLIC LEADERSHIP**

Public service is one of the best ways you can affect change in your community, state, or nation. Many organizations offer training specifically for women interested in running for public office, such as She Should Run and The White House Project.

You can serve as a public leader without running for office as an appointed local, state, or federal official. Elected officials appoint these individuals to help them shape and administer public policy. Appointments are generally made based on an individual's expertise in a specific area, but networking and gaining grassroots support for your appointment helps.

## **AWARDS**

GFWC recognizes State Federations for outstanding projects and clubs for creative projects in implementing effective Legislation/Public Policy program, as follows:

- Certificate to one State Federation in each membership category
- \$50 award to one club in the nation for project creativity

Award winners will be determined by entries into the Awards Program. Each State Federation may submit one State Award Entry Cover Sheet and one Club Creativity Award Entry Cover Sheet for the Legislation/Public Policy program. Clubs do not submit entries directly to GFWC.



Refer to the Awards section of the *Club Manual* for more information, including the Award Entry Cover Sheet guidelines.