



2019

PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

THE JEWISH COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS (JCPA) is the umbrella body of the Jewish community relations field, representing over 125 local Jewish community relations councils and 16 national Jewish agencies. Together our network builds consensus on behalf of the entire Jewish community to promote a just and pluralistic American society, advocate for human rights around the world, and support Israel's quest for peace and security. JCPA convenes its network to deliberate key issues and identify and develop policies, strategies, and programs. Through this network, we have an unparalleled capacity to mobilize grassroots Jewish activism in order to achieve a more just world.

We have prepared the following overview of our positions on issues we anticipate receiving national attention in 2018 to assist the community relations field in responding to future events in the policy arena.

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DOMESTIC POLICY

Immigration



Informed by Jewish values and traditions, JCPA supports federal immigration and refugee policy that balance national security concerns with the protection of civil and human rights. We believe that effective enforcement can only be accomplished as part of comprehensive immigration reform that upholds American values of refugee protection, family reunification, and economic opportunity. We advocate for reforms that would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, especially those brought to the U.S. as children, while prioritizing more effective border security and enforcement that remains consistent with humanitarian values and protects civil, human, and workers' rights. Our immigration system should reflect the best of our national values: equality, fairness, due process under the law, and respect for human dignity.

Criminal Justice Reform



The U.S. currently incarcerates a quarter of the world's prisoners despite comprising only 5% of the world's population. Beginning in the 1970s, our prison population skyrocketed, disproportionately impacting people of color and contributing to poverty, income inequality, and family instability. We keep people behind bars at great social and financial expense even when the sentences are disproportionately lengthy or counterproductive. JCPA supports bipartisan legislation that would reduce mandatory minimums and allow for greater judicial discretion. We also support reforms that would promote community-based treatment for people with addiction disorders and reduce collateral consequences and barriers to successful reentry by expanding access to public assistance programs and helping returning citizens find stable housing and employment.

Poverty and Food Insecurity



JCPA is committed to building a more just and equitable society, especially as a growing number of middle- and low-income families face temporary and permanent poverty due to stagnating wages and increasing job insecurity. We strongly support raising the minimum wage, expanding eligibility for the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits. JCPA will also continue to advocate for policies that help empower older adults to live healthier, more independent lives free from poverty. We support a robust social safety net that includes important programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). To lift the next generation out of poverty, we also support full funding for child nutrition programs, such as the Summer Feeding Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Food insecurity is one of the most acute hardships many Americans, including children, face across the country.

Education



Education is one of the most important determinants of lifetime earnings, social mobility, and health outcomes. Yet our nation's public schools are chronically underfunded and underperforming, especially within low-income and rural communities. The problems that afflict our education system begin early, starting with the inaccessibility of affordable, high-quality preschools. Increasing the availability and affordability of early childhood education is one of the surest ways to close the achievement gap.

Voting Rights



The cornerstone of democracy is the election process and the right of every eligible citizen to cast a meaningful ballot for a candidate they choose. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, which weakened enforcement, allowing many states to adopt new, restrictive voting laws that disenfranchise segments of the voting population, particularly communities of color. JCPA is committed to ensuring fair and representative elections, advocating for measures that would expand early and absentee voting, protect against voter ID requirements, and restore voting rights to millions of formerly incarcerated people. We will also work to ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census, which determines political representation and apportionment.

Civil Rights



JCPA is committed to protecting and advancing civil rights for all Americans. We will continue to focus on protecting individuals from discrimination on the basis race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion. JCPA will also advocate for new policies to address bullying, including proactive measures to combat future incidents and create a safe environment. We will work with the executive branch to ensure that civil rights statutes—such as the Hate Crimes Prevention Act and updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act—are implemented and enforced.

Religious Liberty

Religious liberty, and the relationship between religious institutions and the federal government, has been a priority for JCPA since its founding. Among our primary concerns is striking a balance between religious beliefs and civil rights. JCPA will continue to fight efforts to bring partisan politics into religious nonprofits and houses of worship, including efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. We are sensitive to questions of individual conscience, but are equally concerned about governmental policies that may lead to discrimination. JCPA will closely monitor legislation and regulations that relate to government funding for social services by religiously-affiliated organizations. Where such funding is authorized, it must have appropriate safeguards to prevent First Amendment violations and protect the religious freedom of employees without leading to discrimination or infringing on the rights of program beneficiaries.



Energy and Environment

Climate change is an international security threat and one of the greatest moral issues of our time. We will continue to advocate for legislation that promotes energy independence and reflects our values of protecting Creation. By supporting policies that promote renewable energy and other clean energy innovations, we can reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil while protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Central to this fight in the coming years is state implementation of the Clean Power Plan, which would help reduce the nation's greenhouse gas emissions and ease our transition to renewable energy.



Economic Growth

JCPA believes that Congress and the Administration can boost the economy by creating pathways to sustainable, long-term employment. The government should invest in infrastructure, schools, hospitals, renewable energy, and technological innovation in order to ensure long-term economic and employment growth. JCPA supports targeted employment and job retraining assistance to specific geographic regions and populations that may be struggling economically, including low-income individuals, women, people of color, people with disabilities, seniors, veterans, youth, and the long-term unemployed.



INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Israeli-Palestinian Peace

JCPA works to promote a strong, vibrant Israel that is committed to peace, and continues to encourage the U.S. government to pursue a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict through diplomacy. Our organization strongly advocates for two independent, democratic, and economically-viable states: the Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security. This vision can only be achieved through direct negotiations. Unilateral attempts to achieve Palestinian statehood through United Nations action—as well as Palestinian efforts to achieve full membership in United Nations-affiliated bodies—are counterproductive.



International Humanitarian and Refugee Crises

JCPA supports the vigorous protection of human rights as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, especially situations involving genocide, mass atrocities, and sweeping population shifts due to displacement by war and violence. We will continue to speak out and call on Congress to take strong action against the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign the Burmese military is perpetrating against the Rohingya. JCPA also believes that the U.S. and the international community must respond to today's unprecedented refugee crisis, which has displaced over 65 million people. With the most sophisticated resettlement program in the world, the U.S. should increase annual admissions of refugees, particularly from Syria, while maintaining the rigorous security screenings that are integral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.



International Terrorism

JCPA encourages Congress and the Administration to implement strong U.S. policies to counter international terrorism, including state-sponsored terrorism. The U.S. government must work with our allies to implement comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to terrorism, including freezing the assets of groups and individuals that have been linked to terrorism, strengthening international cooperation on weapons control, and halting nuclear proliferation.



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