

Girl Scouts of the USA Legislative Agenda for the 112th Congress – First Session

Promoting Girls' Physical, Social and Emotional Health

For almost a decade, policymakers have grappled with issues such as childhood obesity and children's health. In many cases, policy solutions have focused solely on the physical side of the issues – nutrition, built environments, physical activity, and other physical health issues -- but have paid scant attention to children's social and emotional health. Girl Scouts' original research, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living*, suggests that this approach may miss the mark with girls, as they place as much emphasis on their emotional and social wellness as they do their physical health. Girl Scouts advocates for holistic programs and policies that address both girls' emotional and physical well-being. In the 112th Congress, we will advocate for legislation and policies that address the following challenges:

- **Healthy media images** Youth consume as much as 8-10 hours of recreational media each day, and are often exposed to media that can affect their self-esteem, body image, and aspirations. Girl Scouts supports the *Healthy Media for Youth Act*, which supports media literacy programs, promotes research on the effects of media images, and encourages the adoption of voluntary guidelines to promote healthier media images for young people.
- **Eating disorders** The current emphasis on obesity prevention is often overshadowing another nutrition issue that dramatically affects girls and women: eating disorders. As many as 10 million women and girls are currently struggling with an eating disorder. Girl Scouts supports legislation which promotes research, screening, prevention and treatment for eating disorders.
- **Social and emotional well-being** Improving youths' physical health and emotional well-being are not mutually exclusive. Youth, especially girls, experience them in an interrelated fashion. They place the same or even greater emphasis on social and emotional health as physical health. Girl Scouts supports legislation that promotes girls' social and emotional well-being as a way to bolster their physical health.

Promoting Educational Opportunities for Girls

As Congress and the Administration work toward reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), and other federal education policies, Girl Scouts encourages policymakers to create educational environments that allow girls to flourish and thrive. Our principles for ESEA center on the following priorities:

- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education** Around 4th grade, girls begin to lose interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). As they age, the problem only gets worse -- the percentage of girls who say they would not study math anymore given the choice increases in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade from 9 percent to 15 percent to 50 percent. Girl Scouts supports legislative efforts to:
 - Help educators engage and motivate *all* students;
 - Expose girls to diverse role models and mentors;
 - Promote proven techniques for teaching STEM, including hands-on, inquiry based learning, and;
 - Cultivate collaboration among non-profits, educators, businesses and leaders.
- **Relational Aggression, Bullying and Harassment** Relational aggression includes behaviors such as starting rumors, gossiping, encouraging the isolation, rejection or exclusion of a peer, taunting and teasing, name calling, cyberbullying and other forms of social isolation. Girls are more likely to instigate or be the victim of relational aggression. Girl Scouts supports comprehensive school safety policies that provide incentives for schools to combat threats like relational aggression.

- **Physical Education** Research shows that girls' rates of physical activity are lower than that of boys, and girls also still do not receive equal opportunities to participate in sports. Girl Scouts supports legislation that provides promotes physical activity for girls' and young women. Furthermore, policy should support physical activity for girls in supportive environments where they do not feel self-conscious about their looks or ability, where they can choose their activities, and be active in ways that make them comfortable.
- **Financial Literacy:** For almost 100 years, Girl Scouts has provided girls the money management skills they need to become fiscally responsible and successful kids *and* adults. The Girl Scout Cookie Sale is often girls' first introduction to business planning and entrepreneurship. Girl Scouts supports legislation that ensures that all girls have solid financial literacy skills and that supports the role of youth-serving organizations in providing real-world financial literacy experiences for girls.
- **Leadership Opportunities for Girls:** The Girl Scouts Research Institute's original study, *Change it Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership*, finds that girls strive for leadership based on personal principles, ethical behavior, and the ability to affect social change. We must do more to encourage girls' and women's leadership at all levels. Girl Scouts supports legislation to create opportunities and environments that foster girls' leadership development.

Reaching Underserved Girls

Girl Scouts is working to ensure that “every girl, everywhere” can enjoy the benefits of the Girl Scout experience – including girls that have often been forgotten, neglected, or underserved by society. Working in partnership with a variety of federal agencies, Girl Scouts provides programs that give girls the real-world skills and tools they need to avoid risks such as alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, truancy, and other challenges. We support legislation that supports these types of partnerships, including:

- The proposed *Families Beyond Bars Act*, which supports national and community-based programs that serve children of incarcerated parents, and help break the intergenerational cycle of violence and incarceration.
- PL 110-234, the *Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008*, also known as the Farm Bill, supports programs targeted at youth living in rural America by breaking down barriers to youth participation; enhancing opportunities for youth involvement in policy and decision-making; creating safe and inviting environments for youth activities; and improving access to information and technology.

Supporting a Thriving Non-Profit Community

Girl Scouts is proud to partner with our other youth-serving organizations to ensure that non-profits can survive and thrive as employers and continue to provide services in these troubled times. We support public policies that help non-profits recruit and retain volunteers, incentivize charitable giving, facilitate non-profits' abilities to provide background checks, and other activities that help us achieve our mission. Girl Scouts encourages Congress to work with non-profit organizations to ensure a healthy, effective, and vibrant non-profit community.

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is the preeminent organization for and leading authority on girls with 3.6 million girl and adult members. Now in its 99th year, Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. The organization serves girls from every corner of the United States, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. www.girlscouts.org

GSUSA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office, located in Washington, D.C., works in partnership with local Girl Scout councils to educate representatives of the legislative and executive branches of government and advocate for public policy issues important to girls and Girl Scouting. **For more information contact us at 202-659-3780 or advocacy@girlscouts.org.**