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Girl Scouts of the USA 2011 State Legislative Agenda

Promoting Girls' Physical, Social and Emotional Health

Through our program experience and research, Girl Scouts has a unique understanding of the complex issue of healthy living and what motivates youth – especially girls – to adopt healthy lifestyles. As public officials and community leaders grapple with issues such as childhood obesity and school safety, we encourage you to consider a wide range of related and overlooked issues that disproportionately affect girls' healthy living including:

- relational aggression and bullying;
- Cyber-bullying;
- Healthy media images; and
- Eating disorders

Throughout our history, Girl Scouts has offered innovative programs across a wide range of healthy living topics that educate and empower girls to take action to strengthen their physical and emotional health and positively impact their communities and the world. Our newest leadership program, *It's Your Story, Tell It!*, provides activities that get girls to think critically about the media, including its portrayal of girls and women. Additionally, the Girl Scout Research Institute report, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living*, tell us that girls believe health combines good nutrition and physical fitness with emotional and social well-being.

Girl Scouts can provide valuable perspectives and counsel in shaping policies that address this and other serious children's issues. Girl Scouts is looking for opportunities to assist policymakers and community leaders in improving how our state promotes the health of young people, especially girls.

Increasing Girls' Involvement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

Girls enter kindergarten just as interested in math and science as boys. However, girls' interest diminishes over time, fifth grade for science and sixth grade for math. The lack of girls' participation in STEM hold serious consequences for girls because STEM helps students develop critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration skills that are useful for all careers and life pursuits. As a result, women are vastly underrepresented in STEM fields, at a time when our country needs all the scientists and engineers it can educate. Girl Scouts has developed a leadership program entitled, *It's Your Planet, Love It!*, where girls are encouraged to explore many possibilities in STEM-related fields. Our research supports that Girl Scouts programming can play a significant role in capturing and maintaining girls' interest in STEM fields. In 2011 the Girl Scout Research Institute will release a new STEM research report that will explore the key factors that influence girls' decisions of whether to (or not to) pursue STEM education and careers such as family, self perception and self confidence in skills.

To increase the number of girls and young women pursuing education and careers in STEM, Girl Scouts seeks to work with policymakers and community leaders to ensure that education policies reflect the unique learning styles of girls and include expanded learning opportunities. By increasing public awareness, securing funding for organizations like Girl Scouts and supporting policy solutions and public education, state government policies and programs can provide the support needed 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 and support collaboration among non-profits, schools, educators, businesses and leaders.

Girls and Leadership

For almost a century, Girl Scouts has produced leaders who have excelled in every segment of our American life: culture, politics, civic, business, community, etc. Through the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, girls 5-17 discover themselves and their values, connect with other girls, and take action to make the world a better place. The original research study by the Girl Scouts Research Institute, *Change it Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership*, finds that girls strive for leadership based on personal principals, ethical behavior, and the ability to affect social change. While some progress has been made in the area of female leadership, women still make up only 17 percent of Members of Congress, 23 percent of state legislatures, six governorships and less than one half of one percent of Fortune 500 CEOs. Girl Scouts is eager to work with policymakers and community leaders to create opportunities to cultivate and expand girls' leadership development.

Financial Literacy

The current economic crisis has highlighted the need to improve financial literacy among all Americans. With youth controlling more than \$172 billion in spending, and one in three carrying a credit card, we must ensure that all youth – especially girls – have the information they need to properly save, spend, budget, and invest. Moreover, as women are more likely to earn less, work fewer years and live longer on smaller retirement benefits than men, teaching girls personal finance early is crucial to helping them avoid financial insecurity as they mature.

From the Girl Scout Cookie Sale Program – often girls' first introduction to business planning and entrepreneurship – to innovative programs like *CentsAbility* and *The Stock Market Game*, Girl Scouts has a long history of working with girls to provide informal financial education and money management skills they need to become fiscally responsible. Girl Scouts seeks to work with policymakers and community leaders to develop programs and policies that ensure that all girls have solid financial literacy skills and support the role of youth-serving organizations in providing real world financial literacy experiences for girls.

Supporting a Thriving Non-Profit Community

Girl Scouts, working in partnership with our state's non-profit community, supports public policies that sustain non-profits, recruit and retain volunteers, incentivize charitable giving, facilitate nonprofits abilities to provide background checks, protect nonprofit sales and property tax exemptions and activities that help us achieve our missions. Girl Scouts encourages policymakers and community leaders to work with human services organizations to ensure a healthy, effective and strong non-profit community.

We, and our organizations, are a resource to you. The Girl Scouts are ready to discuss the issues, suggest policy solutions, serve on advisory committees, testify at hearings, and provide research and background information, or indeed, partner with you to benefit girls, their families, and our communities.

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