

# **Girls Incorporated<sup>®</sup>**

## **Advocacy Statement in Support of the Girls' Bill of Rights**

### Introduction

The vision of Girls Incorporated is empowered girls and an equitable society. Our mission is to inspire all girls to be strong, smart and bold<sup>sm</sup>.

As we move into the new millennium, we bring together the Girls' Bill of Rights and our local advocacy statements in a new expression of our organizational identity. This document reflects the strength of the Girls Incorporated commitment to social change, change that is required for girls to exercise their rights freely and fully. Girls Incorporated of the Greater Capital Region has based their advocacy statements on a model adopted by the National Organization at the April 2000 National Committee Meeting.

***Girls have the right to be themselves and to resist gender-stereotyping.***

## **Gender Equity**

Equality of rights, responsibilities and opportunities without regard to gender is essential to a just society. The contributions of girls today, and as emerging women, are essential to achieving that future equitable society. Through both programs and advocacy, Girls Incorporated responds to the continued need to champion equity for girls of every background and description. We affirm our support for equal rights and commit our resources to the active promotion of gender equity.

## **Diversity**

Girls Incorporated is committed to diversity in principle and practice. Our programs are open to *all* girls. Our commitment is founded in our communal sense of justice and gives expression to our belief that the world and our organization are nourished and enriched by the diversity of our cultures and experiences. We strive toward a world of understanding and mutual support. Working with girls and young women, we also endeavor to address the economic divide and eliminate sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination.

We celebrate the similarities and differences among girls and embrace girls of every background and ability. We believe that girls are sisters: discrimination targeted toward some girls not only hinders their achievement but diminishes the strength of sisterhood for all.

## **Inclusion of Girls with Disabilities**

Girls with disabilities seek out and are entitled to the same opportunities as their nondisabled peers. This means the right to a free and appropriate education in school and full participation in the learning that takes place in the community. Girls with disabilities are both individuals with individual needs and part of all groups of girls and young women. Their specific strengths and experiences enrich us all. We are committed to building an organization and a society that recognizes diversity and celebrates *all* girls.

***Girls have the right to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm.***

### **Advocacy**

Girls Incorporated is committed to vigorous advocacy for all girls. We recognize our responsibility to address publicly the social issues and public policies that seriously affect girls' lives. Advocacy is found in all aspects of our work: public education, program development, research, publications, legislative and legal action, speeches, coalition building and media relations.

Girls Incorporated is committed to vigorous advocacy by girls. Advocating on their own behalf enables girls to think of themselves as leaders at a young age. They assess community needs and take action to improve their communities. They use reading, persuasive writing, information technology, analysis and organizing skills in pursuit of advocacy goals. They practice assertiveness and leadership. Girls grow to understand, exercise and protect their rights and the rights of others.

### **Citizenship and Leadership**

Girls Incorporated is committed to providing opportunities for girls to learn about and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and leadership in democracy. Girls are entitled to learn to analyze alternatives and to assess the long-range implications of their choices. Girls also have an obligation to act on their beliefs and to take responsibility for the consequences.

In a democracy, citizens have a responsibility to help shape the laws, to abide by the laws and to contribute to the common good. Girls Incorporated encourages girls to understand and practice these roles during their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

### **Equitable Allocation of Resources**

Girls have a right to a fair share of public and private resources. Tax dollars spent to foster positive youth development must be allocated equitably to both girls and boys. Girls Incorporated believes that additional resources are required to address the special strengths and needs of girls through gender-specific services. Girls Incorporated also urges the philanthropic community to fund girls' programs at a level commensurate with girls' needs and at least equal to funding of programs and services for boys.

Girls must have adequate opportunities to develop leadership qualities and career skills to assume their rightful place in society.

*Girls have the right to take risks, to strive freely and to take pride in success.*

## **Sports**

Girls Incorporated endorses the right of girls and women to equal opportunities in sports throughout their years in school and in the world of organized sports. We advocate vigorous enforcement of Title IX and equal opportunity policy in sports.

Girls Incorporated recognizes that girls' participation in sports is likely to have a positive long-term impact on their total development. The lessons in sports carry over to other challenges in life. Through sports, girls learn the values and experience the benefits of self-discipline, competition, teamwork and the spirit of sport, responsibility to oneself and others, achieving one's full potential, a positive self-image and a healthy and well-trained physical being. In addition, sports are fun.

## **Adventure**

Girls Incorporated believes that girls benefit from opportunities that expand their world, increase their own expectations for themselves and challenge them intellectually, physically and emotionally. Therefore, we provide and endorse opportunities for girls to explore new places, climates and cultures; to experience the fun and exhilaration of risk-taking; to engage in outdoor adventures that challenge them as individuals and as members of a team.

A sense of adventure today can lead girls to be tomorrow's explorers of land, sea and space – adventurers who dare to be first and best in any field of endeavor.

## ***Girls have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies.***

### **Health**

Girls Incorporated believes that girls are entitled to live and thrive in communities that invest in their total physical, mental and emotional wellness. Girls need access to information and skills to be partners in promoting their own healthy development. Today, girls' full access to health and health care is limited by poverty, high cost and discrimination.

Girls Incorporated promotes girls' healthy development and works to change limiting and dangerous media images. Such images depict thinness as a measure of worth, smoking and alcohol as integral to glamorous and healthy lifestyles, sexual relationships without responsibility and violence as acceptable behavior.

### **Sexuality**

Girls Incorporated encourages all girls to develop positive sexual identities and to function comfortably as responsible sexual beings. We recognize that the family is the primary source of information about sex and we help girls and young women communicate with their families about sexuality.

To make responsible decisions about sexuality, pregnancy and parenthood, girls need and have a right to sensitive, truthful sexuality education; convenient access to safe, effective methods of contraception and protection from disease; and referral to comprehensive information, counseling, clinical and other services that support their responsible decisions. We recognize that any sizable group of girls includes those who face issues related to their sexual orientation or that of a family member and who face discrimination based on this sexual orientation. Girls have a right to positive, supportive environments and linkages to community resources for dealing with issues of sexual orientation.

### **Reproductive Freedom**

Girls Incorporated affirms that girls and young women should make responsible decisions about sexuality, pregnancy and parenthood.

We recognize the right of all women to choose whether, when and under what circumstances to bear children. Reproductive freedom and responsibility are

essential to other rights and opportunities, including the pursuit of education, employment, financial security and a stable and fulfilling family life. Restrictions of reproductive choice are especially burdensome for young women and poor women. Girls Incorporated supports a woman's freedom of choice, a constitutional right established by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 *Roe vs. Wade*.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Girls Incorporated believes that for young people, abstinence should be the first choice. We also recognize that girls and young women who are sexually active are at high risk for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Our prevention strategies include public education, skill building and accessibility of risk-reducing forms of protection.

## **Substance Use and Abuse**

Girls Incorporated is committed to preparing girls and young women to avoid the use of harmful substances, both legal and illicit, and to providing a healthful environment that strongly urges the choice not to use mind-altering substances. Patterns of substance use are related to gender; girls often are induced to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to become or stay slim, manage stress, appear mature, be popular with peers of both sexes, or escape overwhelming problems.

We strongly oppose advertising targeted to girls and other portrayals that glamorize or normalize their use of dangerous substances. Further, we challenge the acceptability of substance abuse in youth cultures by engaging with girls in advocacy and community action.

*Girls have the right to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world.*

## **A Safer World for Girls**

Girls Incorporated believes that girls have a right to move about freely in society, to participate in redefining the roles of women and to challenge the policies and practices that limit these roles. Therefore, we work to see that girls live safer lives by developing skills for recognizing and avoiding threatening situations, mediating disputes and resolving conflicts, and defending themselves in the face of violence.

Girls have the right to be treated respectfully and sensitively and a responsibility to accord such treatment to others. Girls have a right to understand the balance of power in relationships and to leave relationships that exploit them or engage them in exploiting others.

Overwhelmingly, girls are the targets rather than the perpetrators of violence. Many forms of violence are critical problems for girls, among them male-on-female aggression in the family, sexual harassment and gang violence in the school and community and acquaintance rape. We oppose entertainment and media portrayals that glorify violence and trivialize girls and women. We also advocate the reduction and regulation of firearms, especially of access to and use of firearms by young people.

## **Juvenile Justice**

Girls Incorporated endorses the right of girls and young women to understand and derive the full benefits of the legal system of our country. We support programs that foster girls' knowledge and understanding of the law and strongly encourage girls to function within its boundaries.

Among the girls and young women involved in the juvenile justice system, a high proportion have been physically or sexually abused; a disproportionate number have disabilities, especially learning disabilities; and, among girls charged with the same "offenses", a disproportionate number are girls and young women of color. In far too many communities, the services that enable girls to function within the law or to return to law-abiding life are woefully inadequate.

Girls Incorporated advocates responding to the strengths and needs of girls, not only to their behaviors; establishing gender equity in policies and practices of arrest, detention, education and allocation of resources; and diverting girls from the juvenile justice system to community-based youth development programs.

## **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Girls Incorporated recognizes its obligation to report cases of child abuse to local child protective services agencies. We work to help survivors understand their innocence, enable girls to recognize and assert their right not to be abused or neglected, prevent and alleviate this destructive force in the lives of girls and their families and strengthen girls who have been subject to abuse.

*Girls have the right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.*

## **Education**

Girls Incorporated recognizes the importance of an excellent education in developing girls' capacity to be self-sufficient. Therefore, we are committed to equal access to excellent, non-sexist education for all at every level. We work toward and value education that is free of gender stereotyping and that celebrates and acknowledges cultural diversity and the advantage of girls who speak other languages in addition to English.

## **Math, Science and Technology**

Girls Incorporated is committed to seeing that girls have opportunities to excel in math, science and technology through both informal and formal education. Girls must be encouraged to participate in the world of technology, gaining experience with sophisticated tools and ways of thinking. It is crucial that girls be prepared to play an active role in shaping the future of math, science and technology, and in maintaining the principles of democracy in a technologically complex world.

Girls today can expect to spend much of their adult lives in a workforce that increasingly requires mastery of computers. Girls Incorporated is committed to bridging the digital divide by providing girls with opportunities to build a full range of computer skills, including skills in computer programming and web design. Girls Incorporated strongly encourages girls to enroll in advance level computer classes and to prepare for careers in technology and computers.

## **Economic Independence**

Girls Incorporated develops information and programs that provide girls with real-world knowledge about money, wealth, power and independence. We engage girls in understanding economic realities, advocating for economic justice and investing their own resources to benefit their communities. We work to reduce occupational segregation by gender, race, language, culture, disability, sexual orientation and economic background.

Every girl growing up today must plan toward and achieve economic self-sufficiency. The full and equal participation of girls and women in the economy and in establishing economic policy is vital to a just society.

Girls Incorporated develops and implements programs that address these advocacy positions. Our programs are based on research and the expertise of our affiliates; they focus on the strengths and needs of girls and young women as they develop from age 6 to age 18.

Girls Incorporated programs are carefully evaluated and have engaged hundreds of thousands of girls and young women at thousands of program sites across the nation. For more information about Girls Incorporated advocacy, programs and research, please contact:

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