

LEGISLATION/PUBLIC POLICY

ADVANCEMENT PLAN

2024-2026 GFWC CLUB MANUAL

“EVERY GREAT DREAM BEGINS WITH A DREAMER. ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU HAVE WITHIN YOU THE STRENGTH, THE PATIENCE AND THE PASSION TO REACH FOR THE STARS TO CHANGE THE WORLD.” HARRIET TUBMAN

For more than 130 years, GFWC members have raised awareness of specific issues requiring attention at the national level through their advocacy efforts. GFWC members’ advocacy efforts are practical, not political. GFWC members worked to pass laws affecting highway safety, juvenile justice, women’s suffrage, the rights of the disabled, equal pay for women, and increased resources for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. Our efforts can change lives! Our empathetic members use public advocacy to seek solutions to local, state, and national concerns. Our organization is strengthened by resolutions and advocacy, which make a difference.

During the 2024-2026 Administration, the Legislation/Public Policy Committee is guided by our theme, *Raise Our United Voices*. The goals of the Legislation/Public Policy Committee during this Administration include:

- Increasing advocacy through the Legislative Action Center.
- Educating members about GFWC’s legislative priorities.
- Promoting Legislative Advocacy as the natural extension of our members’ volunteer work for each of the Special Programs and all the Community Service Programs.
- Building relationships with the local, state, regional, and national decision-makers.
- Establishing the GFWC name as a brand that lawmakers and the community recognize.
- Mobilizing our members to raise a united voice to advocate for GFWC and its legislative priorities.



GFWC
est. 1890
GENERAL FEDERATION
OF WOMEN’S CLUBS

2024-2026 LEGISLATION/PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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CLUB CONNECTION INITIATIVE:

LEGISLATIVE LADDER

LEGISLATIVE LADDER

EDUCATE
EMPOWER
ENGAGE

ACTION PLAN: During 2024-2026, GFWC clubs are challenged to “step up” to EDUCATE, ENGAGE, EMPOWER through the concrete steps of the Legislative Ladder, found in the Member Portal Digital Library. Steps do not need to be completed sequentially. Individual steps may be reported only once each reporting year but may be engaged in multiple times during the club year. The point values identified for each step is the total that may be accumulated annually. Certificates will be awarded for clubs reporting activities with point values totaling 35 points or more. Individual club recognition will take place during the 2025 and 2026 GFWC Annual Conventions.

FEATURED PROJECTS



INFORMATION BOOTH

GFWC Sylvania Junior Woman's Club (GA) held a political "party," inviting all local and state politicians to participate by having a booth with information about themselves and issues of importance. The party was open to the public and was held on the courthouse lawn with food trucks selling refreshments.



BIRTHDAY CARDS

The club members of GFWC Naperville Woman's Club (IL) wrote birthday cards to students turning eighteen in the five area high schools, encouraging them to vote. The club was provided lists of students identified by first names and numbers, so members could assemble for the teachers to distribute. The club worked with the League of Women Voters on this project.



GFWC NORTH CAROLINA DEMOCRACY QUIZ

GFWC of Holden Beach (NC) members, in preparation for the mid-term election season, had a GFWC North Carolina Democracy Quiz in the October newsletter, and all members were encouraged to take it. The answers were distributed and reviewed at the November meeting and published in the newsletter.



LEGISLATION TASK FORCE

GFWC of Pewaukee (WI) formed a Legislation Task Force to focus on safety related issues in their community. The task force identified the need for walking trails and bike paths and contacted elected officials.

MAKING GFWC'S PRESENCE KNOWN: THE 2024-2026 LEGISLATIVE FOCUS

During the 2024-2026 Administration, the Executive Committee will work with the Legislation/Public Policy Committee to identify federal legislative priorities for each of the Community Service Programs areas and Special Programs - Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention and Advocates for Children. These will be announced on a calendar year basis to coincide with the Congressional sessions and will be available on the GFWC website. The GFWC Legislative Action Center will be utilized to educate clubwomen about timely issues and urge them to contact their members of Congress. It is critical that GFWC members respond to these requests for action. Just being a member on paper is not enough, you must advocate.

THE GFWC LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER: A DIRECT LINK TO CONGRESS

The GFWC Legislative Action Center (LAC) is the primary tool that GFWC uses to educate and mobilize its members. Members who sign up for the LAC receive updates on specific legislation GFWC is supporting. These updates let members know when to contact their national legislators about a bill. The Alert will include information about the issue and a prepared message directly related to a GFWC Resolution(s). Once activated by enrolled members, the message will automatically be sent to the member's respective Congressional leaders.

The GFWC Legislative Action Center is now available for use by individual state federations. State federations may now contact their membership through GFWC to request they reach out to their elected officials on statewide legislative issues. Before taking action, the following GFWC LAC policies and procedures must be followed:

- States may request that GFWC send state alerts in the following areas:
 - GFWC Signature Program: Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention
 - Juniors' Special Program: Advocates for Children
 - Community Service Program Area: Arts and Culture, Civic Engagement and Outreach, Education and Libraries, Environment, and Health and Wellness
- Issues must be germane to GFWC Resolutions.
- The State President must submit required material to the GFWC Programs Department and GFWC Legislation/Public Policy Chairman as soon as possible, but no later than ten business days from the date the alert is scheduled to be sent.
- All LAC state alert requests are subject to approval by the GFWC Programs Department, GFWC Legislation/Public Policy Chairman, GFWC Second Vice President, and the GFWC International President.

To realize the full potential of this tool, however, members must sign up for the LAC and then take action.

REGISTERING FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER (LAC) IS EASY

You can sign up for the LAC by going to the GFWC website ([GFWC.org](https://www.gfwc.org)), clicking on the "What We Do" tab, then clicking on Legislation/Public Policy, and click on the linked words "Legislative Action Center." Members fill in their name, address, and email address then click in the boxes under "Remember Me" and "Email Opt-In" to receive the notifications issued by GFWC and then "TAKE ACTION" by responding to the notifications that the member supports. (The direct link to the LAC is <https://www.votervoices.net/GFWC/home>)

Members are encouraged to share the information from the LAC notifications with their family, friends, and local community.



ACTION PLAN: Make signing up for the LAC a club meeting event. Bring a computer to your club meeting to enroll members. Invite a representative from GFWC or your State Federation to answer questions. Explain that those enrolled will be notified via email with language for action GFWC would like to see taken on a bill. After reviewing the provided language, members can inform their Congressional delegates simply by clicking "Take Action."

ADVOCATING AT THE LEGISLATIVE LEVEL

Most of GFWC's advocacy efforts take place at the legislative level – our members advocate for or against a specific piece of legislation. We also advocate for the legislature to fund specific programs. Effective advocacy at the legislative level requires that our members engage decision-makers and learn that there is an opportunity to advocate at every stage of that process. The Legislation/Public Policy Committee wants you to understand your role in the legislative process and how every club member can make an impact.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: ENGAGING WITH DECISION MAKERS

On the local, state, and national level, legislative work begins with the introduction of a proposal in the form of a bill. One of the most effective ways a GFWC member can influence the passage of legislation is by encouraging her senators or representatives to sponsor or co-sponsor a bill. After a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a committee. GFWC members can express their opinions to their legislators serving on the committee. The committee process represents one of the best opportunities for GFWC members to express their opinions. If a bill is scheduled for vote, GFWC members are encouraged to contact their congressmen to advocate for passage or defeat of the bill. The LAC uses its notification process to alert GFWC members about upcoming legislation actions that require attention.

EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

To be an effective advocate, GFWC members need to build relationships with the decision-makers who impact their lives. This requires members to contact their legislators. Contact occurs in three ways: personal meetings, emailed correspondence, and telephone calls. Here are some suggestions to help maximize the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts.

MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

- Schedule an appointment in advance.
- Open the meeting by identifying yourself as a constituent and explain your GFWC affiliation. Emphasize the fact that you are speaking for yourself and others, if appropriate.
- Assume that neither the legislator nor the legislator's staff has any detailed understanding of the issue at hand or any knowledge about GFWC.
- Be prepared with a short, direct, and fact-based statement of the issue in question and the specific action you are asking the legislator to take. Relate how the issue affects you, other constituents, and/or specific groups. Let them know why the issue is important to their constituents.
- Have a "Leave Behind." Bring information you can leave with the legislative staff. Include the following: a succinct, one-page fact sheet; in-depth materials (for legislative aides who may want more information); information on GFWC and your State Federation or local club; your name and contact information. Place all of these items in a single folder and, if possible, affix a GFWC logo sticker to the front of the folder or purchase GFWC folders through the Marketplace.
- Be sympathetic to the time demands made on legislators and their staff.
- Remain fact-based and focused on the action you want the legislator to take. Do not argue with the legislator or staff member. Always remember that advocacy is about educating so action

can be taken. Be passionate – not personal.

- Follow-up after the meeting with a thank-you email and to see if there are any questions or any requests for additional information.
- Once you have established contact with your legislator's office, keep a line of communication open by touching base periodically with new information on the issue you met about or on other issues. Build that relationship.

EMAIL YOUR LEGISLATOR

- The best way to communicate in writing with your Congressional representatives is by email. Due to security concerns, mailed correspondence can be delayed for weeks. Email is a more effective and timely means of communication.
- Each member of Congress establishes their office's policy related to the processing and management of email. Generally, if a member has a public email address, it can be found on the member's website. The office may list a public email address or provide a form directly on the member's website.
- Place your name and address at the top of the message. The first thing your representative wants to determine is if you live in his or her district.
- Address your legislator as The Honorable, Senator, Representative, or Congressman/Congresswoman in the greeting. Insert the GFWC emblem on your correspondence.
- Remember to identify yourself and your GFWC affiliation.
- Explain the reason for your correspondence and refer to the specific legislation you want addressed. Be specific about the action you want your legislator to take. Explain how the issue in question directly affects you, your family, and/or your community.
- Keep the correspondence succinct and direct. Include as many relevant facts as possible, citing sources for those facts, if available. Keep it as short as possible while still getting your point across.
- Address no more than one issue in your correspondence.

CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR'S OFFICE

- Phone calls are an excellent advocacy tool when an immediate vote is scheduled to take place on a bill of interest.
- Keep in mind you will typically speak with a member of the legislator's staff. Ask that your position be transmitted to your senator or representative and request a written response from the legislator's office.
- At the outset of the phone call, give your full name, address, and GFWC affiliation.
- Identify the specific action you want your senator or representative to take.
- Keep your call short and focused. Remain fact-based and do not engage in debate or argument.
- Do not abuse the phone system – flooding the phone switchboard can result in a negative image of GFWC. Find that happy medium of a recognizable number of phone calls but not an abusive activity.

INVITE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO SPEAK

- Every GFWC club, State Federation, and Region needs speakers for events. Your local, state, and national legislative representatives (or their local staff members) are free speakers.
- Invite them to update your members on important local issues or areas of concern they are passionate about.
- Ask a legislator to present a keynote speech at your event. Remind your guest that the

legislator may not solicit campaign contributions or ask for your members' vote in the upcoming election.

- Always remember to be respectful. You may not agree with everything the legislator talks about, and it is okay to ask difficult and thought-provoking questions, but never be disrespectful.
- A speaking invitation can open the door to further communications. Once opened, keep your foot in the door to develop a productive relationship.



ADVOCACY AND ISSUE AWARENESS: PROCLAMATIONS

A significant part of advocacy includes bringing attention to a specific issue or group. State Federations and local clubs can help raise awareness by asking their state or local governments for a proclamation recognizing a specific awareness day, week, or month or the anniversary of a club or State Federation. Sample proclamations may be found in the Legislative Toolkit.

Your chances of receiving a proclamation are greatly enhanced if you present a draft of the proclamation. When drafting a proclamation, follow these guidelines:

- Proclamations usually consist of two to five factual statements about the organization, issue, or event being recognized. Each of these statements should be preceded by the word "WHEREAS." (For example: "WHEREAS, The General Federation of Women's Clubs is an international women's organization dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteer service.")
- Following the factual statements, you should have one or more sentences that present the organization or event being recognized. The first of the sentences begins with the words "THEREFORE RESOLVED," and subsequent sentences begin with the phrase "AND FURTHER RESOLVED." (For example: "THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Town of Jones recognizes April 24 as Federation Day.")
- When presenting the proclamation to officials, have them sign in descending order of rank. You may request proclamations from more than one entity (e.g., you could ask for a proclamation from your state, your county, and your city).
- For each proclamation ask that the entity apply the state/county/city seal to mark your proclamation as official.
- Promote the fact that the proclamation was issued with a photo on your website and on social media. Send a copy of the photo with a thank you letter to the issuing dignitary, with the request that the photo is shared on their website/newsletter.
- Share the proclamations with GFWC's Legislation/Public Policy Committee Chairman so GFWC can share in your success.

CLUB LEVEL ADVOCACY - EDUCATE, ENGAGE, EMPOWER

Individual GFWC clubs can educate members to enable advocacy and empower them to be effective public advocates. Once a clubwoman becomes an advocate, she plays a vital role in the legislative process.

EDUCATE MEMBERS ABOUT GFWC'S ADVOCACY EFFORTS

- Appoint a club Legislation/Public Policy Chairman or designate a member to be responsible for reporting to the club on GFWC's advocacy efforts and resolutions.
- Give a club presentation on the GFWC Legislative Action Center. Have one or more members bring their computer to the meeting and help club members sign up for this advocacy tool.
- Educate members on the GFWC Resolutions by reading one at every club meeting and asking members why it is important in your community.
- Include a short article about a GFWC Resolution in every club newsletter. Do not just reprint them, talk about what it asks from members and why.
- Give a presentation on the Legislative Priorities for the 2024-2026 Administration.
- Reprint information from GFWC in your club newsletter or forward it to members via email.
- Invite a Legislation/Public Policy Chairman or committee member from the National, State, or District level to speak about GFWC's impressive history of advocacy and its current advocacy efforts.
- Provide club members with information about the Woman's History and Resource Center and the history of GFWC, which can be obtained from the GFWC website or purchased through the GFWC Marketplace.

EDUCATE MEMBERS ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND HOW TO ADVOCATE

- Present a club program on how a bill becomes a law. Consider playing the video "I'm Just a Bill" from Schoolhouse Rock (available on YouTube), which provides lots of information about the legislative process.
- Encourage club members to contact their senators and representatives via email, the LAC, or phone calls. Provide them with the tips for communicating with their legislators found in the Club Manual.
- Draft and distribute a sample letter or email for club members to send on a specific issue.
- Bring paper, envelopes, and stamps to a club meeting and have members write to their senators/representative urging passage of a bill or write to the senator or representative chairing the committee to which the bill was sent urging it be voted out of the committee. It is helpful to have sample language previously drafted. Do not forget to include the GFWC emblem in your correspondence.
- Write to the senator or representative chairing the committee to which the bill was sent urging it be voted out of the committee. Do not forget to include the GFWC emblem in your email. If your members do not live in that legislator's district, mail letters to a local office. This address can be found on the legislator's website.
- Present a program to teach members about the various levels of government (city, county, state, and national) where they can use their advocacy skills.
- Develop and distribute a directory that lists contact information for public officials and their staff. Include this information in your club directory and update it frequently as local office addresses often change.

ENGAGE MEMBERS ON THE ISSUES

- If your club becomes interested in a specific issue, invite an elected official to a meeting to discuss the issue. Make this an open meeting, where you invite the public to attend.
- Become familiar with women's caucuses at both the state and national levels. Determine what issues they are focused on and if those issues also interest your club.
- Develop information for your members and the community on the effect of budget cuts on programs designed to benefit women and children.
- Ask members to share information on public policy issues that are of interest and/or concern to them. Email these articles to other members or provide them with copies at the club meeting. Use these articles to foster discussion and debate on public policy issues.

EMPOWER MEMBERS TO TAKE ACTION

- Make an appointment with a state or national legislator in his or her home office to discuss GFWC's top legislative priorities.
- If there is an issue before a legislative body that you want to advocate for or against, hold a letter-writing (email) campaign in your club.
- Hold a legislative day for your club, visiting your state legislature or local council meeting to advocate for an issue or piece of legislation that is important to you and your community. Consider partnering with other groups. For instance, if the issue is domestic violence, consider partnering with a state or local advocacy group whose sole focus is domestic violence awareness and prevention.
- Sponsor a voter education night in your community to inform voters.
- Sponsor a voter registration drive in your community. Visit NonprofitVote.org (www.nonprofitvote.org) for information, resources, and handouts.
- Ask a GFWC member who works as a public servant to share how her membership encouraged her to seek her current position and/or enhance her skills.

BUILDING GFWC RECOGNITION: USE THE GFWC EMBLEM

GFWC's advocacy efforts raise awareness of the organization as one working to influence change. To maximize this awareness, GFWC encourages members to use the GFWC emblem on all communications, promotional materials, and advocacy efforts.

GFWC members impact our nation and communities through the power of one. One member telling another who tells another is like compound interest - GFWC legislative and public policy initiatives will grow into waves that cannot be ignored! Members can share to their social media accounts and to the social media accounts of legislators when they "take action" on a particular bill.

- The GFWC emblem can be downloaded from the GFWC website via the Member Portal.



Primary GFWC Emblem



Vertical GFWC Emblem



ADVOCACY DO'S AND DON'TS

GUESS WHAT?

A §501(C)(3) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION CAN ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY AND IT IS OK WITH THE IRS!

Some members are under the impression that because GFWC (or their State Federation or local club) holds Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 501(c)(3) status, its members cannot advocate or lobby. IRS guidelines do not ban advocacy activities. Rather, the IRS rules limit the types and amount of lobbying that a 501(c)(3) organization may engage in. A 501(c)(3) organization may advocate to raise awareness of an issue or to lobby for or against a piece of legislation. Lobbying may not be the primary purpose of the organization, nor may it constitute a substantial part of the organization's activities. If organizational funds are spent in lobbying efforts, those expenses must be reported on the organization's IRS Form 990 that all 501(c)(3) organizations may be required to complete. A 501(c)(3) organization may not endorse or oppose specific candidates or political parties.

Advocacy by GFWC members is important, and GFWC encourages it!

Here is a list of Advocacy "Do's and Don'ts" to ensure that your State Federation or local club stays within these guidelines:

DO

- Advocate for action on a specific issue or for a specific piece of legislation.
- Contact your national, state, and local elected officials directly, either in person or via email.
- Participate in voter registration drives.
- Hold nonpartisan forums to educate the public about one or more specific issues.
- Sponsor candidate forums, ensuring that all candidates receive a formal invitation to participate.
- Give only facts when referring to or speaking about a specific candidate or incumbent.
- Educate candidates on GFWC's resolutions and legislative priorities.
- Use the GFWC emblem when advocating on a GFWC-endorsed issue.

DON'T

- Endorse or oppose a specific candidate or political party.
- Use club funds, facilities, in-kind donations, publications, or events to promote a specific candidate or political party.
- Ask candidates to sign a pledge on any issue.
- Offer opinions about an incumbent or candidate.
- Support legislation that conflicts with a GFWC Resolution.

NOTE

A State Federation that takes a position in conflict with any GFWC Resolution must register a minority opinion with GFWC. If a State Federation takes legislative action on an issue that reflects this minority opinion, it must make clear that its position does not represent that of GFWC.



AWARDS

GFWC recognizes outstanding and creative work in implementing the Legislation/Public Policy projects as follows:

- A certificate to one State Federation in each membership category
- A \$50 award to a single club for the most creative and effective project
- A certificate recognizing clubs that achieve status on the Legislative Ladder to be presented during the 2025 and 2026 GFWC International Convention.

To be eligible for awards, each State Federation may submit one State Award Entry Cover Sheet and one Club Creativity Award Entry Cover Sheet for the Legislation/Public Policy projects. Individual clubs must submit entries for activities included in the Legislative Ladder no later than March 15 to the Legislation/Public Policy Chairman and Programs@GFWC.org. See instructions included in the Legislative Ladder Form.

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



LEGISLATIVE LADDER

EDUCATE
EMPOWER
ENGAGE

1. CLUB INFORMATION			
Club Name			
State Federation			
Club President's Name			
Phone		Email	
2. CONTACT PERSON			
Contact Name			
Mailing Address			
City		State	Zip Code
Phone		Email	
3. SUBMISSION YEAR			
<input type="checkbox"/> 2025 (July 2024 - March 15, 2025)		<input type="checkbox"/> 2026 (April 2025 - March 15, 2026)	
4. INSTRUCTIONS			
<p>GFWC clubs are challenged to annually "step up" to EDUCATE, ENGAGE, EMPOWER by tackling varied concrete steps of the Legislative Ladder. Steps do not need to be completed sequentially. Individual steps may be listed only once each submission year but may be engaged in multiple times. The point values identified for each step are the total that may be accumulated annually. Certificates will be awarded for clubs submitting activities with point values totaling 35 points or more. Individual club recognition will take place during the 2025 and 2026 GFWC Annual Conventions.</p> <p>Completed Legislative Ladder forms must be emailed to Chairman Mary Pat Marcello (njsfwcmariapat@aol.com) and Programs@GFWC.org no later than March 15 annually.</p>			





4. GFWC'S LEGISLATIVE LADDER

Check applicable boxes

1. Increase club enrollment by 10% annually in the Legislative Action Center. (25 points)

Total club membership _____ Previously registered _____ Newly registered _____

2. Request a proclamation from a "decision-maker" (i.e., town council, mayor, state or U.S. Congressman, governor) recognizing, for example, a "week" promoted in one of the CSPs, a club anniversary, etc. (5 points)

Topic: _____ Issued by: _____

3. Conduct a program on GFWC's Resolutions and how and why they are created and adopted. (5 points)

4. Invite a local decision-maker to discuss issues relevant to your community. (10 points)

Whom did you invite? _____ Topic: _____

5. Identify a GFWC Resolution and develop a club project to support the Resolution. (15 points)

Resolution: _____ Project: _____

6. Take action on a current GFWC/State Resolution (i.e., write an email, send a "letter to the editor," speak at a local government meeting, or create a community coalition). (10 points)

Resolution: _____ Action: _____

7. Draft a Resolution to submit to your State for consideration. (15 points)

Topic: _____ Adopted? (Y/N) _____

8. Visit a State legislator/staff to advocate on an issue of your choice. (15 points)

Topic: _____

FOR GFWC USE ONLY: Total Points: _____

