



## Junior League: Women in Advocacy

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### AJLI History:

AJLI was founded by a social activist in 1901 (Mary Harriman). The AJLI mandate has not wavered: to develop exceptionally qualified civic leaders who collaborate with community partners to identify a community's most urgent needs and address them with meaningful and relevant programs and initiatives that not only improve lives, but also change the way people think.

In the 1930's, Public Affairs Committees (PACs), State Public Affairs Committees (SPACs), and Legislative Issues Committees (LICs) began to take shape. They are collectively governed by their member Leagues and the methods by which they operate vary by state as do the issues chosen for study and action. PACs, SPACs, and LICs are individual, *apolitical* Junior Leagues or coalitions of Junior Leagues within a state that form to educate and take action on public policy issues relevant to The Junior League Mission.

### TODAY--

Every year (starting in 2015), AJLI awards one league the PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY AWARD. The purpose of the Public Policy and Advocacy Award is to recognize a League or group of Leagues for their success in using public policy and advocacy as strategies in advancing their community work and causes. Successful efforts will include those where a League or a State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) have worked to raise awareness, to improve the public policy environment or to influence public policy legislation through specific League-driven initiatives or programs.

**2015:** The first award in Public Policy & Advocacy was to the Junior Leagues of California State Public Affairs Committee for its Maternal Mental Health Advocacy Project, which began five years ago.

The 34 delegates from 17 member Leagues representing the more than 10,000 women of Cal-SPAC conceived of and implemented a long-range plan to broaden awareness and secure state-wide legislation to de-stigmatize women's mental health. Their focus? The pregnancy and post-partum-related disorders that can affect up to 21 percent of women and their families by way of untreated or undiagnosed depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and, in very rare instances, psychosis, infanticide and suicide.

There were many components to Cal-SPAC's initiative, which ultimately resulted in the passage of three different bills. It kicked off with the highly successful "Speak Up When You're Down" campaign, which raised public awareness of the psychological difficulties of new motherhood via social media, billboards, PSAs, community forums, and a distribution of informative collateral materials. The campaign led to the designation of the month of May as "Perinatal Depression Awareness Month" and inspired a start-up grant for the California Maternal Mental Health Collaborative, a nonprofit the Maternal Mental Health Advocacy Project established for administrative advocacy.

Other outcomes of the initiative include the creation of the Commission on the Status of Maternal Mental Health Care and the investment of resources by health care stakeholders in the education of women about perinatal depression risk factors and triggers. In addition, breakthrough alliances led to the formation of the National Coalition for Maternal Mental Health, which convenes nonprofits around the country to address the issue and the elimination of barriers to diagnosis and treatment. Partnerships with the Los Angeles County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force, Postpartum Support International, UCSF Medical Center, Homeless Prenatal Program and Help a Mother Out have been cornerstones of the program.

Over time, the project's focus has evolved from legislative advocacy and awareness-building to capacity-building through stakeholder engagement and volunteer participation, always with an eye on sustainable change. Today, Advocacy Project continues with the 2020 Mom Project, which sets forth tactical steps for hospitals and providers to improve awareness nationally, and with the training of nearly 500 health care providers via a Web-based Maternal Mental Health certificate program.

**2016** recipient: Junior League of Los Angeles through its Community Leadership Forum.

Since 2008, the Community Leadership Forum has been bringing together key community groups (some of which don't regularly engage with one another) to focus attention on pressing multi-faceted and interconnected issues such as early childhood literacy, education, foster youth and human trafficking. Government agencies, nonprofits and issues advocates are part of the mix as speakers, and events (in the form of conferences, public forums and training and networking opportunities) are open to the community at large, not just League members.

In 2015, the Community Leadership Forum featured expert speakers from the city, state and federal levels to discuss "The Disturbing Link between Foster Youth and Human Trafficking." In 2014 the forum tackled "Foster Youth as Parents: Providing Support and Breaking the Cycle."

Both of these events brought to light big topics that created dialog about important issues most of us aren't particularly familiar with. And, in so doing, helped to firmly establish the Junior League of Los Angeles as a thought leader and critical community convener.

### **Examples of how to have an ADVOCACY FOCUS from other Junior Leagues:**

#### **LONG BEACH:**

Like many nonprofits, the JLLB conducts two primary types of advocacy: community and legislative. Community advocacy involves changing the ideas and attitudes of the public. This is typically accomplished through education programs that may include direct mail, publications, group presentations, and a website. Many nonprofits make effective use of the media to reach the public and promote an issue.

Nonprofits pursue legislative advocacy when the target for change is a federal, state or local law, school board policy, or budget allocation. Nonprofit advocacy to influence legislation may involve legislative monitoring, committee testifying, lobbying, writing position statements or papers, organizing networks and coalitions, and a variety of other activities. The Junior League of Long Beach is a proud sponsor of state legislation that creates opportunity and betters the lives of children. They conduct legislative advocacy through the State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) as well as through our own sponsored and supported legislation. JLLB has a series of position statements in the areas of health, education, violence prevention and family support.

## SAN DIEGO: Advocacy Committee

The Junior League of San Diego Advocacy committee works to raise public awareness and league education around the issues of transition-age youth and human trafficking while developing and maintaining relationships with elected officials and community partners within these focus areas.

The Advocacy Committee hosts three major events a year including the Community Impact Forum, Human Trafficking awareness rally, and "Legislation and Libations" training. The Advocacy Committee also supports the JLS State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) delegates to establish relationships with elected officials to maintain the Public Affairs Advocacy network.

## TAMPA BAY: the ABOLISH movement

In 2013, The Junior League of Tampa launched the ABOLISH movement to bring an end to the child sex slavery epidemic in The Tampa Bay area through education, prevention, support services and legislative advocacy.

## SEATTLE: Advocacy Committee

The Advocacy Committee works to ensure that JLS members are informed and understand the focus areas, community impact, and how to use JLS's collective voice to achieve our mission. Advocacy also assigns Legislative Leads who track legislation that affects the community partners and women and children in the community, and who work directly with our Community Partners. Long known for putting on the Capitol Days experience in Olympia, the Advocacy Committee is also working to bring opportunities closer to home this year, with member Advocacy Nights at the JLS office and with the introduction of a house party format that will allow members to be advocates in the fight against sex trafficking.

## FLORIDA SPAC: Public Affairs Committee

The Junior Leagues of Florida State Public Affairs Committee has been the advocacy arm of the Junior Leagues of Florida for over 30 years, monitoring the state legislative process and addressing issues of political importance to the members of the Junior Leagues.

The Junior Leagues of Florida have weighed in on various topics, including bicycle helmets for children under 16, the Environmental Growth Management Act of 1995, the '911' Emergency Medical System, child abuse, domestic violence, juvenile justice, and education.

The State of Florida boasts 24 Junior Leagues, with combined membership of over 15,000 women. Each Florida Junior League that chooses to participate in the advocacy process sends delegates to state meetings and conferences throughout the year to research and debate the issues of the day.

## NEW YORK: Advocates for Public Policy

The focused and determined efforts of our Advocates for Public Policy (APP) committee have spurred legislation that includes the protection of children against child abuse, anti-stalking, mental health insurance coverage, the removal of toxic cleaning products from New York City buildings, human trafficking, and domestic violence.

[Historically, they have done a lot but] recently, APP and NYSPAC are continuing their work to combat human trafficking as part of the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA) which seeks to address

child sexual abuse and exploitation, including forcing minors into prostitution, in a comprehensive way by enhancing protection for trafficking victims. A portion of that legislation was passed in 2014 and as a result, criminal courts are now required to treat persons 16 and 17 years old who commit prostitution offenses as Persons in Need of Supervision, rather than treating them as adult criminals. Because of this legislative change, it is now possible to engage some of this very young segment of our New York community toward intervention from human trafficking.

Information regarding each league's advocacy efforts was taken from their respective Junior League website.

For an overview of all SPACs, refer to AJLI's website: <https://www.ajli.org/?nd=p-do-comm-ip-spac>