

FACT SHEET

# ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

*The New York Junior League champions policies that support women and children and works to hold local and state government accountable to the women, children and families it serves.*

For more than a century, the NYJL has been on the forefront of some of the city's most defining moments: civil rights movements, political reforms, cultural evolution, technological transformation, and the ongoing crusade to realize equity in health care, education, economic stability, and political voice.

The NYJL began its work in New York City's settlement houses, addressing the health, education, and social welfare needs of immigrant families living on the Lower East Side. As an early supporter of women who sought professions outside the home, the NYJL operated a hotel for single, working women during the early twentieth century and launched a childcare program in the 1930s. From 1970 to 1990, the NYJL focused on advocacy efforts from children's rights to education, job discrimination, medical insurance coverage, domestic violence, the Equal Rights Amendment, and reproductive health. And as a longstanding advocate for survivors of domestic violence, the NYJL has supported policies that protect survivors of violence, such as the Clinic Access and Anti-Stalking Act, which became law in 1999.

**The New York Junior League (NYJL)** is an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

Partnering with more than 60 community-based organizations, the NYJL trains and mobilizes about 2,800 volunteers to carry out its mission. Bringing their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and talents, NYJL volunteers create customized health, education, arts, and social support programs for women, children, and families from underserved communities throughout New York City. The NYJL also provides on-demand community service and leads two projects every year to revitalize parks and community spaces. Through community and training programs, NYJL volunteers develop their leadership skills, and many begin serving on other nonprofit boards or in government.

# NYJL's Recent Advocacy Achievements

2005

NYJL advocated for the **Sex Offender Registration Act**, or "Megan's Law," creating a state-wide registry for convicted or formerly incarcerated sex offenders when it was signed into law in 2006.

2006

The NYJL convened a forum of service providers, legislators, and government agencies to spark dialogue about the complicated policy issues surrounding foster care. The NYJL went on to advocate for the reduction of cases assigned to caseworkers and the provision of Medicaid to **youth aging out of the foster system**.

2007

In partnership with the National Organization of Women (NOW) NYC, the NYJL advocated for New York State's first comprehensive **anti-human trafficking legislation**.

2008

The NYJL successfully advocated for New York State funding to support shelters for **survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking**.

2010

Alongside the Women in Prison Project, the NYJL began advocating for the **Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA)** to grant judges discretion when issuing sentences to survivors of violence who are convicted of crimes related to their abuse. Under this law, judges may order lesser sentences or send survivors to community-based programs instead of prison. Governor Cuomo signed this bill into law in May 2019.

2012-15

The NYJL called for the passage of the **Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA)** to place greater accountability on traffickers and purchasers and to defend survivors of trafficking from prosecution for sex work. Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the TVPJA into law, along with seven other bills in the Women's Equality Act, in late 2015.

2015

NYJL met with state senators, urging them to pass the **Paid Family Leave Act**. This legislation took effect in January 2019.

2017

The NYJL advocated for a bill preventing employers from asking for applicants' salary histories, a practice that exacerbates the wage gap between white men and people of color, especially women. In 2019, the **salary history ban** became law in New York State.

2018-19

NYJL actively advocated for the passage of the **Separation of Children Accountability Reporting (SCAR) Act**. While this legislation passed the State Senate in May 2019, as of November 2019, the legislation is still under consideration and awaits passage by the full Assembly.

**Learn more about the New York Junior League and our advocacy!**

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# ADVOCACY AGENDA 2019–2020

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## Voting Rights: Education and Activation

→ Increase awareness of voters' rights through visibility, outreach, and advocacy training.

### Issue

The United States has one of the lowest rates of voter turnout among the world's high-income nations. Nearly 56% of the voting age population cast a ballot in the 2016 presidential election. And in New York City voter turnout for mayoral elections hasn't exceeded 50% since 1993. Our work with young adults and newly eligible voters makes us uniquely positioned to make an impact by developing a new generation of consistent, conscientious voters.

### Legislative Update

New York Automatic Voter Registration Act aims to increase voter registration by integrating automatic registration in designated state agency applications. If passed, New Yorkers who interact with certain State agencies, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, would automatically be registered to vote. This non-partisan effort aims to advance US citizens' protected right to vote in local, state, and federal elections by creating awareness and expanding access to voter registration, so individuals can advocate on their own behalf.

## Separation of Children Accountability Reporting (SCAR) Act

→ Advocate for the passage of legislation in the New York State Assembly, increasing accountability through transparency and requiring regular reports of the number of separated immigrant children.

### Issue

Although the policy of separating children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border was reversed in June 2018, by then, thousands of children had been taken from their parents and sent to holding facilities around the country. Many children were placed thousands of miles from where their parents were detained. Given the numerous foster care agencies within its periphery, New York City was one of the largest recipients of children separated from their families.

While the court-ordered deadline to reunite separated children with their families has passed, unknown numbers of children remain within the federal government's care, including within New York City and State. With no public record of the number of such children, their status, or whether they have been returned to their parents, the US government has lost track of nearly 1,500 immigrant children it had placed into the homes of caregivers. This bill enhances transparency and accountability by ensuring accurate, periodic reporting regarding the status of children in the care of New York facilities.

## Legislative Update

The Separation of Children Accountability Reporting (SCAR) Act would require the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to collect data on the number of unaccompanied immigrant children detained by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and under the care of an authorized agency. The Office of Children and Family Services would report this information to the governor, the temporary president of the Senate, and the speaker of the Assembly semiannually. Although this bill would impact children detained in New York City and state, the SCAR Act could provide a replicable model for all states to follow. In May 2019, the SCAR Act passed the NY State Senate, but has not passed the Assembly.

## Homelessness

→ **Advocate for policies and increased funding focused on the needs of New Yorkers experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.**

### Issue

During the 2018-2019 school year, over 114,000 New York City (NYC) public school students were identified as homeless, an increase by 66% since 2011. That is, the number of homeless students in NYC's public education system is more than twice the total number of students in the entire Boston Public School system. Students in temporary housing face higher absentee rates, potentially leading to significant academic struggles. The NYJL is committed to serving the coalition of community partners working to improve policies impacting women, children, and families who are experiencing homelessness in NYC. Over the past year, the NYJL has dedicated multiple training sessions, featuring experts from city leadership and community partners, to ensure NYJL volunteers are better prepared to work with clients experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness..

### Legislative Update

In 2019, the NYJL worked with a coalition that successfully secured over \$10 million in NYC's 2020 budget to add more social workers to public schools with higher concentrations of homeless students. The inclusion of this earmarked funding in each year's budget is not guaranteed, so advocates and community partners will need to continuously monitor budget proposals and advocate accordingly.

## Child Victims Act

→ **Support implementation of newly enacted legislation to protect survivors of child sexual abuse.**

### Issue

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), one in six boys and one in four girls experience sexual abuse by the time they are 18 years old. Researchers estimate that only one third of child survivors reports abuse. Trauma from abuse impacts survivors long after the abuse ends, often resulting in learning disabilities, poor health, mental illness, substance abuse, and juvenile and adult crime. These lasting effects cost taxpayers, but offenders and the institutions that cover for them should bear this burden. A civil lawsuit could result in monetary compensation for a victim's medical and mental health costs and provide an additional platform to hold assailants accountable. However, prior to the Child Victims Act, survivors of abuse had only one to five years, upon turning 18, to file civil lawsuits.

### Legislative Update

The Child Victims Act passed the New York State Senate and Assembly (January 28, 2019) and was signed into law by Governor Cuomo (February 14, 2019). Now survivors of child sexual abuse have until the age of 55 to file a claim, if it hasn't expired under the old statute of limitations, or one year and six months after Governor Cuomo signed the act into law on February 14, 2019.