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Girls Incorporated®

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Advocacy Statements



*in support of the Girls Incorporated
Girls' Bill of Rights*

**girls
inc.®**



Photo: Duffy-Marie Anouit

Introduction

With our vision of empowered girls and an equitable society and our mission of inspiring all girls to be strong, smart, and bold, Girls Incorporated has been committed to advancing the rights of girls for over 140 years. We believe passionately that every girl is entitled to the opportunity to envision her best self as well as the tools to strive to become the person she wants to be. Our programs, carefully researched, evaluated, and grounded in the collective experience of all Girls Inc. organizations, have given millions of girls in the United States and Canada just such tools and opportunities.

Girls Inc. also works tirelessly, in partnership with the girls and young women we serve, to advocate for social change that ensures the world is more welcoming of strong, smart, and bold girls. From supporting and defending girls' rights to equitable educational opportunities to advocating for the inclusion of protections for girls in anti-violence legislation, Girls Inc. is consistently on the forefront of the public and policy debates that affect girls' lives.

These advocacy statements, first created over a quarter century ago and adopted by the entirety of Girls Inc., are at once the expression of our values and the guiding principles of our social engagement. An articulation of our convictions, they are the framework within which we pursue our mission and our vision.





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

Gender Equity

Equality of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities without regard to gender is essential to a just society. The contributions of girls and young women are essential to achieving that future equitable society. Today, gender equity is still not a reality; and Girls Incorporated responds through both programs and advocacy 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.

It is our conviction that gender equity will be achieved only when both girls and women have the opportunity, the resources, and the freedom to become the people they want to be. In the pursuit of this goal, it is incumbent on us as a society to create a spirit of inclusive empowerment. Too often, public discourse on gender devolves into a rhetoric of division, with girls and boys portrayed as combatants in a battle for scarce resources, where one “side” succeeds only at the expense of the other. This dialectical approach to gender ensures that all our children lose out on the opportunity to live in a society united for the common good. Girls Incorporated is committed to building a culture of unity and hope—one in which each child is recognized and valued.

Equitable Allocation of Resources

Girls Incorporated affirms that girls have a right to their fair share of public and private resources. Tax dollars spent to foster positive youth development must be allocated equitably to girls and boys. Further, 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.



Diversity and Inclusion

Girls Incorporated is committed to diversity in principle and practice. We work to make our organization welcoming and accessible to all girls. Our commitment is founded in our communal sense of justice and our belief that the world and our organization are enriched by the diversity of our cultures and experiences. We strive toward a world of understanding and mutual support.

We recognize and attempt to bridge the growing gulf in our society between rich and poor, privileged and neglected. Working with girls and young women, we also endeavor to 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. Each girl's specific strengths and experiences can enrich us all. We respect the diverse forms and structures of family in which today's girls are loved and supported.



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

Photo: Duffy-Marie Arnout

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. By advocating on their own behalf, girls come to think of themselves as leaders at a young age. Through assessing community needs and taking action to improve their communities, girls learn that they can influence positive change. 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 a democracy. Girls are entitled to learn to analyze alternatives, to assess the long-range implications of their choices, to act on their beliefs, and to take responsibility for the consequences.

In a democracy citizens have responsibilities to vote, help shape the laws, abide by the laws, and contribute to the common good. Girls Incorporated encourages girls to understand and practice these roles during their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. We provide opportunities for girls to learn about and engage in the political process, and see their own potential as future officeholders.



Photo: Duffy-Marie Arnoult



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

Photo: Kate Jenkins

Risk and Adventure

Girls Incorporated believes that girls are entitled to 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 healthy risk-taking; to engage in outdoor adventures that challenge them as individuals and as members of a team. We encourage girls to take credit for their work and be proud of what they accomplish.

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



Photo: Lee White

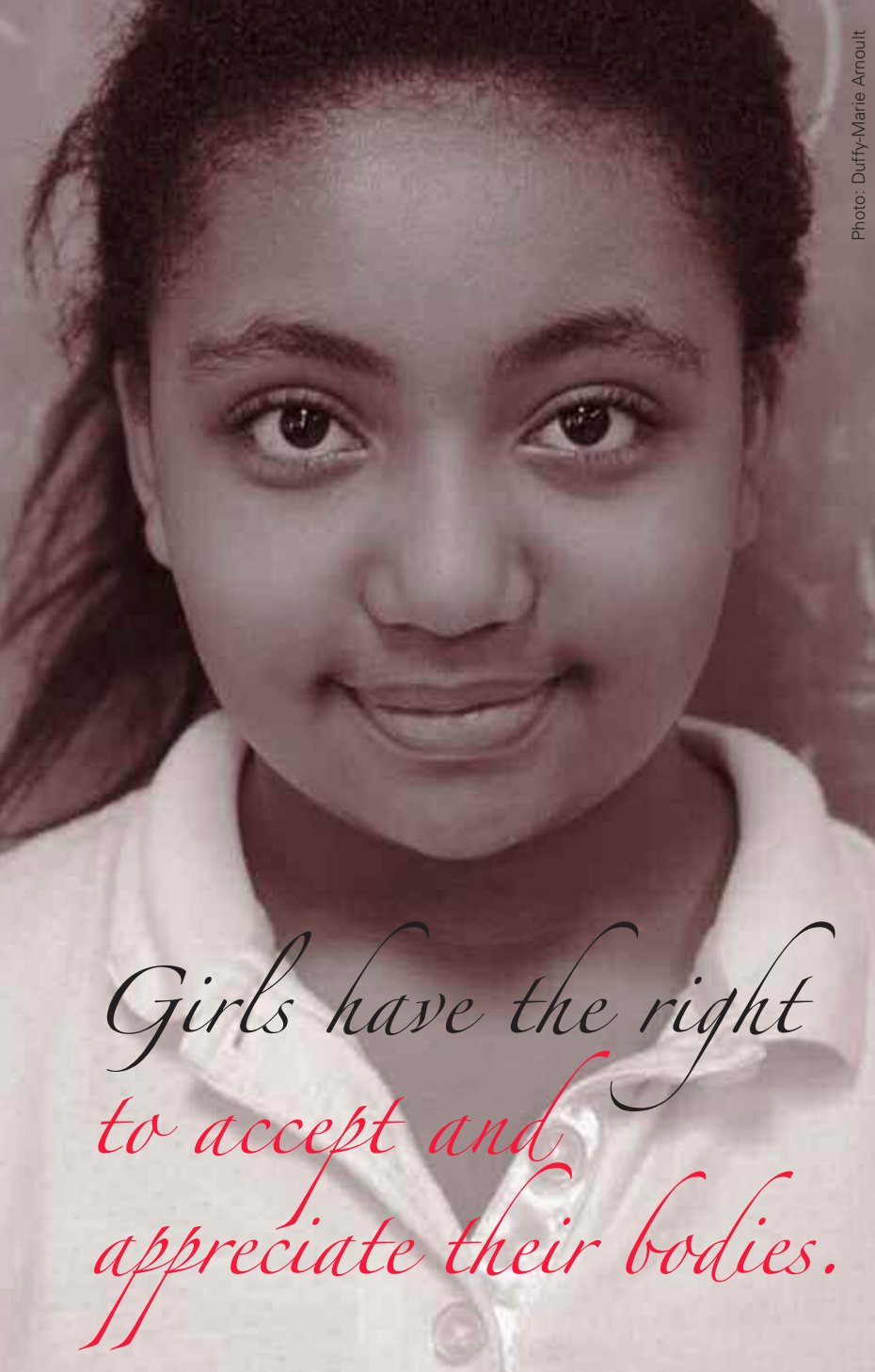
Sports

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' participation in sports is likely to have a positive long-term impact on their total development, especially when fair and supportive opportunity is afforded. The lessons learned in sports carry over to other challenges in life. Through the enjoyment of 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. Sports help girls develop a healthy way to balance their lives.



Photo: Duffy-Marie Amoult



*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, resources, 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 costs, and discrimination.

Body Image

Girls Incorporated promotes every girl's healthy development and positive body image, and works to change limiting and dangerous stereotypes. Girls experience significant stress about the way they look from family members, peers, and the media. They routinely compromise their health trying to meet societal expectations and cope with feelings of failure and self-blame when they fall short.

Girls Inc. believes girls have the right to grow up in families and communities that affirm both their inner and outer beauty. Girls Inc. encourages media that depict girls of all shapes and sizes, expand our conception of physical attractiveness, advance healthy eating, promote physical activity, and feature empowering images of girls and women. We encourage and provide opportunities for girls to learn to deconstruct harmful media messages. We call on educators and families of girls to be aware of the determinative role they play in girls' emotional health and sense of confidence in their bodies.

Sexuality

Girls Incorporated encourages all girls to develop positive attitudes toward their sexuality and 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.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Girls Incorporated believes that for young people abstinence should be the first choice. To make responsible decisions about sexuality, pregnancy, and parenthood, girls need and have a right to sensitive, comprehensive sexuality education; convenient, affordable access to safe, effective methods of contraception and protection from disease; medical privacy; and referral to information, counseling, clinical, and other services that support their responsible decisions.

We recognize that many girls face issues and discrimination related to their sexual orientation or that of a family member. Girls have a right to positive, supportive environments and linkages to community resources for dealing with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

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 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 freedom of choice, a right recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 in *Roe v. Wade* and by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1988 in *R v. Morgentaler*.

Girls Incorporated affirms and teaches that postponing sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. We also recognize that girls and young women who are sexually active are at high risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and diseases. Their anatomy makes girls and women especially vulnerable to STDs, and young women are at particular risk because their bodies are still developing. Girls Inc. supports access to medical care without stigma for girls with STDs, and funding for STD research and prevention. Girls Inc. prevention strategies include public education, skill building, and ensuring access to 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, by providing a supportive environment and the skills and resources to make healthy decisions. Patterns of substance use are related to gender; girls often are induced to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to become or stay slim, add muscle, increase stamina, 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.



Photo: Sarah Murdoch

*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.

Overwhelmingly girls are the targets rather than the perpetrators of violence. Many forms of violence pervade girls' lives, including domestic violence, sibling abuse, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse; bullying, sexual harassment, assault, and gang violence; dating violence and acquaintance rape; hate crimes and fear of violence from strangers. Technology has brought new threats to girls, including online predators and cyber-bullying. In response to a culture that is saturated with violence, and a sense that adults are not providing a safe environment for them, more girls are resorting to violence themselves. We support programs and policies to break this cycle.

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.

We oppose 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 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 return to a law abiding life are woefully inadequate. Girls in the juvenile justice system are entitled to rehabilitative services that are sensitive and targeted to their age and development. Girls Incorporated strongly believes that girls should not be tried as adults or incarcerated in adult correctional facilities.

Girls Incorporated advocates responding to the strengths and needs of girls, not only to their behaviors. We support prevention and early

intervention. We also strongly encourage diverting girls from the juvenile justice system to community-based youth development programs whenever possible. We support gender-specific instead of gender-stereotyped policies and practices of arrest, detention, education, and services; and adequate staff training, supervision, facilities, and resources to ensure girls' safety and help them prepare for a positive future.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Girls Incorporated affirms that girls have a right not to be abused or neglected. It is imperative that girls who disclose abuse are listened to, taken seriously, and afforded sensitive, caring support and protection. Girls Incorporated recognizes its obligation to report cases of child abuse to local child protective services agencies. In turn, those agencies require sufficient resources to perform their vital functions. We work to help survivors understand their innocence and become stronger, enable girls to recognize and assert their rights, and prevent and alleviate this destructive force in the lives of girls and their families.



Education

Girls Incorporated recognizes the importance of an excellent education in developing girls' confidence, intellect, and capacity to be self-sufficient. Therefore we are committed to equal access to excellent, non-sexist education for all at every level. We work to promote and protect the letter and spirit of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. 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. We believe that girls with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education in school and the greatest possible participation in the learning that takes place in the community.

Career Development

Girls Incorporated believes that every job is a job for girls to consider. Nearly every girl will work for pay for much of her adult life. The adults in girls' lives have the opportunity and the responsibility to open doors and remove obstacles so that girls' early interests and passions become pathways to education, employment, and lifelong fulfillment. Girls are entitled to the widest possible range of experiences—chores and hobbies, programs and courses, internships, scholarships and apprenticeships—as they discover fields that inspire them and pursuits at which they

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

excel. We call upon families, educators, employers, and policy makers to dismantle stereotypes and to welcome girls and women into a full range of fields. We encourage girls to see themselves with bold futures as leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals, and employers.

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 are entitled to participate in the worlds 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.

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. We support efforts

to secure living wages and benefits for every full-time worker and increase compensation for the caring and helping professions so often filled by girls and women. We support equal pay for work of comparable value, and we work to recognize and value the unpaid work, most often performed by women and girls, that is vital to a functioning society.

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.



Photo: Durfy-Marie Arnoult