



Girl Scouts of the USA
816 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Third Floor
Washington, DC 20006-2701
T 202 659 3780 F 202 331 8065

Public Policy & Advocacy

Girl Scouts of the USA Agenda for the 111th Congress – First Session

Encouraging Healthy Living Among Girls

Girl Scouts have a long-standing commitment to the well-being of girls, and a unique understanding of the complex issue of healthy living. As Congress grapples with the childhood obesity epidemic, Girl Scouts can provide valuable perspective and counsel in shaping policies that address this and other serious children's health issues. For example, our experience and research, especially our report *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living*, tells us that girls have a view of health that combines good nutrition and physical fitness with emotional and social well-being. We encourage Congress to consider a wide range of important issues, such as relational aggression, cyberbullying, healthy media images, and eating disorders, that directly and disproportionately affect girls' health.

With more than 60 healthy living-related badges and a historic emphasis on health in the Girl Scout experience, girls are educated and empowered to take action to strengthen their physical and emotional health and positively impact their communities and the world. Girl Scouts helps girls learn how to make healthy decisions, not tell girls what they should do. Because adequate progress is not being made to ensure our young people live healthy lives and we believe all sectors must be involved in developing solutions, Girl Scouts is looking for opportunities to assist Congress in improving how we promote the health of young people, especially girls.

Increasing Girls' Involvement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

Around 3rd grade, girls begin to lose interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). As they age, the problem only gets worse -- the percentage of girls who say they would not study math anymore given the choice increases in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade from 9 percent to 15 percent to 50 percent.¹ As a result of these factors among others, women are vastly underrepresented in STEM fields. With more than 70 badges and patches in STEM-related activities, Girls Scouts are encouraged to explore many possibilities in STEM-related fields. Our research and programming finds that teaching style can play a significant role in capturing and maintaining girls' interest in STEM fields. Girls benefit more from hands-on activities and group projects than from lecture-style, textbook-based learning.² Our goal is to build and reinforce girls' interest in STEM and to support their continued involvement as they reach critical decision-making points. To increase the number of girls and young women pursuing education and careers in STEM, Girl Scouts seeks to work with Congress to ensure that education policies reflect the unique learning styles of girls, include expanded learning opportunities such as hands-on and afterschool programs.

Girls and Leadership

For almost a century, Girl Scouting has helped girls develop their leadership skills. In anticipation of our Centennial, Girl Scouts has renewed this commitment by launching the new Girl Scout Leadership Experience, where girls 5-17 can discover their talents and strengths, connect with other girls, and take action to make the world a better place. To ensure the most effective experience for girls, the Girl Scouts Research Institute released an original study, *Change it Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership*. This nationwide survey found that 39 percent of girls want to be leaders, and that the desire to lead is higher among African-American (53 percent), Hispanic (50 percent), and Asian-American (59 percent) girls compared to Caucasian girls (34 percent). The data

¹ Educational Equity of Girls and Women, National Center for Education Statistics, 2000.

² Carrie Liston, Karen Peterson, and Vicky Rangan, Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology. *Guide to Promising Practices in Informal Information Technology Education for Girls*, 2007, p.3.

indicate that girls find the command-and-control style of leadership unappealing, and a majority of them would aspire to a different kind of leadership focused on personal principles, ethical behavior, and the ability to affect social change. Girl Scouts is eager to work with Congress, the Administration and other policymakers to identify opportunities to cultivate and expand girls' leadership opportunities.

Financial Literacy

The current economic crisis has highlighted the need to improve financial literacy among all Americans, but especially among youth. A recent survey found that high school seniors could answer fewer than half of basic financial literacy questions. With youth controlling more than \$172 billion in spending, and one in three youth carrying a credit card, we must ensure that all youth – including girls – have the information they need to properly save, spend, budget, and invest.

Girl Scouts of the USA has a long history of working with girls to ensure their financial literacy. From the Girl Scout Cookie Sale Program – often girls' first introduction to business planning and entrepreneurship – to innovative programs like CentsAbility and the Stock Market Game, Girl Scout programming provides girls the money management skills they need to become fiscally responsible and successful adults. Girl Scouts seek to work with Congress to develop programs and policies that ensure that all girls have solid financial literacy skills and support the role of youth-serving organizations in providing real-world financial literacy experiences for girls.

Opportunities for All Girls: Bringing Girl Scouting to Girls in Underserved Communities

Girl Scouts is working to ensure that “every girl, everywhere” can enjoy the benefits of the Girl Scout experience – including girls that have often been forgotten, neglected, or underserved by society. This includes:

- Daughters of incarcerated mothers
- Girls who are at risk for violence
- Girls in public housing communities
- Girls in rural communities
- Latina girls

Working in partnership with a variety of federal agencies Girl Scouts works to provide programs that give girls the real-world skills and tools they need to address the problems they face in their lives, such as alcohol and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, truancy, and other risky behaviors. Girl Scouts supports efforts to strengthen these partnerships, and the agencies that help make these activities possible.

Supporting a Thriving Non-Profit Community

Girl Scouts is proud to partner with our other human service and youth-serving partners to ensure that non-profit organizations can survive and thrive in these troubled times. We support public policies that help non-profits recruit and retain volunteers, incentivize charitable giving, facilitate non-profits' abilities to provide background checks, and other activities that help us achieve our mission. Girl Scouts encourages Congress to work with human service organizations to ensure a healthy, effective, and strong non-profit community.

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is the preeminent organization for and leading authority on girls with 3.6 million girl and adult members. Now in its 97th year, Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. The organization serves girls from every corner of the United States, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. www.girlscouts.org

GSUSA's Public Policy and Advocacy Office, located in Washington, D.C., works in partnership with local Girl Scout councils to educate representatives of the legislative and executive branches of government and advocate for public policy issues important to girls and Girl Scouting. **For more information contact us at 202-659-3780 or advocacy@girlscouts.org.**