

Temple Sinai Policy on Public Policy Endorsements

Statement of Policy

In accord with our vision of Temple Sinai as committed to efforts to bring justice, healing and caring to our world, the Temple, acting through the Board of Trustees, should take positions on issues of public policy consistent with the values of our congregation and of Reform Judaism. We should do so based on criteria, and through a process, that reflect the diversity of our congregation and our respect for the diverse views of our members.

In taking positions on matters of public policy, we seek to serve two goals: to encourage lively, thoughtful, and informed conversation among our members on the issues, and to express our views to the larger community. Any decision by the Board to take a position on behalf of the Temple should be articulated and understood as an expression of our understanding of the principles and values of Reform Judaism as applied to the particular issue. No statement on behalf of the Temple should suggest that Temple members are unanimous on the issue, or that members are required to vote or otherwise to act in accord with the Temple's policy position.

Criteria

In deciding whether to take a position on any issue, the Board should consider the following criteria, giving such weight to each as the Board deems appropriate to the particular issue. Other criteria may also warrant consideration in particular instances.

- Is the issue one on which Jewish texts and the principles and values of Reform Judaism offer clear or strong guidance?
- Have the Union for Reform Judaism, the Jewish Community Relations Council, or other local, regional or national Jewish organizations taken positions?
- To the extent the Board is able to determine after reasonable efforts in accord with the process set forth in this policy, is there a widespread consensus among our membership? Are there strongly held minority views within our membership?
- To what extent will the Temple's taking a position serve the dual goals of educating our membership and influencing public officials or the public generally?
- Is there a risk that the proposed action will jeopardize the Temple's tax exempt status, will have other adverse legal consequences, or will give rise to security hazards?

Process

In most instances requests for public policy endorsements should come to the Board from committees. A proposal that arises on a subject that falls within the mandate of an existing committee should be referred to that committee. A committee considering a proposal should conduct research on the issue, consider multiple viewpoints, and make efforts to elicit the views of members. When possible consistent with the urgency of the issue, the committee should hold an open forum or discussion session at which members of the congregation have an opportunity to hear informed and responsible views on all sides and to express their views. Board members should attend such events whenever possible. The committee should then formulate a recommendation to the Board. In presenting its recommendation, the committee should endeavor to provide information to the Board reflecting informed and responsible views on all sides of the issue, including any views expressed by members of the congregation, and should articulate the relationship between the proposed action and the principles and values of Reform Judaism.

When a matter is to be brought before the Board for action without a committee recommendation – such as in instances where the matter falls outside the mandate of any committee, or where a member seeks action despite a committee's decision not to recommend action – the officers should endeavor to ensure that the presentation to the Board will include articulation of opposing viewpoints. One means of doing so would be to solicit volunteers from among the Board members who would undertake to research and present a variety of informed and responsible viewpoints.

If the agenda for a Board meeting includes a recommendation for a public policy endorsement, reasonable efforts should be made to advise the congregation in advance of the meeting, through the weekly electronic mail update, announcement at services, or other means appropriate to the urgency of the issue with a reminder of the general right of all members of the congregation to attend Board meetings and address the Board on issues under consideration.

Any decision of the Board to endorse a position on a matter of public policy should be by a two-thirds vote of those Board members present and voting.

Implementation

The Temple should publicize its positions on matters of public policy, both to the members of the congregation and to the community generally, by means appropriate to each particular issue. A list of policy endorsements should appear on the Temple website. Other means of communication appropriate to particular issues may include letters to legislators or other public officials and statements to news media outlets, and participation by members and by the clergy, in the name of the Temple, at public events.

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