



GIRLS INC.

NETWORK-WIDE POLICY & ADVOCACY PLATFORM

At Girls Inc. we are committed to a **girl-centered advocacy approach** that is **grounded in the experiences of the girls¹ in our network**. We lift up girls' voices and give them opportunities to advocate on issues that matter to them, in their communities and beyond, and encourage them to be civically engaged. As part of our dedication to social justice, we also bring intersectional, racial justice, and trauma-informed lenses to our work, and **advocate for policies and practices that combat systemic racism, sexism, and other social and economic barriers to girls' success**. Sixty-two percent of the girls we serve come from households with incomes of \$30,000/year or less, and 78% identify as girls of color.

Our direct service and advocacy work are linked, and each fuels the other. **Across the United States and Canada**, we partner with schools to provide the mentoring relationships, safe spaces, and **evidence-based programming** that are proven to help girls succeed. Our advocacy focuses on **policies and practices that support girls' health and wellness and foster school climates that are conducive to learning for all students**, particularly those from underserved communities and those who face discrimination and other obstacles because of their race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or religion.

OUR VISION

A world where girls and all youth have what they need to grow and flourish, in school and beyond. To that end, the Girls Inc. Network, with input from our girls, adopts the following advocacy priorities:

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Girls Inc. affiliates report that natural disasters, COVID-19, economic instability, racial injustice, social unrest, immigration raids, and increases in hate crimes and discrimination have contributed to trauma and mental health concerns for girls. Mental health is as important as physical health and there should be no shame associated with having a problem and needing help, yet girls report that there is still a stigma associated with seeking support. **Our advocacy aims to:**

- *Increase* access to mental health and wellness support for children in underserved and underrepresented communities.
- *Combat* the persistent stigma surrounding mental health issues and treatment.

¹ Girls Inc. welcomes cisgender girls, transgender girls, non-binary individuals who experience gender-based oppression, and those who are exploring their gender identity or expression during their time at Girls Inc. The Girls Inc. national position is that our member organizations may not discriminate or exclude girls from our programming based on their gender identity or gender expression.



SEXUAL HEALTH, SAFETY, AND AUTONOMY

At Girls Inc., we work to ensure girls have the skills, knowledge, and support to take ownership of their sexual health and make decisions to help them lead fulfilling, safe, and healthy lives. Their bodily autonomy is critical to their dignity as human beings and their right to be safe in the world. **Our advocacy aims to:**

- *Promote* access to comprehensive sex education & sexual health services.
- *Advance* menstrual equity.
- *Combat* sexual harassment & violence in schools, by (1) protecting and helping schools comply with prohibitions against sex discrimination (including explicit protections for LGBTQ+ youth) to effectively address harassment and ensure student survivors get the support they need to continue their education; and (2) encouraging practices that prevent harassment and violence.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Every child should have equal opportunity to succeed, and the discrimination that girls face due to the intersection of their race and gender (as well as other factors) can negatively impact their academic achievement, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing. **We advocate for:**

- *Reforms* to school discipline policies and practices, including a shift of focus from school-based law enforcement to mental health providers, training for staff on trauma-informed practices, and adoption of evidence-based alternatives like Restorative Justice practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, and social and emotional learning.
- *Increased access* to postsecondary education.
- *Improved access* for girls and other underrepresented groups to meaningful opportunities to pursue career paths that lead to economic independence.
- *Increased funding* to bridge the digital divide, for social and emotional learning, and for out-of-school-time programs and mentoring.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTING RIGHTS

A democracy is stronger when more voices are heard and everyone is engaged and we encourage all eligible voters to participate in our democracy. Centering the voices of the girls we serve, including our national [Teen Advocacy Council](#), we give girls the platform and tools to push for social change. Every issue we work on depends on electing leaders who care about and are ready to tackle the wide-ranging problems affecting girls and their communities. **We advocate for:**

- High quality, sustained civic education in schools, for grades K-12.
- *Free and fair elections* in which all voters are able to fully participate in the democratic process.
- *Policies* that make it easier for people to register to vote and cast their ballots.
- *Protecting* the rights of communities that have historically been excluded from freely voting and resisting voter suppression.