

## RJV 2008 Legislative Summary

Reform Jewish Voice actively worked on, but experienced limited success in the issues that we endorsed during the 2008 legislative session. Most of the issues were passed by the Assembly, but remained in committee in the State Senate.

We supported five issues during our Interfaith Advocacy Day with Interfaith Impact of New York State: the Healthy Teens Act, Marriage Equality, Universal Health Care, Dignity for all Students and the Reproductive Health and Privacy Act. However, we also supported or opposed a number of other issues that we expected would be considered during this session as well. Below is a summary of these issues.

Note: Coalition partners listed are those we know. Other organizations may also have worked on these issues.

### RJV Supported

**Healthy Teens Act:** would provide grant money for schools to implement comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education programs through the Department of Health.

**Assembly:** A.2856 Passed for the fourth time

**Senate:** S.1342 Introduced, but held up in the Senate Finance Committee

**Coalition Partners:**

- Planned Parenthood Federation of America,
- Family Planning Advocates of NYS
- Interfaith Impact
- Advocates for Youth
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US (SIECUS)

**Comments:** RJV will continue to press the Senate to pass this legislation.

**Marriage Equality** provides for civil marriage for same sex couples. The act would have no effect on religious marriage. Couples could enter into legal marriages distinct from religious marriages.

**Assembly:** A.8590 Assembly passed the bill.

**Senate:** S.5884

**Coalition Partners:**

- Interfaith Impact
- Empire State Pride Agenda

**Comments:** The Governor instructed state agencies to review policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the NYS court decision recognizing same sex marriages legally performed in other states and jurisdictions.

**Universal Health Care:** The Governor instructed the State Departments of Health and Insurance to study ways of providing health care coverage to NYS residents. NYS has contracted with the Urban Institute to study and analyze various universal health care models.

**Status:** Assembly passed resolution endorsing HR 676, "Medicare for All" federal legislation which would provide universal coverage.

**Assembly:** A7354 In Ways and Means Committee

**Senate:** S3107 In Finance Committee.

**Coalition Partners:**

- Physicians for a National Healthcare Plan
- Interfaith Impact
- Hunger Action Network
- BALCONY (Business and Labor Coalition of New York)
- Citizen Action of New York
- Rekindling Reform
- Capital District Alliance for Universal Healthcare (CDAUH)

**Comments:** The state has requested comments on instructions for modeling four plans, which are due July 21, 2008.

**Dignity for All Students:** This act would protect public school students from harassment and discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender and sex.

**Assembly:** A.3496 Passed the Assembly

**Senate:** S.1571 Held in Senate Education Committee

**Coalition Partners:**

- Empire State Pride Agenda
- Interfaith Impact

**Comments:** Missouri recently passed an internet anti-bullying bill.

**Reproductive Health and Privacy Act:** would move the right to an abortion from the criminal justice law to the public health law, and update it to include modern medical practices.

**Assembly:** Never introduced

**Senate:** S.5829

**Coalition Partners:**

- Interfaith Impact
- Empire State Pride Agenda
- Concerned Clergy for Choice
- Family Planning Advocates
- Planned Parenthood
- Advocates for Youth

**Increase In Basic Welfare Grant** in state budget. New York's basic Public Assistance (welfare) grant for needy families in New York has not been raised since 1990, and the housing and heating allowances date from the 1987-1988 fiscal year.

**Status:** Neither the Senate, the Assembly, nor the Governor proposed increasing the basic welfare grant.

**Coalition Partners:**

- Hunger Action Network
- Interfaith Impact
- League of Women Voters
- Labor Religion Coalition of New York State

**Comments:** The State proposed expanding eligibility for energy assistance (HEAP), which triggers additional food stamp eligibility, effective Oct. 1, 2008. Approximately 115,000 low income families, primarily those living in public and Section 8 housing, will benefit.

**Access to Higher Education for Public Assistance:** Would enable public assistance recipients to use bachelors or advanced degrees toward "work credits"

**Assembly:** A.11297 never came to the floor.

**Senate:** Never introduced

**Coalition Partner:**

- Hunger Action Network

**Access to Family Court** extends access to Family Court to victims of domestic violence who are not married and to same sex partners

**Assembly:** A.11707—passed

**Senate:** S. 8665—passed

**Coalition Partners:**

- Empire State Pride Agenda
- Fair Access Coalition

### **RJV Opposed**

**Death Penalty:** In 2005, RJV testified at Assembly hearings to institute a death penalty moratorium, which was signed into law. In 2005, RJV sent an action alert to its listserve asking Reform Jews to take action to oppose reinstatement of the death penalty.

A number of senators recently took polls on their web sites on the death penalty, most respondents were opposed.

**Status:**

**Assembly:** Never introduced

**Senate:** S. 6414 "cop killer" bill passed in 2008;

S 4632-general death penalty bill-- no action

**Coalition Partners:**

- New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty
- Interfaith Impact
- National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

**Tax Credits For Private Schools:** Governor Spitzer in his Executive Budget for 2007-2008 proposed to provide tuition tax deductions to parents of children who attend private school, whether religious or secular. It was not passed but a child tax credit for children between 4 and 17 years old was passed. There were no similar provisions in the 2008-2009 budget.

**Coalition Partners:**

- NYSUT (New York State United Teachers)
- Interfaith Impact

**Comment:** RJV actively opposed the tuition tax deduction for private and parochial schools.

**Rockefeller Drug Laws:** In December 2004, the Legislature passed limited reforms of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, These Laws still mandate extremely harsh mandatory minimum prison terms for the possession or sale of relatively small amounts of drugs and strip judges of their discretion.

**Coalition Partners:**

- Drug Policy Alliance
- Real Reform New York Coalition
- Interfaith Impact

**Comments:** RJV monitored the issue.