

#### **IV. CIVIL RIGHTS/CIVIL LIBERTIES/COMMUNITY SAFTY (Issues pertaining to crime, punishment, civil rights, discrimination, and community safety.)**

##### **A. Death Penalty**

**WHEREAS**, the death penalty has been abolished in most of the world's nations as cruel and barbaric; and

**WHEREAS**, proponents of the death penalty claim it is a deterrent to crime, no evidence supports their assertions; and

**WHEREAS**, application of the death penalty is arbitrary, ineffective, discriminatory toward the poor and people of color, and is a violation of basic human rights; and

**WHEREAS**, the world's ethical and moral leaders, and groups like Amnesty International, the Catholic Bishops, ACLU and NAACP all strenuously oppose the death penalty; and

**WHEREAS**, between 1976 and 2004, the U.S. has executed 916 persons and has had 3,494 people on death rows; and

**WHEREAS**, many of the condemned have been proved innocent.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers opposes the death penalty under all circumstances; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers joins the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty in active opposition to state-sanctioned killing.

##### **B. Availability of Guns**

**WHEREAS**, a high proportion of emergency room cases involve victims of gun violence, many of the social and economic costs of which are passed on to all of us; and

**WHEREAS**, research has shown that most shootings in homes are the result of a gun and ammunition kept there by a family member; and

**WHEREAS**, a gun and ammunition in the home does not protect the family, but has the exact opposite result; and

**WHEREAS**, we witness a steady stream of innocent victims of gun violence, including children; and

**WHEREAS**, the only purpose of owning an assault weapon is to kill another human being; and

**WHEREAS**, a large segment of the population (including children) are accidentally shot by their own guns and by home invaders who use the homeowner's guns against them; and

**WHEREAS**, the availability of firearms is a factor in the prevalence of violent crime.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers support reinstatement of the Assault Weapons Ban and urges that it be made permanent; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panther supports legislation at the state and local levels reasonably to limit the availability and trafficking in guns by unscrupulous gun dealers and manufacturers; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers support legislation at the federal, state and local level that requires all purchasers of guns be subject to mandatory training in safe storage, including the mandatory use of trigger locks, and handling of guns and provide penalties for violations of these laws.

### **C. Police Accountability**

**WHEREAS**, racial profiling, improper searches, false arrest, harassment, and excessive force – even torture – by police are growing problems across the nation; and

**WHEREAS**, American taxpayers are paying hundreds of millions of dollars to settle civil lawsuits and to hire special prosecutors to address these problems; and

**WHEREAS**, when abusive police officers remain on the streets, the police force as a whole loses the trust, respect, and cooperation of the community – and with it, a large measure of its effectiveness; and

**WHEREAS**, an effective justice system must be open, responsible, and fair, and those who work within it must be held accountable for their conduct.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers support measures to control police misconduct, brutality, and torture, including:

- **Documentation of police encounters with civilians**, including pedestrian and traffic stops.
- **Analysis of the data collected, and creation of an “early warning system”** to identify and counsel officers acting outside established benchmarks.
- **Videotaping** of police interrogations.

- **A system providing fair and thorough investigations** of civilian complaints and an effective and efficient disciplinary process.
- **Long-term archiving of complaints** – including anonymous complaints – against individual officers.
- **Public reporting of information**, including civilian complaints and the actions that followed.

## **D. Political Prisoners**

**WHEREAS**, nations worldwide, including the U.S. have political prisoners; and

**WHEREAS**, the U.S., in recognition of individual freedom and dignity, has traditionally condemned the practice of imprisonment of persons on the basis of their political views or religious background; and

**WHEREAS**, in the wake of the 9-11 Disaster, the U.S. has arrested and detained many individuals who, in the eyes of the world, are political prisoners; and

**WHEREAS**, U.S. government leaders and agencies have been slow to differentiate among such prisoners and to identify those who have committed crimes, as opposed to those who have been detained for reasons.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers urges the President and Congress to resolve quickly the status of persons detained in the aftermath of the 9-11 disaster affording them protections of the law embodied in the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Human Rights; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports the work of Amnesty International, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent and other humanitarian organizations who monitor the status of foreign and domestic political prisoners worldwide, and who work for their proper treatment; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports those foreign and domestic political prisoners and their advocates who seek justice and freedom for themselves and for others, without resort to violence.

## **E. Marriage Equity**

**WHEREAS**, Gray Panthers "fight everywhere the injustices of ageism, sexism and racism, and promote peace, and social and economic justice;" and

**WHEREAS**, equal rights for gays and lesbians is a civil right; and

**WHEREAS**, decisions about whether and whom to marry are highly personal and private; and

**WHEREAS**, governmental authorities have an objective interest in those relations only to the extent that their contractual content concerns such civil issues as Property ownership; powers of attorney; survivors' economic rights; the terms and procedures for dissolving marriages; and ensuring the well-being of children of the marriage, should it be dissolved; and

**WHEREAS**, State laws regarding the licensing of marriages and civil unions create by contract what are essentially two-person legal entities, which are universally valid and recognized within the United States, without any reference to religious approval or disapproval; and

**WHEREAS**, issues beyond the sorts of civil issues noted above fall within the realm of moral and religious codes which are not regulated by the government; and

**WHEREAS**, religious marriage ceremonies have no civil effect without licensing according to the laws of each State; and

**WHEREAS**, couples who are legally old enough to marry can make their own decisions regarding with regard to their domestic arrangements.

**BE IT RESOLVED** that Gray Panthers oppose amendments to the Constitution and / or statutes which attempt to enforce the restrictions of any religion regarding marriage on any person; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Gray Panthers supports the rights of people who are gay and lesbian to enter into the same legal and personal relationships, including marriage, having all the rights and privileges that accrue to people who are in heterosexual committed relationships, and that we will fight efforts that discriminate against gay couples and that attempt to limit their civil and human rights

## **F. CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 2008**

**WHEREAS**, Congress has enacted bipartisan laws to ensure that Americans have real remedies when their civil rights are violated and to ensure that federal tax dollars are not used to subsidize discrimination; and

**WHEREAS**, recent court decisions have weakened these basic protections in ways that Congress never intended; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 2008 (S. 2554) was introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy (co-sponsored by Senators Boxer, Clinton, Durbin, Harkin, Lautenberg, Schumer, Brown, Cardin, Kerry, Mikulski, Obama and others) and Representative John Lewis (HR 5129) to help strengthen accountability when civil rights and workers' rights are violated; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 2008 will allow individuals to seek relief when federal funds subsidize practices that have a discriminatory effect; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 2008 will require state employers to provide full relief for age discrimination, including back pay; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 2008 will protect students from harassment in schools that receive federal funds; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civil Rights Act of 2008 will prohibit employers from requiring workers to give up the right to enforce employment laws in court in order to get a job or keep a job; provide effective remedies for victims of discrimination based on gender and religion paralleling those available for race and national origin; and provide relief for workers, regardless of immigration status, who are victims of labor and employment law violations.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the Gray Panthers calls for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 2008; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers calls upon local Networks to urge members of Congress representing their communities to co-sponsor and vote on behalf of the Civil Rights Act of 2008.

## **G. Solidarity with Immigrants**

**WHEREAS**, the politics of fear, racism, class warfare and divisiveness have fastened on issues relating to immigration; and

**WHEREAS**, racist rhetoric has led to physical attacks on immigrants, and inflammatory accusations that they are the cause of unemployment, overburdened social programs and violence and such rhetoric results in calls for more border security, rounding up and deportation of immigrants, denial of citizenship to their U.S. born children, and withholding of public protections and services; and

**WHEREAS**, demagoguery on immigration issues has swept away both valid security concerns and humanitarian concerns and fear-stoked public policies have split neighborhoods and families, imposed impossible documentation burdens for Medicaid (which also affect non-immigrant poor U.S. citizens) resulting in denial of health care; and

**WHEREAS**, while demagogues attack immigrants, business interests benefit from and seek expansion of a large supply of very low-wage immigrant labor, especially in a temporary or “guest worker” status and immigrant laborers regardless of their legal status, are vulnerable and unable to form unions or otherwise resist exploitation.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers opposes these developments and that Gray Panthers resist legislative proposals which are not consistent with human rights as expressed in the United States founding documents and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that in solidarity with immigrants, Gray Panthers affirms the rights of all persons, whether native-born or immigrant to the protections afforded by the Constitution, including rights to due process of law and rights of equal access to public services and resources; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers will not yield silently to the politics of fear, racism, class warfare and divisiveness; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers supports the redirection of the Nation's resources toward the building of a healthy society for all members wherever they are from and wherever they are; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers calls upon the Federal Government to implement humanitarian immigration policies which admit refugees from war, natural disasters and persecution, and which provide for the reunion of family members; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers further calls upon the Federal Government to implement even-handed border crossing policies, so that visitors from all countries are all treated equally; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers calls upon government at all levels—Federal, State and Local—to legislate and implement public policies which are blind as to ethnicity, race, creed, national origin, gender, and sexual identification; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that, in order to implement these policies, Gray Panthers demands legislated amnesty for immigrants, immediate halt to ICE raids, and release of all who are incarcerated for immigration reasons; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers opposes immigration policies, such as “guest worker” programs, which create new categories of immigrant workers who are more vulnerable to economic exploitation; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, Gray Panthers calls for training and public education to ease assimilation of immigrants and to promote inter-cultural understanding.

## **H. Statehood and Full Federal Representation for the District of Columbia**

**WHEREAS**, over a half million Americans reside in the District of Columbia; and

**WHEREAS**, there are no provisions for direct federal representation of these citizens.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Gray Panthers continue to support full Statehood for the citizens of Washington, D.C. in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 21:

- Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
- The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections that shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

## **I. Repeal the Patriot Act**

**WHEREAS**, under the guise of fighting terrorism, the Patriot Act and associated measures have weakened and/or abrogated the:

- First Amendment rights of free speech and peaceable assembly
- Fourth Amendment prohibition against unreasonable search and seizure without probable cause
- Fifth Amendment nullifying due process and allowing indefinite incarceration without a trial
- Sixth Amendment, the right to prompt and public trial
- Eighth Amendment, protecting against cruel and unusual punishment by allowing and conducting widespread wiretaps, secret searches, internet surveillance, FBI access to personal data, CIA domestic surveillance, torture, and Justice Department arbitrary designation of domestic organizations as terrorist groups, thereby undercutting the civil liberties guaranteed to the people of the United States of America by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights

**BE IT RESOLVED**, The Gray Panthers urge the Congress to repeal the Patriot Act and all associated measures which institute domestic terrorism in the name of fighting international terrorism.

## **J. Hate and Discrimination - Free Country**

**WHEREAS**, the goals of full political, social and economic acceptance of all Americans, regardless of ethnicity, social class, religious commitment, age and sexual identity have yet to be met; and

**WHEREAS**, Gray Panthers continues to support an inclusive, egalitarian society and to oppose all forms of discrimination in public life and public policy; and

**WHEREAS**, a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society depend on achievement of these goals; and

**WHEREAS**, strong and active radical elements in our society work actively against those goals, using the public airwaves, the print media, and the Internet to amplify and gain acceptance for their messages of scorn, ridicule and hatred; and

**WHEREAS**, continuous effort is needed both to consolidate and maintain the progress that has been made toward acceptance of the gifts of diversity among us and to oppose radical efforts to erode civility in public life, and to marginalize the weakest among us.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers urges its members to take active roles supporting, educating, and advocating for inclusiveness in public life; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers redouble efforts to reflect inclusiveness in its membership, actively inviting persons of all ages, religions, ethnic backgrounds, sexual identities, and social classes to participate in Gray Panthers activities and to join this organization; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers support actions, political, economic, and social that strive for equality and protection of the rights of all persons; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that Gray Panthers identify corporate entities and their products associated with the radical, discriminatory propaganda effort, and make known to those sponsors by appropriate means, our opposition individually and as a group, to their message.

## **L. Challenging Ageism**

**WHEREAS**, one of Gray Panthers founding purposes is to organize people of all ages to fight injustices of ageism, sexism, and racism; and

**WHEREAS**, Robert N. Butler, M.D., coined the term ageism to mean a “deep and profound prejudice against the elderly”. Ageism, which permeates our society, can more broadly mean discrimination and negative age-related stereotyping of people of all ages; and

**WHEREAS**, ageist thinking, practices and systems create barriers among people of different ages; it denies opportunities for all people to realize their full potential, with an especially harsh impact on older adults; and

**WHEREAS**, the problem of age discrimination is growing and is expected to become greater as the baby boom generation ages. The number of claims filed under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act rose 21 percent (from 15.8 million to 19.1 million claims) between 1997 to 2007; and

**WHEREAS**, the Gray Panthers was founded on the belief that intergenerational connections bring people together across age groups to foster understanding of each other and to provide varying perspectives that strengthen social justice work; and

**WHEREAS**, ageist attitudes and practices in our society are sustained by myths about growing older and reinforced by negative age stereotypes in news media.

**BE IT RESOLVED**, Gray Panthers vow to challenge ageism in our society by educating society about the myths of aging and by promoting intergenerational leadership and programming within Gray Panthers networks; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, as a fundamental part of our work, Gray Panthers will take action to counter ageism.