

BETH EL POLICY PROCESS

Approved by the Beth El Board

February, 2017

From time to time, Beth El Synagogue may take a policy position on an issue or event of importance to the congregation and local community. Examples of what it means to “take a position” may include adopting a resolution, issuing a statement (to the congregation or to the public via the press), co-signing or authoring a public letter or op-ed, or contacting a governmental official. We also may choose to encourage congregants to themselves take a position by contacting a government official or attending an event. The following policy outlines the process that Beth El will follow to take such steps and the principles we will consider in making a decision. Of note, this applies to any such public position in the name of “Beth El Synagogue,” including by a Beth El committee, member or employee. Beth El also co-sponsors events of importance to congregants in order to disseminate information and ideas without endorsing the views of the speakers. The decision to co-sponsor events is made by the Board in response to a request by 10 members.

Principles and values guiding instances where Beth El takes a policy position

Jewish law and values: Is the issue one where Jewish law, text and values provide guidance for our position? Are there multiple perspectives in Jewish law and have we taken those under consideration? What is the historical and contemporary context? In line with our tradition of text and study, we will also prioritize deepening our understanding of issues when we take a position and documenting any instances where Beth El does take a position. Examples of substantive considerations may include (though are not limited to): Is Judaism or the Jewish community (or a segment of it) threatened? Are the human or civil rights of some other religious or vulnerable group threatened and what additional considerations should be accounted for (the rule of law, security, etc)? Is there a sufficiently clear ethical or moral understanding and agreement on its application? How serious is the threat?

Impact: In deciding whether Beth El will take a position we will weigh its significance to our local community, whether we believe taking a position will have an impact on the outcome, and the importance of a collective Jewish voice on the issue. For example, we are more likely to take a position when we think an issue impacts or harms the members of our congregation or our neighbors locally, and we are more likely to encourage congregants to contact national Jewish organizations if the issue fits their purview. We are also more likely to make a statement where we believe the voice of our synagogue could impact the issue or that silence could be construed as consent. Similarly, we will also weigh the impact of any risks—i.e. what resources will the action require of staff and volunteers, could taking the position expose the synagogue to any

harms (i.e. loss of members, loss of community support, etc.), etc. On the other hand, if the issue is of particularly significant concern or a Jewish response would have a unique impact, we may choose to take a position.

Transparency: We take the responsibility of stating a public position seriously and understand that it will be viewed as speaking on behalf of and to the whole congregation. For this reason, we will make it a high priority to notify the congregation before we take a position unless a matter is absolutely urgent, and will provide congregants an opportunity to weigh in before a decision is made. Opportunities will typically be offered via email or in writing. Board meetings are always open to the congregation as well.

Congregational opinion and diversity of views: We are cognizant, respectful, and protective of the diversity of the synagogue's membership and the range of views held by its congregants. For this reason, we will seek to determine where the consensus is among members on a given issue and have a strong preference for speaking when there is significant concurrence in the congregation on an issue. However, consensus is not the same as unanimity, and we acknowledge that there are likely to be individuals who disagree with a stated position. In such cases, we will seek to understand minority views prior to adopting a position, will offer an opportunity to document the minority perspective, and respect those congregants who hold differing views.

Process for requests and decisions on Beth El policy positions

- The Rabbi, any Board member, a Board committee or 10 Beth El member units may request that the synagogue take a public policy or civic position by submitting a request to the Board President. Requests should include specific background on the issue, the action requested, information about any deadlines, and any information about other congregants' support or concerns about the proposal. If possible, such requests should also address the Jewish dimension of the issue in line with the principles above.
- If needed, the President will convene an ad hoc policy review sub-committee to prepare a memo that clearly describes the situation that gave rise to the question, what facts support the position (or go against it), what other Jewish or other religious groups are taking a position on the question, and, in conjunction with the Rabbi, what light do Jewish law, ethics, teachings or customs shed on the matter. Such subcommittee will also seek out minority opinions to share with the Board for consideration.
- The President will present the proposal to the Beth El Board. If one-half or more of voting members of the Board believe that the matter should be shared with the congregation for action, the congregation shall be a) notified of the proposal, b) informed of when the proposal will be

considered, and c) given at least 10 days to present comments or additional information to the Board relating to the proposal. The Board can also choose to hold a congregation-wide meeting, debate, or other appropriate forum. In addition, the Board may ask the requestor to submit more information, make changes to their proposal, and/or confirm that others support the proposal. Notice should be provided to the congregation in as broad a manner as is practical, including through e-mail and other means deemed appropriate.

- If input is collected from the congregation, the Board may vote at a subsequent board meeting on the request. Such vote should consider community input and the principles and values outlined above. A two-thirds majority of the Board may approve taking a policy position.
- A member of the Board or 5 member units of the Congregation may submit a minority position within 10 days from the approval of the policy position. Such dissent shall also reference Jewish sources. Subject to approval by the President, such position will be circulated internally (i.e. by email and posted on the website) and will be acknowledged (although not necessarily distributed) in any external distribution of the majority position.
- *In situations where it is urgent to move more quickly*, the President may present the proposal to the Executive Committee and within one week, shall decide to either move forward with the proposal or to take the proposal to the Board under an expedited process by email or at the next board meeting. Such actions should be rare and should only be used when it is clear that there is widespread congregational support and the other principles are met. One such example might be if Beth El wished to issue a public statement of support to a neighboring congregation that experienced a hate crime. Another might be if the synagogue wished to weigh in on a City Council decision that impacted Jewish students up for a vote on a deadline.
- Once an issue has been discussed and voted upon by the Board, the President and/or Executive Committee can use the precedent as guidance to requestors to administer similar or related requests.
- Nothing in this policy limits the rights of individual members of Beth El from engaging in any lawful political activities in their own name.
- Nothing in these guidelines shall restrict the Rabbi's freedom of the pulpit. The Rabbi shall retain the right to speak on any issue in his personal capacity.

Note: Beth El synagogue is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization under the IRS code, and for this reason may not explicitly or implicitly endorse or oppose a candidate or political party. This policy and process does not allow for such actions in violation of our tax-exempt status.