

MISSOURI RIGHT TO LIFE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

General Structure

Missouri Right to Life is composed of three organizations: the main nonprofit corporation called “Missouri Right to Life,” the MRL Political Action Committee (PAC), and an affiliated nonprofit corporation called “Missouri Right to Life Educational Fund.” The requirements of the Internal Revenue Code for nonprofit organizations and the requirements of federal election law drive the choice of this structure.

Regions and chapters are components of the main nonprofit corporation, Missouri Right to Life. They help it to carry out its work in every area of the state and, in turn, give it the strength of a statewide grassroots organization. The more effective that MRL is, the more the lives of the unborn and the vulnerable are benefited.

II. The main organization, Missouri Right to Life

A. State level:

The main nonprofit corporation is sometimes referred to as “the C4.” That slang name comes from the section of the Internal Revenue Code that governs it, section 501(c)(4). A nonprofit organization under sec. 501(c)(4) is allowed to lobby legislatures and to influence legislation, which is one of MRL’s primary functions. It is also allowed to sponsor a PAC, as MRL does. MRL’s income is not taxed, in contrast to the income of for-profit corporations. But contributions to 501(c)(4) organizations are not tax deductible for donors. In other words, those who contribute to MRL cannot take the donations as charitable deductions on their income tax returns. (Contributions to the Ed Fund are tax deductible, as described below.)

The state board of directors is the official, legal board of MRL. It establishes policies and elects officers. State law established its powers and duties and governs its operations. The board’s decisions are legally binding on the organization. The board also elects a director to serve on the board of the National Right to Life Committee as Missouri’s representative.

B. Region level:

Region boards do not make legally-binding decisions for the organization or any part of it. However, region boards and offices are key to the success of MRL. They facilitate the organization of activities appropriate for their areas of the state and encourage different local pro-life activities and learn from each other. Moreover, they assist in governance of the organization in two ways: they elect members of the state board of directors, while they are themselves composed largely of delegates elected by chapters. This in-between status allows grassroots folks to debate policy questions broader than their own localities, which in turn helps prepare their fellows who serve on the state board to grapple with these questions on the state level.

C. Chapters:

Chapters provide the engines for bringing the pro-life message to the attention of the citizens who need to be educated and activated on the life issues. There is nothing quite as effective in pro-life work as reaching out to people in the local area. Certainly all types of educational efforts have their place, but the personal contact most often found in local efforts has the greatest influence on people.

D. Members:

Although state law would permit MRL to function without “members” as such, as some other organizations do, federal election law requires that a nonprofit corporation have members if it is going to sponsor a PAC. To attain pro-life legislation, we must elect pro-life officials, so operating an effective PAC is an essential mission of MRL.

An official member of MRL is someone who has donated \$25.00 to MRL’s state organization in the past four years. Because of state nonprofit corporation law, membership in MRL is membership in the state organization, not in a region or chapter. The membership at large also directly elects one voting member of the state board of directors. In these ways, every member of MRL is the equal of every other member within the corporation.

III. The Political Action Committees:

The MRL Federal PAC is a “separate segregated fund” of MRL pursuant to federal election law. The MRL State PAC is a “continuing [political] committee” under Missouri election law. The ultimate control of the MRL PACs lies with the state board of directors, but both tax law and election law dictates the work and money of the MRL PACs must be maintained separately from the work and money of MRL. (One major exception: MRL may pay for administrative and clerical costs of the PACs.) **In turn, that means a chapter does not do PAC work and cannot sponsor political ads.** Members of MRL do PAC work, of course--it is strongly encouraged!--but when members perform PAC activities, they are PAC volunteers and are not working for the chapter or region.

The President of MRL selects the PAC chair. The nine Congressional District coordinators, who serve on the PAC board are selected by the nomination committee and approved by the state board of directors. The state board has delegated to the PAC board the functions of surveying candidates and making endorsements when appropriate.

The MRL Victory Fund is an "independent-expenditure only committee", and may not make contributions to candidate campaigns or parties, but may engage in unlimited political spending independently of the campaigns. The MRL Victory Fund works to elect pro-life leaders to the White House and Congress.

MRL offers a unified, statewide pro-life voice by acting through our statewide PACs. To safeguard that unified voice, and also to prevent violations of complex election laws by persons unfamiliar with them, no region or chapter may attempt to sponsor a PAC or perform other election activities. The separate PACs collect all political donations, organize all political rallies and events, compose all political flyers and advertisements, and make all endorsements.

IV. MRL Education Fund

The Ed Fund is sometimes called “the C 3.” Like the “C4,” this abbreviation refers to a section of the tax code, section 501(c)(3). The primary role of 501(c)(3) organizations is charity, including education. Donations to a 501(c)(3) organization are tax-deductible, so a powerful incentive is provided for larger gifts to be made by persons who can afford them. In return, the government requires (c)(3) groups to take no part in politics and to avoid spending more than an insubstantial amount of resources on legislative lobbying.

MRL’s Ed Fund is a separate nonprofit corporation that provides support to MRL for the strictly educational aspects of MRL’s activities, such as a pro rata portion of MRL’s newsletter. It also can provide funding for educational materials for fair booths and other purely educational activities.

MRL is established as the only “member” of the MRL Ed Fund. It is similar to the situation where one corporation owns a controlling interest in another. MRL elects the board of the Ed Fund and maintains ultimate control of its operations.