



VOTER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Donna Cashdollar • Peggy Eyer • Linda Gwinn • Barb Hauge • Joyce Rizzo • Aida Shotts • Kay Smith • Kay Snyder • Sandra Whitson

IMPORTANT DATES

MARCH 2021

March 8, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m.

- Legislative Interview – PA Representative Jim Struzzi
- Email: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com for Zoom invitation

March 15, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m.

- Meeting – LWVIC Board of Directors
- Email: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com for Zoom invitation

March 30, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m.

- Legislative Interview – PA Senator Joe Pittman
- Email: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com for Zoom invitation

APRIL 2021

April 19, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m.

- Meeting – LWVIC Board of Directors
- Email: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com for Zoom invitation

April 24, 2021

- Annual Yard Sale – Day 1 of preparations
 - * Set-up
 - * Collection of sale items

April 29, 2021

- Event – “People Powered Day of Action”

MAY 2021

May 1, 2021: 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

May 2, 2021: 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.

- Annual Yard Sale
 - * Wayne Avenue – across from KCAC

May 14, 2021 @ 5:00 p.m.

- LWVIC Annual Meeting
 - * Blue Spruce County Park – Pavilion #1

★ PRIMARY ELECTION DAY: MAY 18, 2021 ★

- ★ Polls open on election day from 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
- ★ Last day to register to vote: **May 3, 2021**
- ★ Last day to request mail-in or absentee ballot: **May 11, 2021**
- ★ Pennsylvania Website: www.VotesPa.com

FORMER LEAGUE PRESIDENT ADVOCATES FOR VOTING RIGHTS

Sherene Hess, Indiana County Commissioner, was interviewed by Pittsburgh Action News4 about the efforts of the Pennsylvania County Commissioners Association to advocate for election reform, notably the pre-canvassing of ballots and mail-in ballot deadlines.



Commissioner Hess is the Elections Reform Chair of the Pennsylvania County Commissioners Association. A portion of the televised interview is noted below. The full text of the interview can be found at: tinyurl.com/ryessxu9

In addition, a related article in *The Indiana Gazette* can be found at: tinyurl.com/3z6tc3zc

Pittsburgh Action News4 Interview:

County Commissioners of Pennsylvania Urge Lawmakers to Make changes to Ballot Counting Laws

Record voter turnout, new state election laws and a global pandemic created a unique environment for election officials in the 2020 general election.

Prior to the election, county leaders throughout the state warned about potential delays due to state law prohibiting officials from processing mail-in ballots until Election Day. Those inevitable delays led to statewide election results in days instead of hours, after 2.6 million mail-in ballots were cast.

[Interview continued on page 2.]

COMMUNICATIONS

- Email: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com
- Telephone: 724-465-2824
- Website: lwvindianacounty.org
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/PowertoCitizens/

PITTSBURGH ACTION NEWS4 INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is hoping state leaders will now take steps to make sure that doesn't happen again. In a letter sent to lawmakers late last week, the association urged the general assembly to change the state election law to allow for pre-canvassing of mail-in ballots, and to push back the deadline for mail-in ballot requests to 15 days before the election.

"The process was bent in a way, but it did not break," Indiana County Commissioner and CCAP Elections Reform Chair Sherene Hess said. "We have a process that has a lot of integrity, but there are things we can all do to make it better."

Commissioners are also asking for clarity from the state when it comes to a number of issues including voter signature, and drop boxes.

Hess said she believes the state was still able to execute a fair election across the board, but she welcomes the chance to improve the system to make it easier on election officials and the general public.

"What we all want in the end is for our communities to thrive, our system to thrive and our democracy to be strong and I think this is one way we can ensure that," Hess said.

Commissioner Hess was president of the League of Women Voters of Indiana County for fourteen years prior to her election as Indiana County Commissioner in 2016.

In 1920, the League of Women Voters of the United States was established and the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified. Voting rights were extended to all American citizens regardless of sex.

One hundred years after women were granted suffrage—the right to vote—League members continue to work to protect this right. The members of the League of Women Voters have continued to ensure that every vote is counted by fighting for and implementing voting systems that are free, fair, and accessible while advocating for positive change at the local, state, and national levels.



ANNOUNCEMENTS



NEW WEBSITE

The website redesign was led by Connor Tshudy of Voyage Media Works. Website content was provided by League members Vera Bonnet, Ellen Chinn, Cindy Rogers, Anne Simmons, and Susan Welsh.

ANNUAL YARD SALE: MAY 1 & 2, 2021

Our League's Annual Yard Sale will be housed in the former Woolworth Building – a large, indoor space located on Wayne Avenue across the street from the Kovalchick Convention and Athletic Complex and the Hilton Garden Inn. We are coordinating our sale with the Indiana County Humane Society.



Please send an email to Ellen Chinn (ellenchinn371@hotmail.com) to indicate your interest in helping with the yard sale. We are requesting an initial polling of our membership to help our committee with the planning of the event.

The 'set-up' of the yard sale will begin on Saturday, April 24, 2021 and will continue all week through Friday, April 30, 2021. We need volunteers to accept donations, organize items, and price items for sale. In addition, we need volunteers on the days of the sale, Saturday and Sunday, May 1 and May 2, 2021.

In your email to Ellen Chinn, please indicate how you plan to volunteer:

- ♦ Donate items to sell
- ♦ Loan tables for display of yard sale items
- ♦ Volunteer the week prior to the sale to accept donations, organize items, and price items
- ♦ Volunteer on the weekend to work at the yard sale



LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEWS

- **PENNSYLVANIA REPRESENTATIVE JIM STRUZZI**

- * Monday, March 8, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

- **PENNSYLVANIA SENATOR JOE PITTMAN**

- * Tuesday, March 30, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

All League members will receive an email Zoom invitation. Community members are welcome to participate and can request a Zoom invitation by sending an email to lwvindianacounty@gmail.com.

Questions for the Legislative Interviews are developed by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania (LWVPA) and the League of Women Voters of Indiana County (LWVIC). These questions focus on priority issues for the current legislative session. The LWVIC provides our legislators with the opportunity to prepare for their interviews by furnishing the questions prior to the scheduled interview dates.

The interviews are an important part of the League's work. The LWVIC shares what we learn through the interviews with the LWVPA. These Legislative Interviews afford us the opportunity to educate our legislators about issues and identify legislation we intend to support or oppose. In addition, the interviews assist us in building and maintaining relationships with our local legislators.

Please send an email to Aida Shotts (abshotts@gmail.com) to volunteer to lead a section. The questions for each section and the research/background information for each topic have been provided to us by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania.

- SECTION 1:** Act 77
- SECTION 2:** Redistricting Reform
- SECTION 3:** Judicial Districts
- SECTION 4:** Legislative Rules
- SECTION 5:** Open Primaries
- SECTION 6:** National Popular Vote Compact
- SECTION 7:** Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
- SECTION 8:** Legislative Priorities for 2021
- SECTION 9:** Public School Funding



COMMITTEES

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

CONSERVATION DISTRICT RECEIVED POLYLUMBER BENCH

Vera Bonnet, Chair, Environmental Issues Committee

A polylumber bench was installed at the new offices of the Indiana County Conservation District at 435 Hamill Road on Monday, February 22, 2021. Cindy Rogers, Vice President of the League of Women Voters of Indiana County, Doug Beri, District Manager of the Indiana County Conservation District, and Vera Bonnet, Chair of the Environmental Issues Committee posed for a photograph in front of the bench [see page 5].

The Environmental Issues Committee earned the bench by collecting over 500 pounds of plastic film from locations around Indiana Borough and White Township. The bench challenge is offered by Trex, a company that re-uses recycled plastic film to make a variety of useful objects.

Aside from diverting the plastic film away from disposal in a landfill, the project is intended to raise awareness in the community and reduce the use of plastic. Our League's Environmental Issues Committee has focused on plastics issues since 2018 when it produced an illustrated booklet entitled "All About Plastic." In addition to providing a guide to disposal and/or reuse of plastic material, the 12-page illustrated booklet includes a brief history of plastic development, a description of the production process, and its uses in various industries.

The Environmental Issues Committee will continue collecting plastic for our next challenge. Collection bins are located at the YMCA of Indiana County on Ben Franklin Road and at the White Township Recreation Complex at the S&T Arena (inside the entrance) on East Pike Road. As a reminder, the following plastics are acceptable: store bags, bubble wrap, bread bags, newspaper bags, and dry cleaning bags, among others.

For questions about the types of plastics suitable for the Community Challenge, or to receive a free copy of "All About Plastic," contact the League of Women Voters of Indiana County at lwvindianacounty@gmail.com. Additional information can also be found on the League's website (lwvindianacounty.org).



CHILD ADVOCACY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

CHARTER SCHOOL LAW REFORMS MUST MOVE FORWARD

Susan Welsh, Chair, Child Advocacy Committee on Education

Governor Wolf's recent proposals for charter school reform have been called both "visionary" and "tone-deaf." They are neither. They sensibly revise the outdated Charter School Law of 1997 to create fairer funding and oversight. PA's charter schools and our traditional district schools ARE ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS funded by taxpayer dollars. Three money-saving proposals will be a step toward fairer funding and oversight.

First, use the same tuition formula for special education students in public charter schools as in our traditional public schools. Traditional schools receive funding based on the actual cost of special education services (low, middle, or high). In the charters, a one-size-fits-all formula pays the same rate for each special education student. The charters admit more of the lower-cost special education students and are over-paid for each one. Students with costlier complex needs are served in the traditional schools: 41% of charters enroll no students in the middle and higher cost ranges. This reform would save \$99 million/yr.

[Continued on page 6.]

Second, create a statewide cyber charter tuition amount that is closer to the cost of a full-time education online in a traditional school. That cost, on average, is \$5,000. Wolf's proposed cyber tuition of \$9,500 is generous and allows for overhead expenses. The savings: \$130 million/year.

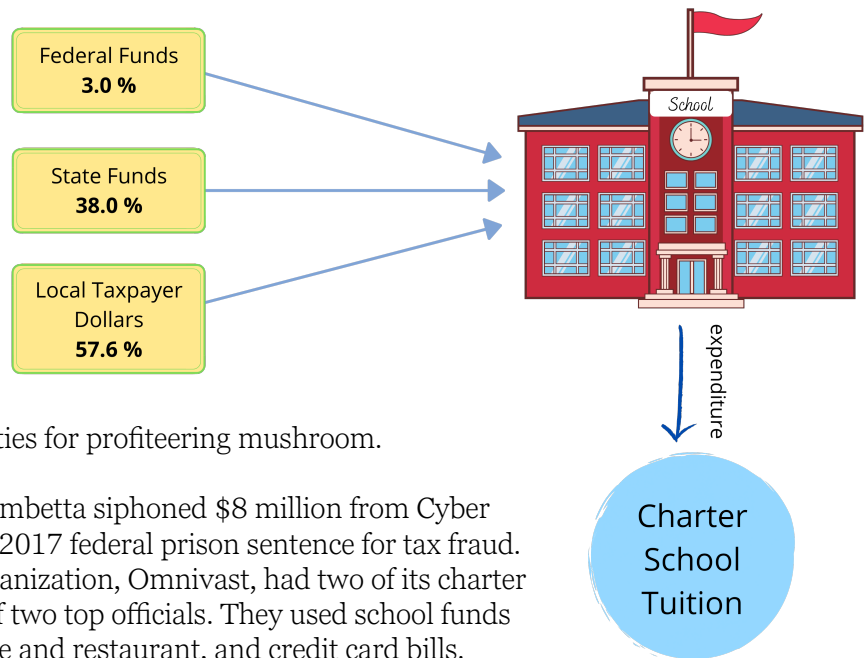
Third, require open-to-the-public audits of charters. Traditional schools must present their budgets to elected school boards at meetings open to taxpayers and parents. Charter public schools do not. Traditional public schools are audited by the state every three years. The charters are not. Opportunities for profiteering mushroom.

Pennsylvania Cyber Charter's CEO Nick Trombetta siphoned \$8 million from Cyber Charter, landing a condo, an airplane, and a 2017 federal prison sentence for tax fraud. In 2016, another for-profit management organization, Omnivast, had two of its charter schools closed after a 27-count indictment of two top officials. They used school funds to pay for a private school, a health food store and restaurant, and credit card bills.

After years of legislative inaction, 68% of PA school boards have signed a formal resolution calling for reforms. Fair funding and fair oversight are what taxpaying education advocates support.

NOTE: This letter was submitted to the Letter to the Editor, *The Indiana Gazette*

Public School Funding in Pennsylvania



CITIZEN EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE

The Citizen Education Subcommittee was formed in January 2021 and is working to increase public awareness of voting, civics, and government with the aim of empowering citizens to participate in the democratic process.

The subcommittee members have discussed how to improve and expand our current programs (e.g., voter registration, legislative interviews, candidate's forums) as well as developing new programs (e.g., age-appropriate educational materials for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5, voter registration events for high school seniors, community speaker series).

Committee members are divided into teams focusing on the following four audiences: 1) Elementary school students, 2) Secondary school students, 3) Community members, and 4) Elected officials. If you would like to join a team, please contact the team leader by email (Elementary: Misty Nocco – mistynocco@yahoo.com, Secondary: Anne Simmons – annesimmons447@gmail.com, Community/Elected Officials: Joyce Rizzo – rizzojoyce6@gmail.com).

Numerous conversations focused on how to increase the participation of high school students in the voting process. Students who participate in the voting process while in high school or as young adults often become 'super voters.' A super voter is someone who votes in every election once they become eligible to vote including in primary and general elections, presidential elections every four years, and congressional races that follow two years later. In addition, super voters vote in local, state, and national elections.

A recommendation of subcommittee members is to provide “computer apps” on the voting process to school students. The search for and evaluation of computer applications was led by River Hone, a high school student. The computer applications listed below increase understanding of civics and political issues as well as encourage civic engagement and community involvement.

COMPUTER APPLICATIONS

River Hone, Member, Citizen Education Subcommittee

www.icivics.org

“WIN THE WHITE HOUSE” BY ICIVICS

- ♦ Offers overall fun game that is easy to use
- ♦ Allows you to pick your own character, slogan, and party
- ♦ Teaches users about running for office
- ♦ Uses both ‘Clever’ and ‘Google Classroom’
 - ➔ Available and approved curriculum for any schools using those platforms
- ♦ Helps explain the belief systems held by each party
- ♦ Founded by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor in 2009

commonally.com

COMMONALLY

- ♦ Provides accurate political information
- ♦ Opportunity to take survey polls
- ♦ Provides voter registration information
- ♦ Opportunity for user to select five topics of importance
 - ➔ Updates you on those five topics

CivicRush.com

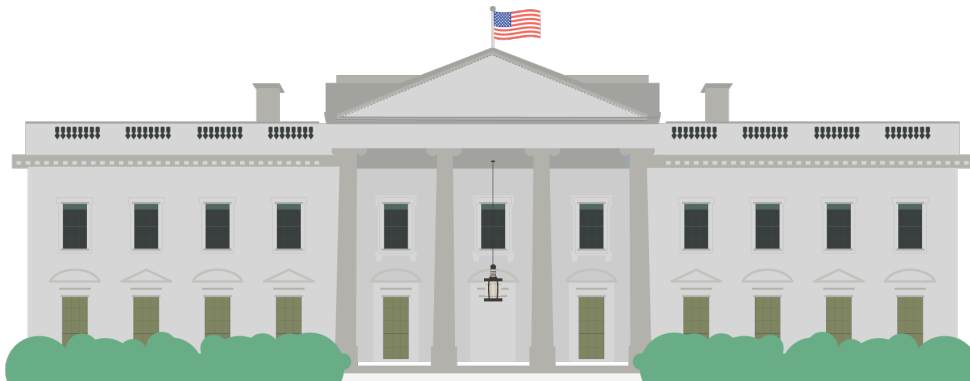
CIVICRUSH

- ♦ Provides accurate political information
- ♦ Includes both local and national information
- ♦ Shares volunteer opportunities
- ♦ Lists events in your area
- ♦ Displays community announcements
- ♦ Prompts links and/or articles about other political topics that may interest you

CivvyApp.com

CIVVY

- ♦ Creates complete profile about beliefs and demographic information
- ♦ Tracks information such as education, income, and religion
- ♦ Matches users with current politicians who share beliefs
- ♦ Showcases news that is both aligned and unaligned with your personal views
- ♦ Offers a variety of surveys to complete



FAIR DISTRICTS PENNSYLVANIA

“DRAW THE LINES” PETITION – PLEASE ADD YOUR SIGNATURE

Joyce Rizzo, Board Director

Information-gathering from the 2020 Census has been completed and the results will be used later this year and at the beginning of 2022 to draw Pennsylvania’s legislative voting districts for the next decade. The Legislative Redistricting Commission (LRC) is the government body that will perform this task. Politicians hold four of the five spots on the LRC. That last person, the chair, needs to be an independent voice – chosen in a fair, open process. In the past, redistricting has been done with almost no public input in dark, back rooms. It is time to bring it into the light. Please sign the petition <https://drawthelinespa.org/petition> to ensure that PA citizens have a voice in this effort.

LWVIC ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Indiana County will be held this year on Friday, May 14, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. at Blue Spruce Park. We reserved Pavilion #1 with a capacity of 250 people. Decisions about a picnic-style event will be made closer to May 14, 2021. At this time, we plan to host a presentation focusing on “Citizen Education” as well as vote for the adoption of several agenda items requiring a quorum. The tentative agenda for the LWVIC Annual Meeting is noted below.



AGENDA:

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Secretary’s Report**
- III. Treasurer’s Report**
- IV. Program for 2021-2022**
- V. Nominations and Elections**
- VI. Presentation: Citizen Education**

PAYMENT OPTION ADDED TO WEBSITE

League members now have the option to use PayPal for the payment of dues, provide the gift of membership to a friend or family member, and to donate to the League of Women Voters of Indiana County. Additional information can be found under the “Membership Dues and Donations” drop-down menu of our website (lwvindianacounty.org).



COVID-19 AND COMMUNITY IMMUNITY

League member Alison Simmons created an Indiana County COVID-19 dashboard to provide a readily available and easily understood source of data for the residents of Indiana County. The graphs on the COVID-19 dashboard allow for the observation of daily changes as well as weekly trends.

More recently, Alison added information on “Vaccination” to enable Indiana County residents to follow how we are moving toward ‘community immunity’ or ‘herd immunity’. The link to the Indiana County COVID-19 Dashboard is <https://public.tableau.com/profile/alisonesimmons/>.



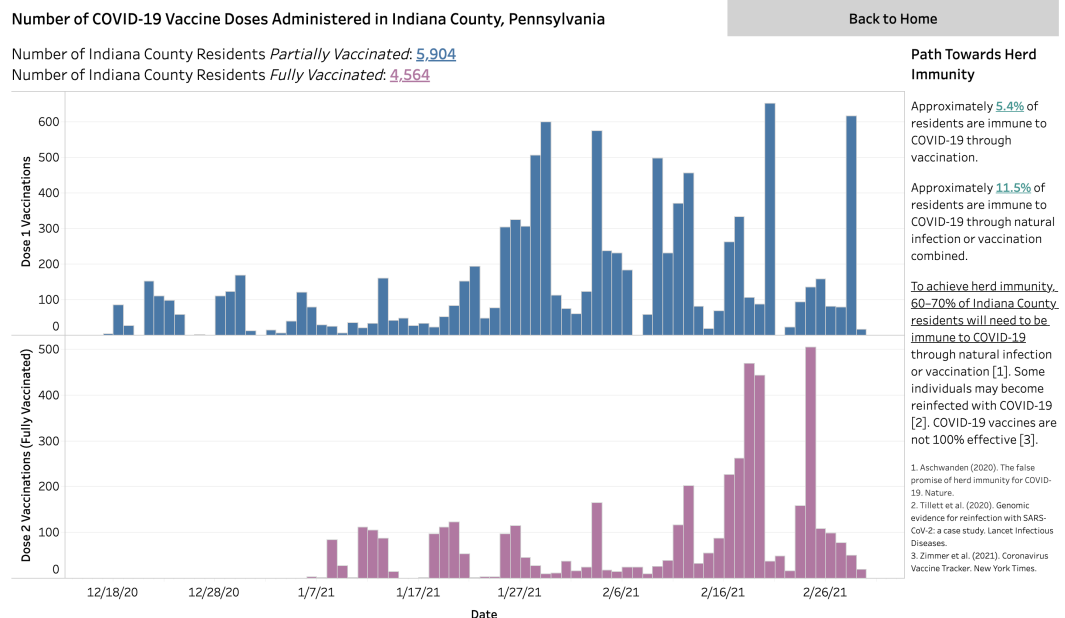
THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING VACCINATED

We all need to get vaccinated to protect ourselves, our families, friends, and community. Vaccines train our immune systems to fight the virus. Community immunity or herd immunity occurs when a large portion of a community (the herd) becomes immune to the disease. The spread of the disease from person to person is unlikely because the virus has trouble finding susceptible people to infect. As a result, the whole community is protected – not just those who are immune.

Until Indiana County reaches ‘community immunity’ or ‘herd immunity’ all of us need to continue to wear a mask as well as stay at least six feet from others who do not live in our home, avoid crowds, wash our hands often, cover coughs and sneezes, and clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

Let us continue to work together to decrease the spread of the virus from person to person.

A screenshot of one of Alison’s COVID-19 dashboard pages showing the daily number of COVID-19 vaccines administered in Indiana County until March 2, 2021.



VOTER SUPPRESSION AND 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS

Anne Simmons, President

The League of Women Voters has strived over the past 100 years to educate voters and increase voter participation. The mission of the League of Women Voters is to encourage informed and active participation in government, work to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influence public policy through education and advocacy.



According to the Brennan Center for Justice, the proposed bills to restrict voting access in 43 of 50 states is viewed as a backlash to the historic voter turnout in the 2020 November General Election.

Voter suppression is a strategy used to influence the outcome of an election by discouraging or preventing specific groups of people from voting.



Please read about the efforts of our legislators to restrict or complicate access to voting. In brief, the legislative proposals focus on the following:

- 1) Limit mail-in voting access;
- 2) Impose stricter voter ID requirements;
- 3) Reduce voter registration opportunities; and
- 4) Enable more aggressive voter roll purges.

RESOURCE: “Voting Laws Roundup 2021 Report”; Brennan Center for Justice ([BrennanCenter.org](https://www.brennancenter.org))

BEHIND THE SCENES

League members working “behind the scenes” to produce the LWVIC newsletter include Shannon Fiedler who is responsible for formatting and page layout, and Vera Bonnet, River Hone, Joyce Rizzo, Anne Simmons for writing articles, and Susan Welsh for proofreading the content of the final copy.

