

THE COMMUNICATOR

President's Message

By Terrie E. Griffin, D. Min., M.Div., M.H.S. President, LWVPA Board of Directors



Dear League Members,

Did you know that Juneteenth, (the name is a combination of “June” and “nineteenth”) is also known as Juneteenth Independence Day, Freedom Day, Jubilee Day, Liberation Day, and Emancipation Day? It’s considered the oldest nationally known holiday celebrating the emancipation of those who had been enslaved in the United States.

On June 19, 1865, Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, rode into Galveston, Texas to announce the news that the Civil War had ended and slaves were now free. This announcement came two-and-a-half years after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. Juneteenth was the Emancipation of remaining enslaved African Americans in the Confederacy. Fast forward to the 1950s and 1960s. It was because of the efforts of the civil rights movement to revive the significance of Juneteenth that forty-five states now recognize it as a state holiday or special day of observance. Today there are efforts underway to make June 19th a federal holiday.

History is important. The League just celebrated 101 years of accomplishments, challenges and actions.

These efforts led to our collective voices crafting our motto, “defending democracy and empowering voters.” Now, there are intentional efforts to dismantle our democratic principles and silence the voices whose color and culture are different. We, the League, must remain vigilant and stand against the individuals and systems that seek to keep our work for and with others silent. In the words of the now deceased Representative John Lewis, “Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America.” These words were spoken on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 1, 2020 commemorating the tragic events of “Bloody Sunday.” Bloody Sunday occurred on March 7, 1965 as peaceful protesters were beaten by law enforcement officers. The marchers were protesting racism and police brutality.

Change doesn’t happen overnight. While the League is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), there remains some who are engaged in both overt and covert racist behavior that negates our efforts towards inclusivity and equity for all. As we begin a new year in the life of the League, let’s start by being open and willing to evaluate or assess ourselves. Self-assessment isn’t a bad thing. It enables us to stare truth in the eyes, be willing to modify offensive behavior, then go the extra mile to engage in transformative critical conversations with others. This includes our League members and community partners. Accepting truth, moving to a place of forgiveness (where necessary), and being open to reconciliation, will ultimately lead to healing. DEI is both individual and collective work. We can do it. Let’s embrace ourselves and celebrate our becoming!

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Update from Executive Director: LWVPA Virtual Convention and Building Sale By Meg Pierce

It has been an exceptionally busy time for the State League! We eagerly anticipate our [Virtual Convention](#) on June 18 and June 19. All members are invited to attend this engaging and important event. Local League Presidents who have not yet submitted the names of their Convention delegates should do so by Friday, June 4. View the full Convention schedule and register [here](#).

All members and League supporters are also invited to attend a [virtual fundraiser cocktail party](#) to kick off Convention on Thursday, June 17. Come meet the LWVPA Board and Executive Director while enjoying your favorite beverage in a League-branded glass! We hope to see you there.

Finally, as of June 1, LWVPA will no longer operate from our office at 226 Forster Street in Harrisburg. Through the generosity of League supporters, LWVPA bought our building in 1991. At the time, the League had many staff members. Since 1991, our operations have downsized considerably. Furthermore, with three floors and no elevator, the office was not an accessible space. There was also not enough space for gatherings of more than a few people. Given these circumstances, the Board made the decision to save significant revenue by not maintaining the space for only two staff members.

League staff will work remotely, which we have done successfully throughout the pandemic, until a decision regarding a potential new location is made. Although we bid our building farewell, the League will remain a Harrisburg-based organization. Please note our new address below for any mailings. Our phone number remains the same.

1425 Crooked Hill Road
PO Box 60890
Harrisburg, PA 17106
(717) 234-1576



While change is always difficult, we know that this was the best financial and operational decision for our organization at this juncture. Local Leagues should know that the level of support and communication from the State League they receive will not be impacted by this change. In fact, it will make LWVPA more functional as we shift to streamlined virtual systems.

I look forward to seeing you all at the Convention!



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Advocacy Updates

By Carol Kuniholm, LWVPA VP of Government and Social Policy

One Last Push for Redistricting Reform

LWVPA has been pushing for redistricting reform legislation since the mid 1980s but no bill, yet, has ever gone to a final vote. We have just a short window of time for continued advocacy on LACRA, the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act.

With Fair Districts PA volunteers, local Leagues have now helped carry out 200 constituent advocacy visits since the start of March. Those visits have yielded 83 cosponsors for House Bill 22 and 25 for Senate Bill 222. Despite that clear support, legislative leaders have not committed to giving the bills a vote.

You can help. Make some calls. Identify yourself as a member of the League of Women Voters, express disappointment that in almost fifty years of advocacy, no redistricting reform bill has been given a final vote, and insist that LACRA (HB22/SB222) be given a vote. If needed, details about LACRA are available [here](#).

- Senate State Government Committee Chair David Argall: 717-787-2637
- Senate Majority Leader Kim Ward: 717-787-6063
- Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman: 717-787-1377
- House State Government Committee Chair Seth Grove: 717-783-2655
- House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff: 717-783-1918
- House Speaker Bryan Cutler: 717-783-6424

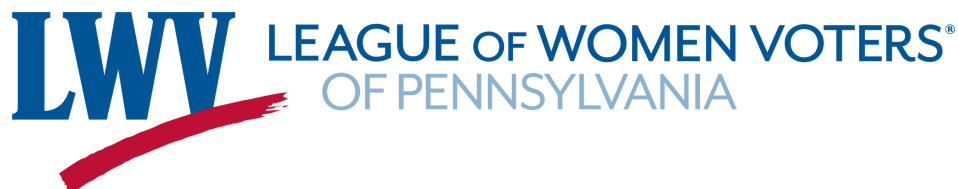
On May 26, there were two meetings on redistricting in Harrisburg:

The Senate State Government Committee held a hearing to consider congressional redistricting criteria. LWVPA VP of Government and Social Policy Carol Kuniholm supplied written testimony on behalf of both FDPA and LWVPA and spoke on a panel of stakeholders. Find a recording of that hearing and links to all testimony [here](#). The LWVPA testimony is also posted on the LWVPA [website here](#).

Later that same day, the Legislative Reapportionment Commission held its first organizational meeting. Agenda and video of that meeting are available [here](#).

In advance of that meeting, LWVPA joined FDPA, the Abolitionist Law Center and Free the Ballot in an [open letter](#) asking the commission to adjust census data to count incarcerated persons in their home communities, rather than the places of their incarceration. Representative Joanna McClinton, House Minority Leader and a member of the commission, has publicized her plan to introduce a resolution instructing the commission to address this. One way to help in this would be for local Leagues to write letter in support of that resolution addressed to the commission at lrc@redistricting.state.pa.us.

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It's Time for Open Primaries in PA

On May 16, Senator Dan Laughlin of Erie County held a press conference introducing legislation that would allow unaffiliated voters to participate in Pennsylvania primaries. LWV member Lori Dolan represented the League in helping to host that event, [available online here](#).

Laughlin's [Senate Bill 690](#) mirrors a bill introduced in the last session that was passed in the Senate but was not considered in the House. SB 690 looks like it will have similar senate support in this session, with Majority Leader Kim Ward and Minority Leader Jay Costa as early cosponsors. A similar bill, [House Bill 1639](#), was introduced earlier in May by Representative Chris Quinn, a Republican from Delaware County.

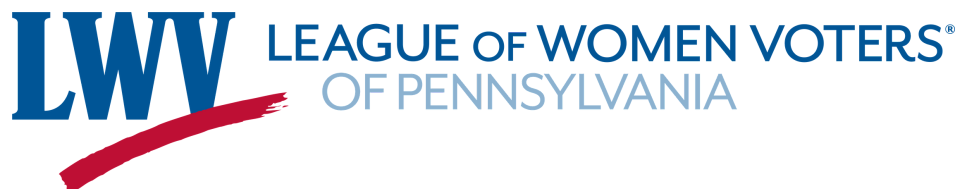
In a [May 31 Washington Post op-ed](#), Alan Novak, chair of the PA Republican Party from 1996 to 2004, and T.J. Rooney was chair of the PA Democratic Party from 2003 to 2010, explain why this issue is so timely and important: "Primary elections don't just matter; they have become the most important round of elections in the United States today. General election competitiveness in our country is in long-term decline. In Pennsylvania last year, only 5 percent of contests in the state House and 16 percent in the state Senate were competitive. Thirty-four percent of state House races and 24 percent of state Senate races were uncontested. Uncontested! Our state is by no means unique; it's the norm. That means the real decision-making happens in the primary elections. And when you shut out millions of independent voters, you place that decision-making in the hands of increasingly small, partisan bands of voters."

Both State Government Committees have made clear their top priorities before summer recess are attention to election law and redistricting. LWVPA will be working with Open Primaries PA, PA Independents and Committee of Seventy to ensure a vote on this issue in both the PA senate and house before the Important primary elections in May 2022.

Let's OPEN PRIMARIES in PENNSYLVANIA to MORE Voters

Pennsylvania has a CLOSED primary system, where only registered Republicans and Democrats may vote for candidates of their party in a primary. The Pennsylvania League of Women Voters supports opening Pennsylvania primaries to voters who are not registered with either party. These "unaffiliated" or "independent" voters are a significant and growing segment of the electorate (1.3 million out of 8.5 million PA voters).

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Election Law: Hearing, Bills and Next Steps

This past winter and early spring, the House State Government Committee held ten three-hour hearings on PA elections and election law. Following the hearings, Chair Seth Grove released a lengthy report, summarizing his own conclusions from the many hours of hearing. Links to all hearings, testimony and report are available on the [committee webpage](#).

Concurrently, the [Senate Special Committee on Election Integrity and Reform](#) held three public hearings. The Election Law Advisory Board established in March 2020 by [Act 320](#), has also been [holding meetings](#) and is due to issue a report by June 30.

Legislators from both sides of the aisle have introduced many election law bills. Some would attempt to roll back gains from Act 77 and eliminate or restrict mail-in voting. Some propose new voter ID requirements already ruled unlawful by the PA Supreme Court. Some would introduce same day voter registration, early registration by seventeen year olds, new campaign finance requirements.

County election officials have asked repeatedly for permission to pre-canvas ballots (opening and preparing mail-in ballots for counting) and for adjustments to dates for requesting mail-in ballots.

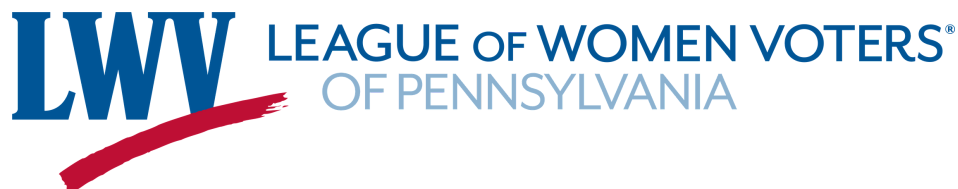
The LWVPA advocacy team is tracking all of these bills. Senate and House State Government Committee Chairs David Argall and Seth Grove have made clear that their goal is to update and clarify election law in a way that gains bipartisan support and avoid a veto by Governor Wolf.

Those conversations will be taking place soon. LWVPA Board and advocacy volunteers will be watching for ways to advocate for protection of gains from Act 77 and adjustments to current election law.

League priorities shared with the House State Government Committee:

1. Provide a clearer definition of what it means to pre-canvas ballots and time for counties to begin opening, sorting and preparing ballots for scanning 10 to 14 days before election day.
2. Simplify rules surrounding ballot return and ensure the ability of voters to cure ballot defects.
3. Provide population-based standards for minimum number of polling places, drop boxes and early voting locations.
4. Establish best-practice standards for correction of voter roles. LWVPA strongly supports automatic voter registration as a way to reduce costs and errors and allow for easy updates and corrections.
5. Provide county election officials with uniform standards for training and implementation.

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How League Dues are Allocated and Utilized

By Melissa Wright, LWVPA Treasurer

The time of year is coming where many local Leagues have membership pushes heading into the summer. Oftentimes, we get questions such as ‘Where does the money go?’ and ‘How is it used?’ and perhaps most critical, ‘Why is every membership important?’.

For each primary (first member in the household) membership, the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) receives \$32 of your payment to help finance its work as our “watch dog” at the national level. The State League receives \$20 to keep a similar watch at the Pennsylvania level. Your local League retains what is left.

While \$32 per member and \$20 per member may seem like large amounts, dues typically comprise no more than 25% of the costs of operating the national and state offices. The National and State Boards have to raise additional money from grants or donations from members and other supporters.

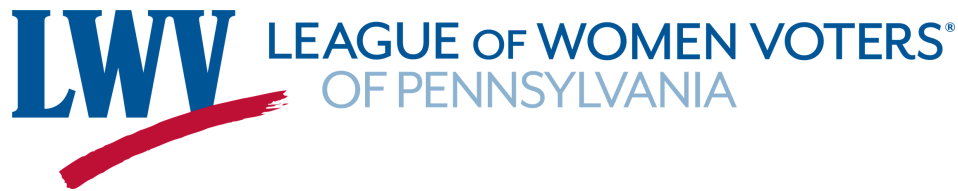
LWVUS plays two essential roles. First, it deals with the national issues that concern League members. The staff of the national office and members of the National Board meet with key legislators and lobby when needed on our current legislative priorities. Second, National provides logistical support to local and state Leagues, provides training materials, and conducts workshops at state and national Conventions. In the 2020 election season, LWVUS provided invaluable counsel as LWVPA undertook [advocacy and litigation](#).

The portion of dues that goes to the State League support our staff (1.5 paid staff members, plus a team of fellows who are paid a small stipend), and operational support like planning Convention, local league capacity building, and member communications. Dues also support our state-wide advocacy and lobbying initiatives, state-wide voter services work, our Equity Initiative, and educational programming that is available to all members. In short, we do a lot with very little, and stretch every member dollar we receive!

The portion of your dues that is kept by your local League is far from sufficient to cover the expenses of running a local League. That is why many local Leagues have fundraisers to make up the difference, and many of you help by making contributions when you pay your dues. Much of the local costs are kept low by the generous work and in-kind donations made by a myriad of volunteers around the state.

Think of the organization as a three-legged stool, each leg being equally important. The League must act as our eyes, ears and voice at the local, state, and national levels. The three legs together comprise a unique grassroots organization that is respected and looked to for information about policy issues and voting. To help keep the stool balanced, check with your local league, or the State if you are a Member at Large (MAL), to make sure that your membership is up to date and if it has lapsed, renew your membership today. Make sure to renew your membership in time to join us for our [Biennial Convention!](#)

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Efforts to Engage Poll Workers Vary Greatly Among Local Leagues

By Cynthia Cominsky, LWVPGH

Pennsylvania League members met for a roundtable recently to share activities and lessons in poll worker outreach. The conversation highlighted that local leagues' poll worker efforts varied greatly based on the experience and number of available League members, local Boards of Election, county-level practices, and relationships with county officials. Consequently, it is difficult to create a standard PA framework by which LWV chapters can recruit and educate poll workers.

Depending on the circumstances, some local leagues' poll worker outreach included:

- Serving as an information source for citizens and serving as a liaison between county resources and community members
- Recruiting poll workers
- Encouraging individuals to run for judges of elections and inspector of election
- Providing feedback to the local Board of Elections, Elections Divisions, and Voter Services offices.
- Educating citizens about the experience of working the polls
- Training poll workers

Despite the diversity in activities, a few key lessons were generalizable: recruiting both poll workers and candidates for judges of elections is important, common PA resources provide state-level details (e.g., [City and State First Read](#) and the [PA Election Advisory Board Facebook page](#)), and sharing resources across local leagues makes it easier for chapters to fulfill their outreach goals.

"I was truly surprised by the scope of activities that the League undertakes across the Commonwealth. It goes to show how critical a role we play as partners with the Department of State and local County Elections Offices in supporting voting, a pillar of American democracy," commented May Zia, Greater Harrisburg and roundtable attendee.

(Members participated in the roundtable from Bucks County, Chester County, Greater Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Lower Merion/Narbeth, Members at Large, Montgomery County, Philadelphia, and Warren).



Introducing LWVPA Speakers Bureau

By Eileen Olmsted, LWVPA Director of Communications

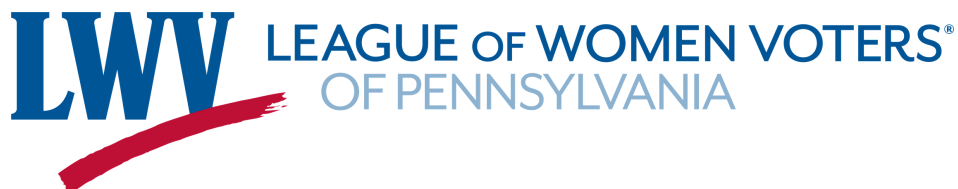
The LWVPA Speakers Bureau is an organizational resource to support local Leagues in providing presentations to other League member groups and as a source of League speakers to outside organizations on policies and positions of the League of Women Voters. These programs and presentations shall be nonpartisan, fact-based and in alignment with the principles of the League.

In the future, we will also seek to develop a list of speakers gathered from League partners and like-minded, nonpartisan organizations that would be comprised of individuals belonging to those groups who have expertise in various topics of interest to members of LWVPA.

LWVPA Speaker's Bureau is ready to build capacity. As soon as we have a roster of speakers, we can begin to advertise it on the LWVPA website.

If you have a presentation you would like to have listed or wish help in getting a presentation developed please contact Rochelle Kaplan at SpeakersBureau@palwv.org for more information.

Let us know your interest in being a speaker by clicking on this link: [Speakers Signup Document](#)



UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR ALL MEMBERS:

LWVPA Equity Initiative

Equity Team Meeting

Thursday, June 3, 7:00- 8:30 PM

Local League leaders are invited to join the Equity Team meeting for support and strategic planning. This group is open to representatives from local Leagues and MAL Units.

[Register for Equity Team meetings here.](#)

Fair Districts PA

Prison Gerrymandering, Mass Incarceration, and Political Representation

Hosted by the League of Women Voters of Lawrence County

Tuesday, June 22, 6:30 PM

The Lawrence County League of Women Voters is hosting a public education program on prison gerrymandering in Pennsylvania. Speakers from the Abolitionist Law Center, Free the Ballot and Fair Districts PA will explain PA's current process and they will demonstrate how prison gerrymandering takes representation away from impacted communities. The speakers will discuss legislation in Harrisburg and solutions available to the Legislative Reapportionment Commission.

[Click here for more information and to register.](#)

Local League Events

Braver Angels Workshops

Hosted by the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh

Monday, June 21, 6:30 - 9:15 PM

LWVPGH with ten other community hosts are co-sponsoring a series of Braver Angels workshops to help area residents mend the political divide by teaching communication skills in a series of free workshops over Zoom. These free workshops will teach strategies for both listening and speaking with people who have differing political opinions – without trying to change anyone's mind.

[Click here for more information and to register.](#)

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