

# League of Women Voters of the United States

## Impact on Issues 2020-2022

### A GUIDE TO PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

## Gun Policy

### The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Gun Policy, as adopted by 1990 Convention and amended by the 1994 and 1998 Conventions:*

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and safety threat to its citizens. The League supports strong federal measures to limit the accessibility and regulate the ownership of these weapons by private citizens. The League supports regulating rearms for consumer safety.

The League supports licensing procedures for gun ownership by private citizens to include a waiting period for background checks, personal identity verification, gun safety education, and annual license renewal. The license fee should be adequate to bear the cost of education and verification.

The League supports a ban on "Saturday night specials," enforcement of strict penalties for the improper possession of and crimes committed with handguns and assault weapons, and allocation of resources to better regulate and monitor gun dealers.

### League History

The 1990 Convention took the then rare step of adopting the gun policy position by concurrence. Proponents had sent two informational mailings to all Leagues before Convention. Spirited debate on the Convention floor persuaded the Convention to concur with the statement proposed by the LWV of Illinois.

Following the Convention action, LWVUS wrote to all members of Congress, announcing the League's new position on gun control and urging passage of federal legislation to control the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States. In 1991, the League joined with other organizations to support legislation banning semi-automatic assault weapons. In 1992 and 1993, the League supported congressional passage of the Brady bill, to institute a five-day waiting period and background check for the purchase of handguns. Following enactment of the Brady bill in November 1993, the League stepped up its efforts in a successful 1994 House campaign to force inclusion of the assault weapons ban in the final conference report on omnibus crime legislation.

The 1994 Convention addressed constitutional arguments affecting gun policy by voting to amend the position on gun policy based on federal court decisions limiting the meaning of the Second Amendment's "right to keep and bear arms." This section of the position was nullified by subsequent U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 2008 and *McDonald v. Chicago*, 2010 and was removed from the position language.

Throughout 1995-1996, opponents of the assault weapons ban and Brady bill pushed for repeal, but the League and others convinced Congress otherwise.

The 1998 Convention again amended the position with: “The League supports regulating rearms for consumer safety.”

The 106th Congress (1999-2001) defeated LWVUS-supported gun policy measures to close major loopholes in the law: mandating background checks for all gun show purchases and child safety locks on guns.

LWVUS endorsed and League members joined the Mother’s Day 2000 Million Mom March that demonstrated citizens’ call for common-sense gun policy measures.

In 2004, the League voiced strong concern over the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act*, which would grant special protection for the gun industry by barring city, county or individual lawsuits against gun manufacturers and dismiss pending cases

The League supported legislation to extend the Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in September 2004. LWVUS also supported language to close the Gun Show Loophole to require all dealers to run criminal background checks at gun shows.

In the 2000s, the League opposed congressional attempts to repeal District of Columbia gun safety laws because such action interfered with the right of self-government for DC citizens.

The League again jumped to action in the 2010’s in response to a lack of action from congressional and executive action after a series of mass shootings across the country. The League continues pushing for passage of closing the gun show loophole, universal background checks, limiting magazine size, banning “bump stocks” and assault weapons, increasing penalties for straw purchases of guns, and funding research and reporting on gun violence in America. In the 115th Congress (2017-2019), the League opposed the *Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act* of 2017.

In 2018 the League endorsed the March for Our Lives rally in Washington, D.C., which was organized by students around the country. The League supported the rally by encouraging our members to attend and sponsor sister marches around the country. LWVUS also used this as an opportunity to encourage our online grassroots advocacy list to contact their members of Congress regarding the need to change gun policy around the country. In the 116th Congress (2019 – 2021), the League supported the *Bipartisan Background Check Act* and the *Background Check Expansion Act* to require Brady background checks for all rearm transfers.