

League Lobbies Legislators in Harrisburg

On May 8, members from 13 Leagues around the state gathered at the Pennsylvania State Capitol for 2024 Lobby Day. Members met with 20 Pennsylvania legislators to discuss important issues that affect their constituents. LWVIC members Susan Boser and Ellen Chinn met with State Senator Joe Pittman and discussed several topics that have bipartisan support in the state.

- *Equitable funding for public education* is required by the Pennsylvania Constitution. The state budget (enacted after Lobby Day) increased funding for public education. LWVIC supported this increase and a cap on charter school tuitions, among other funding reforms.
- *Firearm regulation* has support from a majority of Pennsylvania citizens. The House passed HB 1018, which provides for Extreme Risk Protection Orders, and HB 714, which closes a loophole on background checks. LWVIC pressed for Senate action on both bills.



Image courtesy of LWVPA

- *Campaign finance laws* requiring more disclosure of funding from groups seeking to influence elections have bipartisan public support. HB 1472 and HB 1229 addressing this issue passed with bipartisan support in the House. LWVIC pressed for Senate action on these bills.

Susan and Ellen also had the opportunity to meet with members of other coalitions lobbying about specific issues. The day included lunch and a press conference sponsored by LWVPA.

LWVIC Reorganizes for 2024-25 at May Meeting

At the May 18 luncheon and annual business meeting, LWVIC members elected new directors and officers to its board. Joining the board for two-year terms are Barb Peace, Ann Rea, and Sarah Wheeler. Ann Rea was elected president of the board. Deanne Snavelly continues to serve as administrative vice president. Susan Welsh continues as secretary and Ellen Chinn continues as treasurer of the board.

Barb Peace of Conemaugh Township worked as a senior radiation technologist at Presbyterian University Hospital. She and her husband,

Dr. Matt Klain, have two daughters, Zoe and Abby. Barb raises chickens, hogs, lambs, and beef feeders for sale. Their farm also is home to horses, donkeys, alpacas, and rescue cats. Barb is a farmer-director of the Indiana County Conservation District, is SW Regional Director of the Pennsylvania Association for Conservation Districts, and serves as auditor for Conemaugh Twp. She enjoys fishing, kayaking, biking, and gardening and volunteers with several organizations including the Underground Railroad Museum in Blairsville and AWARE (preserving the Aultman Run Watershed). *(continued on page 2)*

LWVIC Reorganizes for 2024-25

(continued from page 1)



Originally from Iowa, Sarah Wheeler grew up on a farm there. She is beginning her 24th year at IUP, currently as associate professor of political science. She also serves as internship director for political science majors. Her son, Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Reflecting her farm roots, Sarah enjoys gardening and finding new ways to cook the produce she grows.

Acknowledging the resignations of board members Kay Snyder and Lizanne Porter, we wish them well

A native of Belfast, Northern Ireland, Ann Rea became an American citizen in 2003 so that she could vote. She teaches English literature at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Having served as secretary of LWVIC while Sherene Hess was president, Ann explains that after years less active in the League, “Being at the 50th anniversary celebration was like coming home. I feel very honored to be elected as president.”

as they prepare to leave Indiana for new homes out of the county. Kay’s work on sustainability issues and practices in our community included serving for many years on the Peggy Clark Grass Roots Environmental Leadership Award committee. Lizanne contributed to the work of several committees and was a frequent volunteer at registration events and other League activities with our community partners.

LWVIC Recognizes Members Active for 50 Years



Three charter members of LWVIC, currently still active, have been notified that they are now considered Honorary Members and are exempt from paying annual dues. They are Susan McClure, Olga Platt, and Sandy Whitson. These individuals have supported the organization over the years with their contributions of time and funds in the form of dues and donations.

In her response to this recognition, Susan McClure wrote, “...When the LWVIC formed, State Board told me that it wasn’t just the studies and resulting consensus that made the League so special but also the other members. That has been so true. Thank you all for being members of the LWVIC.”

In 2025 Beth Marshall, a past president of LWVIC, will become an Honorary Member. In 2026 Dawn Seagren will reach that 50-year milestone.

Overview of Coming Changes in LWV Membership

LWV

LWV is switching to a new member online portal for all Leagues across the country. There is no action that members

need to take right now, but we want to provide you with an overview of what these changes mean for you.

In 2024 members still renew in the usual way. When the system launches in January 2025, you will receive an email to log in to the portal, but you will not be asked to renew again until a year after your most recent renewal. You will be given the option to sign up to auto-renew annually, and your membership will last a year after your last renewal. Once you have access to the portal, you will be able to update your own information, including contact information.

When it comes time to renew, you will receive an email reminder. Dues will no longer be a fixed rate but will be pay-what-you-can. The recommended dues amount for all members across the country will be \$75, but members can pay any amount (minimum \$20), including the current dues rate.

Under the current system, LWVIC pays a fixed rate per member to LWVPA and to LWVUS. Under the new system, a percentage of dues will go to the state and national League. This means that when you renew, if you would like to make an additional contribution directly to LWVIC as some members choose to do, this will need to be a separate action from choosing a higher dues amount. A higher dues amount benefits the League as a whole and allows us to offer the option of lower dues to increase our member base but does not exclusively support the local League.

There will still be the option to renew by check for members who don't use the internet, but members who are able to access the portal and renew that way are encouraged to do so.

On a member level, we hope these changes will make managing your membership easier. On a League level, this is expected to increase membership around the country and increase our ability to empower voters and defend democracy. We will keep you informed as we have new and relevant information.

Fair Districts Meets with Representative Jim Struzzi



Representatives of Fair Districts Indiana County met with State Representative Jim Struzzi on June 20 to ask him to co-sponsor House Bill 1776. HB 1776 would establish an Independent Redistricting Commission for Pennsylvania. Meeting with Rep. Struzzi were Hayden Johnston, a summer intern with Fair Districts; Chuck Olson; and LWVIC members Joyce Rizzo and Sara Steelman.

LWVIC Participation in Community Summer Festivals

Education and Family Fun at NaturePalooza

by Sue Welsh

In June the county's Children's Advisory Commission sponsored its summer kick-off event, the Family NaturePalooza, to give families information and resources for safe fun and continued care and learning all summer long. More than 25 human service organizations participated in the event on June 1 at Blue Spruce Park.

LWVIC's Child Advocacy Committee on Education sponsored a lakeside table where children participated in two activities. One was an experiment about "Rainwater Run-off"—what it is and how to plant to minimize the damage caused by too much run-off. The other was an opportunity to vote for one's "favorite kind of renewable energy": wind, water or solar.

Our table had a steady stream of small groups at the experiment station, and by the end of the afternoon, 89 children had voted. The result was a tie vote for water (36) and solar (36) followed by wind (13) and 4 votes for *all three* renewables. CACE chair Sue Welsh organized the activities with invaluable help from members Susan Boser, Ellen Chinn, and Lil Clemons.



Ellen Chinn (wearing cap) prepares a group of children to do a Rainwater Run-off experiment at LWVIC's table.

With Fair Districts at Knotweed Festival



Joyce Rizzo and her dog Reese hosted the Fair Districts table at the Knotweed Festival in Blairsville.

Celebrating Juneteenth with Fair Districts



Lizanne Porter signs a petition in support of an Independent Redistricting Commission at the Fair Districts table at the Juneteenth celebration in Mack Park, Indiana.

Community Solar May Come to a Grid Near You! *by Ellen Chinn*

What is community solar?

Not everyone can go solar where they live. This may be because they rent, can't afford the up-front costs, or their roof may be a bad fit for solar. Community solar offers the benefit of solar if you can't, or prefer not to, install solar panels on your home.

How community solar works

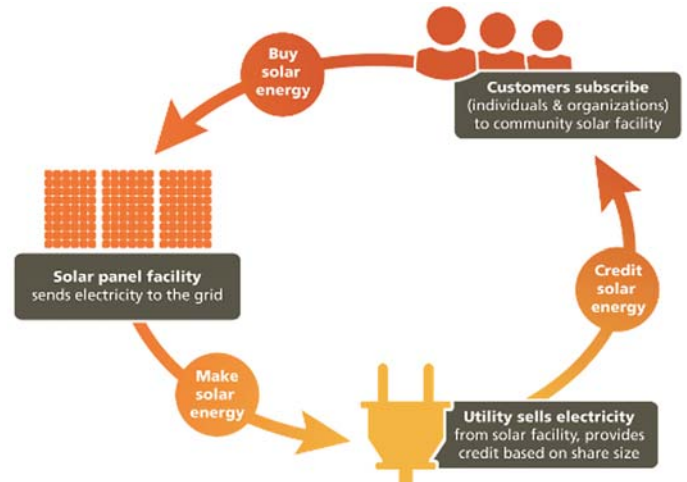
Community solar installations can be owned by a group of neighbors, a church or other nonprofit, a third-party solar development company, or a utility. Electricity generated by the installation enters the grid, and subscribers to the project receive a credit on their electricity bills proportional to the share of the project they lease or own. "Community solar allows them to pool their money together and invest in a solar system, normally on a parking structure, empty lot—anywhere really that's available," said Moises

LWVIC Works on Environmental Issues — Join Us! *by Cindy Rogers*

The LWVIC Environmental Committee invites new members to help continue our work. Some of our recent accomplishments include:

- Encouraging conversations about climate change through signage on self-guided paths at Tanoma Wetlands and the Conservation District.
- Attending training with CRSP (Climate and Rural Systems Partnership with Carnegie Museum of Natural History).
- Partnering with Evergreen Conservancy to collect plastic with the TREX community challenge and donating the benches we earn to community organizations. We have donated 12 benches made from plastic that has not gone into landfills.
- Updating our *All About Plastic* booklet. We are a partner with "No Plastic Please."

LWVIC continues to collaborate with LWVPA's Environmental Committee on a variety of current issues. We are willing to tackle any new environmental issues and need your help to do so. Please contact Cindy at rogers944@comcast.net if you are interested in joining our committee.



Morales, who supervised the installation of community solar projects in Washington, D.C.

Community solar is not available everywhere, including here in PA. However, on March 26, 2024, House Bill 1842 (Community Solar) was passed in the Pennsylvania House by a vote of 111 to 90. This is definitely a win for solar in Pennsylvania but it has yet to pass in the Senate. The passage of HB 1842 would mean more affordable electricity, local clean energy production and living-wage solar jobs in Pennsylvania.

At least 24 states, including Delaware and New Jersey, have passed legislation enabling the development of community solar. For years, state lawmakers have tried unsuccessfully to add Pennsylvania to this list, but with more federal incentives available for solar development through President Biden's 2022 climate bill, proponents say now is the time. Some utilities companies have opposed these community solar bills in the past. Sticking points include whether utilities need to buy excess power and renewable energy credits from community solar projects, and whether community solar subscribers need to pay distribution costs—charges that don't reflect the cost of the electricity but rather the costs to maintain the infrastructure.

<https://why.org/articles/community-solar-pennsylvania-lawmakers/>

<https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/pennsylvania/learn-the-issues-in-pennsylvania/community-solar-in-pennsylvania/>

Public Education in PA Receives Increased Funding

This editorial was submitted by LWVIC and published in the weekend edition of the Indiana Gazette, June 29-30, 2024, while budget negotiations were going on. The budget signed into law for FY 2024-25 significantly increases overall spending for K-12, including \$285 million for basic education, \$100 million for special education, \$100 million for school safety and student mental health, \$100 million for school facility improvements, and \$100 million to reimburse public schools for district students attending cyber charter schools. A one-time appropriation of \$526 million for the Ready-to-Learn Block Grant Program addresses school district adequacy and tax equity.

Chair of LWVPA's Social Policy Committee, Susan Boser commented that the editorial, along with letters to the editor from community citizens, provided public support for increased education funding that helped the state legislature reach the compromises that achieved this historic increase in Pennsylvania's education funding.

Funding for Pennsylvania public K-12 schools has produced unequal conditions in a large number of school districts and a much greater local tax burden than in other states. There are ways to fix this problem if the political will to do so exists.

Pennsylvania provides only 37% toward the cost of running local schools compared to the national average of about 46%. To cover the actual cost of operating our schools, local taxes must make up what the state does not provide. Pennsylvanians pay more for their schools in local property taxes than two thirds of the rest of the states. It also creates inequity across school systems. Some communities have the tax base to fund their local schools well. Others do not and must struggle even to provide basic building maintenance. In fact, the inequity is so extreme that Pennsylvania ranks among the states with the least equitable funding in the nation.

In February of 2023, the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania ruled the state's system of funding to be unconstitutional and mandated reform. In January 2024, the bipartisan Basic Education

Funding Commission presented a formula and process to meet that mandate. In response, Governor Shapiro has proposed a budget for 2024-25 that includes a historic increase in funding for K-12 public education and negotiations are now underway in the State House and Senate.

This year's state budget for education matters to Indiana Area School District. On May 20, 2024, the Indiana Area School District board recommended a 6.8% property tax increase to avoid a budget deficit. This budget includes a cost of \$1.7 million in payments to cyber charter schools. Regrettably, it also reduces expenses by eliminating much-needed contracted mental health workers, reducing literacy instruction leadership, shrinking the driver education program, and reducing custodial staff.

If the Governor's education budget is approved, IASD stands to receive a benefit of \$1,082,904 through an increase in state funds and reduction in cyber charter costs. This could potentially address the district's projected deficit for 2024-25. And, because the Governor's plan is a 7-year commitment, it will help to moderate property tax increases after 2025.

The passage of the education budget should be viewed as an essential investment in the future of the state, yet there are forces in the General Assembly who are opposed, arguing that it is too expensive. The first-year cost is indeed high at \$1.8 billion, but this year the state has the funds to do this because it has a surplus of \$14 billion. Thus the state can fix this problem without raising any taxes.

It's not just IASD that stands to benefit. Analysis of how this budget affects all the school districts in Senatorial District 41 shows a staggering increase in benefits of \$18.45 million in just the first year alone.

The proposed education budget would not increase state taxes but voting it down would raise our local property taxes. Supporting this education budget protects the taxpayers of today as well as the taxpayers of the future.

Resolution Adopted in Support of PA Education Budget

On the recommendation of LWVIC’s Child Advocacy Committee on Education, the LWVIC board voted in June to adopt the “Resolution in Support of Governor Shapiro’s 2024-25 Public Education Budget.” The resolution was prepared by Education Voters of PA (<https://edvoterspa.org/>) and PA Schools Work (<https://paschoolswork.org/>).

Whereas Pennsylvania’s Commonwealth Court, on February 7, 2023, found that our current system for funding public schools is unconstitutional, failing to fulfill the Pennsylvania constitution’s promise of a “thorough and efficient system of public education” — responding to a lawsuit filed by six school districts, the NAACP Pennsylvania State Conference, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, and parents; and

Whereas the court found that education is a “fundamental right;” and

Whereas the court found that school districts “which struggle to raise enough revenue through local taxes to cover the needs of their students lack the inputs that are essential elements of a thorough and efficient system of public education – adequate funding; courses, curricula, and other programs that prepare students to be college and career ready; sufficient, qualified, and effective staff; safe and adequate facilities; and modern, quality instrumentalities of learning;” and

Whereas the court found “that money does matter, and economically-disadvantaged students and historically underperforming students can overcome challenges if they have access to the right resources that wealthier districts are financially able to provide;” and

Whereas the Basic Education Funding Commission, a panel of legislators and executive branch designees, found that Pennsylvania school districts are collectively underfunded by \$5.4 billion and proposed that the state should provide \$5.1 billion to close this gap in seven years, plus an additional \$956 million tax equity supplement over seven years for communities that have faced the steepest local tax burdens; and

Whereas Governor Shapiro’s 2024-25 budget endorses the work of the commission and fulfills the first year of the commission’s seven-year plan with a \$1.1 billion increase in basic

education funding, with most of this funding targeted to public schools that have been shortchanged by the current unconstitutional system in the small towns, suburbs, and cities where students have been the most deeply underfunded; and

Whereas the Governor’s budget stands up for our students by putting forward the first step of a transformative plan for the state to deliver on its responsibility to fully fund public schools in Pennsylvania based on what children need to succeed, so that students all students, regardless of zip code and community wealth, have meaningful opportunities; and

Whereas the court directed the General Assembly and the Governor to enact a plan to address the constitutional deficiencies identified in its opinion, which would include all seven years of funding called for by the Basic Education Funding Commission; and

Whereas all school districts will materially benefit from the Governor’s proposal and adoption of a plan to provide for it to continue for seven years until the funding deficiencies identified by the commission are overcome; and

Whereas every community should have enough funding to serve their students, regardless of wealth; and

Whereas underfunding is a statewide problem in Pennsylvania public schools, and only statewide action can reduce the deep disparities in educational resources that define our school funding system; and

Whereas the time is now to take action, for our children and for Pennsylvania’s future; therefore be it

Resolved, that the **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY** urges the General Assembly to adopt Governor Shapiro’s historic state budget proposal and to pass legislation making the necessary multi-year commitment to address Pennsylvania’s entire constitutional and moral obligation to fully and fairly fund public schools; and

Further resolved, that a copy of this resolution be presented to the governor’s office, to the PA Secretary of Education, and to state senator Joe Pittman and state representative Jim Struzzi, state legislators who represent our school district.

You Can Help Voters Get Vital Election Information

Getting reliable information about candidates in national, statewide, and local races can be difficult. The website www.Vote411.org, sponsored by LWV Voter Services, publishes nonpartisan information that candidates themselves furnish about their policies and experience. This provides every citizen the opportunity to learn which candidates share their beliefs and priorities. The site shows you information about the candidates on your ballot based on your own street address, which you can enter on the website.

Some local and statewide candidates neglect to provide information for voters, especially if they are unopposed in their races. You can encourage them to provide statements about their priorities. Let them know, *“I use Vote411 to get information about the candidates on my ballot, but I don’t see any information there about you.”*

Another way you can help voters get information they need is to volunteer at a LWVIC registration event. Watch your email for an invitation to sign up for a shift at the Northern Appalachian Folk Festival or at other registration opportunities at community events.

Thanks to Volunteers for the Annual LWVIC Yard Sale

Kay Smith thanks the LWVIC board, members, and other volunteers for their help with the 2024 yard sale at the County Fairgrounds Picnic Pavilion on May 11 and 12. Volunteers donated items, hauled them to the site, and helped to set up and conduct the sale. Individuals who worked at these tasks include Bonnie Adair, Faye Bradwick, Susan Boser’s husband Dave, Lizanne Porter, Joan Rittenberger, Karen Ross, Jon Southard, Sara Steelman, Sandy Whitson, and Cheri Widzowski.

The following people hauled truckloads of donated items and moved them into the pavilion: Kelly Fox with her son and a student at ICTC, Don Lancaster with his and Faye’s two grandsons, Mark Phoebus, Sam Phoebus, and Tom Simmons.

LWVIC Calendar

AUGUST

IUP Voter Registration

Saturday, August 17, 10:00 a.m - 1:00 p.m.
Kovalchick Convention & Athletic Complex,
Indiana

SEPTEMBER

Northern Appalachian Folk Festival

Saturday, September 7, 12 noon - 4:00 p.m.
Voter Registration, Downtown Indiana

LWVIC Annual Board Retreat

Saturday, September 7, 10:00 a.m - 1:00 p.m.
Home of Kay Smith, 19 Erica Drive, Indiana

Constitution Day at IUP

Tuesday, September 17, two events:
Public Reading of the Constitution,
12 noon, Oak Grove in front of the Library
Chat with the Founders,
5:30 - 7:00 p.m., 126 Leonard Hall, IUP

National Voter Registration Day

Tuesday, September 17
Indiana Free Library, Indiana

OCTOBER

IUP Six O’Clock Series – Bipartisan Panel

Political scientists and LWVIC representatives discuss the topic:
“Elections and Voter Behavior”
Monday, October 28, 6:00 p.m.
Elkin Hall Great Room, IUP Indiana

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY • BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Susan Boser • Donna Cashdollar
Barb Peace • Joyce Rizzo • Cindy Rogers
Aida Shotts • Kay Smith • Deanne Snavelly
Sarah Wheeler

MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

The LWVIC hosts board meetings on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. using the Zoom platform. LWVIC members are welcome to participate. To request the Zoom invitation and meeting agenda, please send an email to: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com.