

March 7 Meeting: Campaign for Independent Redistricting Commission in Pennsylvania Reaches a Critical Stage



Joyce Rizzo, LWVIC board member, discussed program plans for the March 7 meeting on redistricting with Sid Reger and Stanley Chepaitis, representatives of Fair Districts of Indiana County.

Redrawing the borders of Pennsylvania's voting districts traditionally takes place after each national census, with new district maps passed by the state legislature and signed into law by the governor. Political competition for votes has often resulted in gerrymandered maps that maximize votes for the political party in power at the time. Legal challenges and deadlocked votes for district maps after the 2010 and 2020 censuses resulted in interventions by the state Supreme Court. Pennsylvania's current map was created by an independent consultant commissioned by the Court in 2022.

Polls confirm bipartisan voter support for an Independent Redistricting Commission in our state. Fair Districts of Indiana County has been working toward this goal for several years. Now is a critical time in that campaign, with House Bill 31 and Senate Bill 131 lined up for hearings and

votes in the state legislature. Both bills must be passed by the end of this legislative session. At our Winter Membership Meeting on Saturday, March 7, Stanley Chepaitis, Howard Hastings, and Sid Reger of Fair Districts will review the urgent need for action and how gerrymandering has led to polarization, legislative dysfunction, and voter frustration.

The meeting will take place from 12:00 noon to 2:30 p.m. at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Indiana, 285 Twolick Drive in White Twp. The Fair Districts presentation at 12:30 follows lunch that begins at noon, featuring homemade soups, breads, and desserts.

The event is free and open to the public. This is an opportunity to invite people interested in making voting in Pennsylvania as fair as possible.

Fair Districts Lobbies Legislature for Independent Redistricting

by Joyce Rizzo

Fair Districts PA held a press conference and lobbying effort at the Capitol rotunda in Harrisburg on November 19 to tell the PA legislature that it's time for hearings and votes on House Bill 31 and Senate Bill 131—legislation that proposes a constitutional amendment to establish an independent redistricting commission to draw voting district lines. Among the people who spoke at the event were the prime sponsors of the bills: Senator Tim Kearney (D) from the 26th district and Representative Mark Gillen (R) from House District 128.

(continued on page 2)

SAVE America Act Would Radically Change How We Vote

The following summarizes news and analysis from several sources: Votebeat, an independent and nonpartisan news organization reporting on voting access and election administration; The Washington Post; The Campaign Legal Center, an independent and nonpartisan organization advocating for voting rights and government ethics; and The Brennan Center for Justice, an independent and nonpartisan law and policy organization at NYU Law.

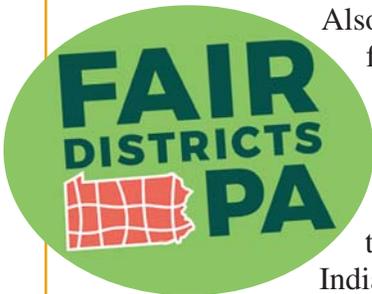
On February 11 the US House of Representatives passed its version of the SAVE America Act, which would make major changes to the way Americans vote in time for the November 2026 mid-term elections. This Act contains requirements that could prevent millions of eligible citizens from voting, according to evidence cited by nonpartisan elections experts. Rural voters and voters with limited mobility could find it harder to vote under the new requirements.

The SAVE America Act is a modified version of an earlier SAVE Act that failed in Congress a year ago due to nationwide public opposition. The US Constitution assigns the responsibility and authority to the states to run elections by its own laws and procedures. Spurred by comments by President Donald Trump about “taking over voting,” some Republicans in Congress are renewing the effort to nationalize US elections. The US Senate still has to vote on the Act, which if passed would be signed by the president.

Some of the sweeping changes to voting under the SAVE America Act include:

- To register to vote, American citizens would be required to show documents such as a notarized birth certificate or an American passport. They would also need to show proof of residence in the state and county where they are registering. These documents would be required (*continued on page 3*)

Fair Districts Lobbies Pennsylvania Legislature *(continued from page 1)*



Also speaking were volunteers from around the state including from Indiana County. FDPA local coordinator, Stanley Chepaitis, talked about the fact that, in the past, Indiana County has been

divided into four state legislative districts and that his home and the land he rented for a small organic farm were in two different districts with different representatives. He emphasized that Pennsylvania in the recent past was one of the most gerrymandered states in the country and the process that contributed to that situation is still in place—politicians are choosing who they want as voters to benefit their own political parties. The people who are negatively affected by this process are their constituents.

To conclude his talk, Dr. Chepaitis mentioned the many letters-to-the-editor that Indiana county citizens have written on redistricting reform as well as the presentations our local group has

made to civic clubs, libraries, church groups, and schools. He promised that in Indiana County, Fair Districts will continue to work until Pennsylvania has an independent redistricting commission to draw voting district lines.



Above: Stanley Chepaitis (center) and other members of Fair Districts PA lobbied our legislators in Harrisburg to hold hearings and vote on a constitutional amendment establishing an independent redistricting commission.

SAVE America Act Would Radically Change How We Vote

any time a voter registered in one location moves to a different state or county within a state. Millions of Americans lack those documents.

- Women whose marriage names are different from the maiden names on their birth certificates or passports would face extra steps to verify their identities.
- Voter registration online or by mail would essentially end due to the requirement to present actual documents verifying citizenship. Even Real ID drivers' licenses might not qualify because generally they do not indicate citizenship.
- Universal mail voting would end. Exceptions would be made for some disabled citizens and service people stationed overseas. This would end the longstanding voting method used by citizens in eight states and Washington, DC. Voting by mail originally became popular with conservatives in rural western states.
- Government-issued photo ID would need to be shown each time someone votes in person. (A strong bipartisan majority of voters supports this measure.) In the SAVE Act, student IDs, even from state universities, and some tribal IDs would not be acceptable. The current Senate version of the bill also requires showing the birth certificate or passport each time a citizen casts a ballot unless in a state requiring a full Social Security number to register to vote.
- States would be required to review and purge its voter rolls every 30 days, ending the 90-day period that protects voters from being mistakenly thrown off rolls right before Election Day. (Purges that rely on faulty databases have been known to drop qualified registered voters.) Exceptions would be made for states that run their voter rolls through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) citizen verification tool.
- Election officials could face up to five years of imprisonment if they register a voter without acceptable documents proving citizenship, even if the voter was proved in other ways to be an eligible citizen. Private individuals would be allowed to sue election officials for a single instance of

this. These penalties add to the growing harassment of state and local election officials whose work helps eligible citizens participate in our democracy.

The Brennan Center for Justice and the Campaign Legal Center both cite the SAVE America Act as part of “a broader agenda to sow distrust in our elections, undermine election administration, and discourage Americans from making their voices heard.” **In any form, this Act would prevent millions of eligible citizens from voting.**

League members are encouraged to share our views with our US senators. In Pennsylvania, contact:

https://www.senate.gov/states/PA/intro.htm?link_id=2&can_id=8c49263673696a03191611fcbd6e647d&source=email-democracy-needs-you-stop-the-save-america-act-before-its-too-late&email_referrer=email_3094519&email_subject=democracy-needs-you-stop-the-save-america-act-before-its-too-late&&

Links to more information:

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/new-save-act-bills-would-still-block-millions-americans-voting>

https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/Updated%20CLC%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20the%20SAVE%20Act%201-29-26.pdf?utm_campaign=wp_the_5_minute_fix&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter

www.pa.gov/services/vote/register-to-vote

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/02/10/republicans-are-pushing-dramatically-change-way-you-cast-ballots/>

https://www.votebeat.org/2026/02/09/donald-trump-dan-bongino-nationalize-take-over-voting-2026-election/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Vetting%20Trump%20s%20push%20to%20nationalize%20elections&utm_campaign=PA%20Post%2002%2009%2026%20%28Copy%29



Pennsylvania Officials Resist Election Interference

The following is a summary of news and analysis from several sources: The Washington Post; the US Constitution website of the US Congress; and The Brennan Center for Justice, an independent and nonpartisan law and policy organization at NYU Law.

Various efforts over past months to assert federal control of American elections are causing concern at the state level for the administration of the 2026 midterm elections.

In August 2025, State Secretary Al Schmidt, a Republican, rejected a request from the federal Department of Justice for a list of Pennsylvania's voters, including sensitive personal information such as Social Security numbers and drivers' license numbers. Schmidt responded that it would violate state law to provide that information.

"As Pennsylvania's chief election official, I take seriously my obligation to ensure that our county election officials faithfully maintain our voter rolls. Likewise, I take seriously my responsibility to safeguard the private information that Pennsylvanians entrust to the care of our county election officials. Thousands of election officials—Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike—across the Commonwealth's 67 counties will continue to ensure we have free, fair, safe, and secure elections for the people of Pennsylvania," Schmidt said in a statement.

Pennsylvania is one of 24 states the federal government has sued over voter lists and election policies. President Donald Trump has proposed a federal takeover of elections, even though the US Constitution, Article I, Section 4, Clause 1 states that the times, places, and manner of holding elections shall be determined in each state by its legislature. Authority to enact the procedures and safeguards necessary to enforce voting rights and integrity constitutionally belongs to the states.

Sued states are refusing to provide voter files requested by the Department of Justice because of well-founded concerns about misuse of voter

data. The administration has **conceded** that DOGE team members within the Social Security Administration agreed to turn over state voter rolls to an advocacy group seeking to "find evidence of voter fraud and to overturn election results in certain States." According to the Brennan Center for Justice, states that agreed to turn over their voter rolls to the administration gave it "unprecedented latitude to meddle in elections, including the power to tell states to remove specific voters from the rolls and share sensitive, private voter data at will—including with people outside of government."

In addition, the president has called for some states to revise their voting districts before the 2026 midterm election, called for an end to mail voting, and called for an end to using voting machines. There have been attempts to place persons sympathetic to federal control in state and local elections offices. The president has also considered deploying a police or military presence at some voting sites.

Most recently he mentioned the possibility of calling off elections if he believes they won't be administered to his requirements.

These and other threats and attempts at election interference are raising concerns about "chaos and uncertainty" in the administration of the 2026 elections. They feed the loss of public trust in the security and integrity of the elections on which our democracy depends.

Links to more information:

https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S4-C1-2/ALDE_00013577/

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/01/12/trump-midterms-elections-voting-redistricting/>

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/new-save-act-bills-would-still-block-millions-americans-voting>

www.pa.gov/services/vote/register-to-vote

LWVIC Discusses Voting Process at Whole Unity Event

by Joyce Rizzo

The LWVIC was invited to make a presentation on voting in Indiana County at a community event hosted by Whole Unity Inc. on October 7. Whole Unity Inc. was founded by Quintina Thomas, a local educator, entrepreneur, and Indiana School District board director, to meet the profound and urgent needs of marginalized populations in Indiana by providing educational resources, training programs and mentorship.

LWVIC President Susan Boser began the conversation by giving a short history of the League of Women Voters—how the organization developed following the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution giving women the right to vote. She talked about how the initial purpose of the organization was to educate these new voters on how to exercise their political rights and

2025 New Citizen Ceremonies Cancelled by US Citizenship and Immigration Services

Traditionally in October, some LWVIC members attend the annual naturalization ceremony in the KCAC on the IUP campus, welcoming new immigrant-citizens of the United States and helping them to register to vote. It has been a moving experience for all participants.

In October 2025 we learned that the local ceremony and registration effort, along with registration of naturalized citizens by Leagues and other non-profits across the country, were cancelled by order of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Registering naturalized citizens as voters now takes place only at regional USCIS offices.

League of Women Voters of the United States CEO Celina Stewart issued a statement outlining the organization’s response, describing the order as “not just a procedural setback; it’s a barrier to participation. Every new American deserves a clear, accessible path to the ballot.”

responsibilities. Since its founding, the League has developed into a powerful force that advocates for important legislation and policies that would protect the right to vote for all citizens.

She then spoke about the activities of our local League—tabling events for information and voter registration, our past candidate night events and plans to continue them in the future, our online Vote411 platform, and advertising on local media on the importance of voting especially in local elections and on safe and secure elections.

Participants in the event asked questions about the voting process and we discussed the challenges of local elections in a county with one dominant political party and the scarcity of candidates willing to run for local office. One participant was about to turn 18 a few days before the voter registration deadline and was eager to learn how best to ensure that he could vote in the November election.

Whole Unity Inc. and LWVIC ended the meeting with hope to partner on future events.



Above: Indiana Borough Mayor Charles Simelton; LWVIC President Susan Boser; Elijah Thomas; Indiana Area School Board Director Quintina Thomas; Trajan Jones, Indiana Borough Planning and Zoning official; and Bill Simmons, former Indiana Borough Mayor (Photo by Sanayah Metcalf-Harris)

Sustainability Summit VIII: Embracing a Sustainable Future

In October 2025, Sustainability Summit VIII brought together representatives of regional businesses, educational institutions, and civic organizations with elected officials, policy makers, and stakeholders in a full-day event at the KCAC focused on advancing community development through sustainable, local solutions.

Co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, the summit featured keynote speaker Drew Pack, senior policy analyst at the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics.



Top: Summit Keynote Speaker Drew Pack discussed successful strategies for sustainable economic revitalization of our region's communities.

Above: Ellen Chinn took a turn at the LWVIC information table in the lobby of the KCAC where several community organizations were showcasing their work.

His presentation, "Fueling Communities with Local, Sustainable Funding," reviewed his work in economic development with communities across western Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia. Throughout the day, panel presentations about development efforts in Indiana County covered Building Rural Climate Solutions, Modern Approaches to Environmental Stewardship, Outdoor Recreation and Community Revitalization, Community Based Food Systems, and Solar Solutions Big and Small.

As the panels continued, LWVIC members took turns staffing the League's information table in the KCAC lobby. It was a day to meet and interact with leaders and stakeholders while learning about the innovative projects being carried out to enhance economies and well-being in our communities.

LWVIC Yard Sale Is Back on the Spring Calendar, April 25-26

The annual Yard/Garage Sale has been LWVIC's main fundraiser for many years. We were unable to sponsor one in 2025, but the tradition resumes this year! It brings in much-needed funding for our local League's activities.

We're limiting what we can accept in donations to items in categories that reliably sell. **YES** to kitchenware, housewares, small appliances, pottery, books, jewelry, children's items, lighting, craft supplies, tools, gardening supplies, and recreational/sports items. **NO** to furniture, shoes, clothes, artificial trees, luggage, and bedding.

If you know someone who has items in good condition, in the accepted categories, please let them know about the opportunity to donate. We will not solicit donations from the general public. The poster on page 7 and this article can be shared with your friends and on personal social media accounts, but a separate flyer for wider distribution will advertise the dates and times of the sale. Please text or call Kay Smith at 724-840-3287 with any questions or concerns.



April 25 & 26

**Indiana Co. Fairgrounds Picnic Pavilion
(next to the playground)**

Regular Sale

**Saturday Apr 25
8:00 am - 4:00 pm**

\$5 Bag Sale

**Sunday Apr 26
12:00 pm - 4:00 pm**

Donations

YES: Kitchenware, housewares, small appliances, pottery, books, jewelry, children's items, lighting, craft supplies, tools, gardening supplies, recreational/sports items

NO: Furniture, clothes/shoes, artificial trees, luggage, bedding

Donation Drop-Off Times

Apr 20-24 9:00 am – Noon Apr 22-23 5:00-7:00 pm

Please text Kay at 724-840-3287 with any questions

A Powerful New Tool to Clean Contaminated Water

Clean water is essential for Life on Earth. Yet humans have polluted their precious water supply with a myriad of damaging substances: agricultural runoff, industrial and mining waste, municipal sewage, urban stormwater, petroleum products and by-products, landfill seepage, microplastics, and much more. Many of these substances are not found in nature (man-made) but some are non-renewable resources such as minerals and metals used in processing and manufacturing.

Consequences of contaminated water can be severe and include damage to human, plant and animal health, and the destruction of aquatic ecosystems. Our oceans are vast, but they are not immune to this destruction. New methods are emerging to clean up our water, but most are expensive or impractical in other ways.

Some good news is that researchers at Northwestern University in Chicago have developed a sponge to “soak up” substances from contaminated water. The sponges are coated with nanoparticles, which can be engineered to adsorb specific pollutants. The sponge works well as



a substrate because the pores provide a lot of surface area, hence more nanoparticles and more binding capacity. The specificity of the particles provides flexibility in the binding capabilities, and once bound to the sponge, the adherents can be selectively released from the nanoparticles to facilitate the separation and proper disposal of the contaminants. The minerals and metals can be recovered and reused, and the sponge can be used again and again!

Much more needs to be done—research into new technologies, implementation of existing technologies—to stop the flow of pollutants into our water supply and to clean up the damage already done. This is a step in the right direction.

For more information:

<https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2025/02/this-sponge-soaks-up-pollutants-but-saves-valuable-minerals>

LWVIC Environmental Issues Committee Update *by Ellen Chinn*

The EIC has been continuing the plastic film collection for the TREX Challenge, partnering with Evergreen Conservancy for year-round collection. We’ve earned more than a dozen composite lumber benches that are placed throughout the county, which has kept thousands of pounds of plastic out of landfills while providing places to sit, contemplate, and enjoy the beauty of our county.

Although the EIC has not been very active in recent years, the committee has lately been invigorated by an influx of new members and a collaboration with Concerned Citizens of Indiana County (CCIC), a nonpartisan group of individuals who are passionate about caring for the environment. The first action taken was to send letters out to area businesses and corporate

headquarters with information about plastic and its associated problems, as well as references and suggestions. The businesses were asked to think about their impact on the environment and if they would be willing to change their habits to minimize their plastic footprints. They were also invited to contact CCIC with any questions or comments.

As a follow-up, the EIC and CCIC are creating a plastic information and resource guide to be distributed to local businesses which would include general information about the dangers of plastics and microplastics, but also specific information about available non-plastic alternatives. The printing of these booklets will be funded by a Heinz Eco Grant awarded to LWVIC by the Pennsylvania LWV.

October 2025 Workshop: Practicing Difficult Conversations



About two dozen workshop participants learned and practiced how to have difficult conversations that are respectful and constructive.



The LAPP framework for dialogue

Listen → Acknowledge → Pivot → Perspective

Skill	Example Phrase
Listen	"Tell me more about that."
Acknowledge	"It sounds like ___ really matters to you."
Pivot	"May I share another way of seeing it?"
Perspective	"Here's how I've come to see it..."

Listening for values turns conflict into understanding.

The LWVIC 2025 fall membership meeting in October featured a workshop conducted by Dr. Gwendolyn Torges of IUP's Political Science faculty. Amid widening political divisions in our country, our civic health depends on keeping communications open and dealing with differences in constructive ways.

As she outlined techniques for navigating in difficult conversations, Dr. Torges emphasized the importance of listening respectfully and acknowledging each other's viewpoints. She directed us to form teams for practice conversations on varied topics, using the frameworks she had outlined. Team members were challenged to pivot in the conversation—to suggest other ways of looking at the issues that could bridge differences and help find common ground.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY • BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

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

Stricter Voter ID Has Little Impact on Preventing Voter Fraud

Showing photo ID when casting a ballot has support by 73 percent of Pennsylvanians, according to polls conducted in 2024. They reason that it would help prevent voting fraud and increase public confidence in our voting system.

Yet studies by several organizations including the conservative Heritage Foundation, conducted between July 2015 and July 2025, found that just

149 fraudulent ballots were submitted among roughly 61 million votes cast in Pennsylvania.

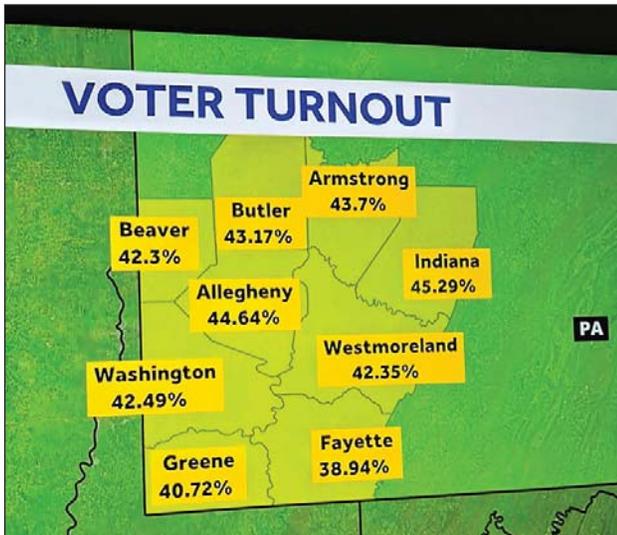
Only 2 of these 149 ballots could potentially have been prevented by stricter voter ID rules—2 votes out of 61 million.

Election administrators have methods in place to flag attempts to cast a fraudulent ballot. For instance, Pennsylvania’s voter management system notes the death of a voter who had been issued a mail-in ballot. If that ballot is completed and returned, election officials do not count it and refer the incident to investigators. Ways to commit voter fraud are limited and can be detected in the process of tabulating votes.

With growing concern about the integrity of elections in the United States, strengthening voter ID has become a bipartisan issue as long as regulations do not disenfranchise eligible citizens. For more information, see:

<https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/08/pennsylvania-voter-id-law-election-fraud-analysis-elections/>

www.pa.gov/services/vote/register-to-vote



Indiana County had the highest proportion of voter turnout among southwestern Pennsylvania counties in the November 2025 general election.

Upcoming Events – Winter/Spring 2026

March 7 – LWVIC Membership Luncheon Program, “Connecting the Dots: Partisan Redistricting Blocks Solving Problems”

12:00 noon-2:00 p.m., First Unitarian Universalist Church, 285 Twolick Drive, Indiana

March 16 – LWVIC Board Meeting

April 20 – LWVIC Board Meeting

7:00 p.m. All members may attend. To request the meeting location and agenda, please send an email to: lwvindianacounty@gmail.com

March 18 – LWV Westmoreland County Program, “Democracy Dies in Digital Silos”

6:30-7:30 p.m., Campana Chapel, University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg. Free. See

www.palwv.org/events to register for this and other League events in Pennsylvania.

March 21 – Red, White, and You: Family Fun Fest, 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Indiana Mall

April 25-26 – LWVIC Yard Sale, Indiana County Fairgrounds Picnic Pavilion, Saturday 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Sunday Bag Sale 12:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

May 4 – Deadline to register to vote or to update registration (www.vote.pa.gov)

May 6 – Lobby Day with LWVPA, State Capitol, Harrisburg PA

May 12 – Last day to apply for a mail-in ballot (www.vote.pa.gov)

May 19 – Primary Election Day