

## **REGISTRATION PROCEDURES**

Permanent Personal Registration (PPR) became mandatory in 1967, primarily due to the unflagging pressure of the League of Women Voters. In 1926 the League began a long campaign to attain a system of permanent personal registration for New York State. Although the 1938 Constitutional Convention authorized such a system, it was not until 1954 that the legislature provided for optional PPR. By 1965 as a result of the work of local Leagues, eighty percent of New York's counties had provided for PPR, with the remainder falling into line when PPR became mandatory in 1967. The system was further improved in 1969 when the mandatory house-to-house check of registrants was eliminated and replaced with verification by postcard. In 1970 another successful League effort led to a statewide, uniform final day of local registration.

In 1973 the League reached consensus for a simple and accessible voter registration system, including registration by mail. A system of mail verification passed the legislature in 1975 and survived a 1976 challenge to its constitutionality in the state Court of Appeals. After 11 years of League prodding, in 1985 the legislature approved and the governor signed a bill providing for the printing, purchase and distribution of a standard voter registration form by the state Board of Elections.

It is a continuing goal of the League of Women Voters to simplify and clarify the Application for Registration Form by eliminating irrelevant questions that serve to intimidate or turn away prospective voters. The passage of legislation to remove the questions relating to employment on the application form was a long-sought victory for the League and other good-government groups who have continuously lobbied for its demise.

In the process of lobbying for a simplified registration system, the League has clearly supported safeguards against fraud, such as the signature check, the mail verification and periodic purging of the rolls. In 1967, the League accepted the two-year Purge that was written into the New York State Election Law; it was formally adopted by LWVNYS consensus in 1973. A review of that consensus in 1975 reversed League position and returned to the pre-1967 position advocating a four-year purge. In 1979 the legislature added primaries and special elections to general elections as voting opportunities where participation would maintain a voter's active status. In 1989 the LWVUS in its Advocacy for the Voter Campaign, came out in favor of repealing the purge of voter registration rolls; the LWVNYS removed its 1975 position by consensus in 1991, affirming the LWVUS position against purging.

The League has always supported the widespread availability of registration forms; therefore, it responded positively to a Governor's Executive Order in 1984 to place the forms in some state agency offices. This order withstood a court challenge, with League support as an amicus curiae, and was declared legal in 1985. The League joined good government groups backing the Governor's Program Bill of 1991 that mandated state agencies to make voting registration forms and assistance available, as of April 1, 1992. League has been lobbying for the extension of agencies distributing the registration forms, for monitoring the visibility of and publicity for agency-based registration forms, and for the goal of trained assistance for those wishing information about registration. The LWVNYS was represented on the ad hoc Advisory Task Force on Implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, a committee appointed by the New York State Board of Elections, to ensure New York State compliance with federal law.

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) became effective January 1, 1995. This federal legislation requires the state to have “motor-voter” registration, “agency based” registration and “mail in” registration. It also forbids the state to purge voters from the registration list because they have not voted.

The League has actively supported the implementation of NVRA in New York State. The law mandates that the agencies use a combined form for voter registration and that the agency staff assist in helping register voters. The League opposed any cuts in the funds necessary to provide the proper training, monitoring and oversight of agency employees. The League actively monitored the various agencies across the state for compliance

Since its adoption in 1976, registration by mail has become widely accepted throughout New York State. For the 1990 general election, the New York State Board of Election figures show 89% of statewide registrations were made by mail and only 7% were made at local registration days. The League worked for the abolishment of local registration days because of the costs involved for few registrants. With the 1991 passage of legislation making local registration days optional to the locality, the position on abolishment of local registration days was dropped (as accomplished) at LWVNYS convention in June 1995.

The League promotes election-day registration at polling places, within strict guidelines to prevent fraud. The 1991 passage of legislation permitting in-person registration at a board of election on any day except a day of election and reducing mail registration deadlines was a welcome step.

Between the years of 1991 and 2006 there was no action on same day voter registration. The League continued to advocate for this, but during the administration of Governor George Pataki no legislation was introduced to address this issue. In January 2007, following the election of Governor Eliot Spitzer, same day voter registration again became a priority. Governor Eliot Spitzer’s Transition Team on Government Reform recommended same day voter registration and early in the 2007 legislative session, the Governor introduced a program bill to address this issue. By the end of the 2007 legislative session, neither house of the legislature has introduced the Governor’s program bill.