

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A portion of the League's pretrial procedures position, diverting certain cases from overcrowded courts to be solved by other means, was broadened to include civil cases. (See pretrial procedures position statement.)

Community Dispute Resolution Centers Program

In 1981, the League supported legislation to create the Community Dispute Resolution Centers Program to facilitate the just and speedy resolution of small disputes by furnishing partial (50%) state support for the creation and operation of such centers for conciliation, mediation, and arbitration as alternatives to pursuing action in civil or criminal court. Since 1981 a series of amendments have enhanced the authority and scope of the centers: in 1984 the program became a permanent part of the Unified Court System, the nation's only permanent state-funded program of its kind; in 1985 the jurisdictional ceiling on monetary awards was increased; and in 1986 referral of selected felonies to these centers for mediation was authorized.

Funding for local programs is based on the 50% principle; the state supplies half of the operating costs and local public and private sources supplies the other half. In 1987, the League successfully supported legislation to provide basic annual grants of up to \$20,000 to each county served to benefit a sizable number of smaller counties having trouble in securing sufficient local funding. Operating costs beyond the minimum grant continue to be funded on the 50% principle. Centers have been established in all of the New York State's 62 counties.

As part of our continuing interest in alternatives to court action, the LWVNYS participated in the planning of the 6th New York State Conference on Alternative Dispute Resolution in September 1989.

Small Claims Court

In 1987, the League successfully supported a bill raising the jurisdictional limit in small claims court from \$1500 to \$2000. This measure provides residents of New York State with continued access to simple, inexpensive, dispute resolution procedures and diverts cases from overcrowded calendars in the higher civil courts.