

SOCIAL POLICY

SOCIAL POLICY POSITIONS OF THE LWVUS **Action Taken Under Those Positions by the LWVNYS**

State action on social policy issues is primarily carried out under LWVUS social policy positions. Under this broad position there are specific positions on childcare, early intervention for children at risk, equality of opportunity, health care, meeting basic human needs, urban policy, and violence. (*Impact on Issues*, 2002-2004 LWVUS, pp. 48-67)

NOTE: Health Care is a separate portfolio for LWVNYS and information regarding state League action appears under Health Care in this publication.

INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION

In 1986 the League sought to block an anti-busing measure that would impede school integration. This measure, approved by the legislature and the governor, was invalidated by the United States Supreme Court.

QUALITY IN EDUCATION

The 1974-76 national program included the phrase “equal access to quality education,” yet the LWVUS has never undertaken a process for determining a common League definition of “quality” that could serve as a basis for action nationwide. When the definition of quality is a key factor in a state or local community, a local or state League must conduct its own study rather than relying on the LWVUS position to take action. (*Impact on Issues*, 2002-2004, LWVUS, p. 49)

The League strives to protect funds for education programs that would aid the disadvantaged. To this end, support is given to budget bills which provide money for opportunity programs, urban centers for vocational training, and pre-kindergarten programs. The League has also supported special aid to urban school districts having problems associated with poverty.

Since 1983 the League has taken a lead in the formation of and participation in the Sex Equity in Education Coalition. Since 1985 the League has actively supported legislation which would provide equal access for all students and employees in education programs and facilities, which receive, state financial assistance.

In 1996 the issue of expanded preschool education was first brought to the attention of state government in a report done by Lieutenant Governor Betsy McCaughey Ross. The League supported the intent of this report. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver advocated for funding for this program in the 1997-98 state budget. Included in the final budget was a \$5.5 billion education plan which will, after a phase-in of five years, include pre-kindergarten classes for all 4-year olds, full-day kindergarten for all children, and smaller class sizes in the early grades.

EMPLOYMENT

In the early 1970s the League acted to eliminate discriminatory hiring practices in state-financed or assisted construction activity. The League has worked for legislation that will assure affirmative action in state-awarded hiring contracts. (*Impact on Issues, 2002-2004, LWVUS, pp. 50*)

In the 1970s the League also focused on the plight of migrant workers, especially the need for adequate standards of health and housing, better education and day care facilities, and prevention of punitive measures that would restrict the right of migrant workers to work for better conditions.

In 1981 the League supported a constitutional amendment to increase the loan capacity of the Job Development Authority. LWVNYS support was an important factor in its subsequent acceptance by voters.

CHILD CARE

Support efforts to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it. (*Impact on Issues, 2002-2004, LWVUS, p. 65-66*)

During the period 1989-1994 a simultaneous tax reduction and budget shortfall adversely impacted a range of needed services. The LWVNYS therefore was cautious about lobbying for childcare services in preference to other needed state programs. In 1991 the state League board decided on a moratorium on lobbying program dollars for all fiscal legislative issues. (Each year until the moratorium, the League had supported expanding the funding and framework of childcare centers.) However, with the introduction of the 1995-1996 Executive budget, Governor Pataki included a four-year tax cut of 25%. These circumstances led the state Board to lift the moratorium on League legislative lobbying concerning social service funding. The League has continued support for legislation that would give tax benefits to corporations that provide day care services to their employees, and increase appropriations for good developmental day care for children of low-income working parents.

In 1988 and 1989 the League worked to provide salary enhancements to child care workers and to increase funding for childcare resource and referral agencies across New York State. Governor Pataki's 1995-96 Executive budget proposal deleted all funding for childcare resource and referral agencies. However, the legislature restored \$500,000 for this valuable service. In 1996-97 League continued its effort to expand the supply of affordable quality childcare for all who need it. In 1996-97 the push for employment-based welfare reform provided an opportunity for childcare advocates to expand and improve childcare for all NYS parents. The League joined 30 other organizations in support of the NYS Child Care Coordinating Council's "CHILD CARE WORKS . . ." campaign. The campaign's five-point plan in brief was to: keep child care affordable; maintain health safety standards; support quality child care; expand the supply of child care; and increase funding for child care resources and referral services that will help parents make informed decisions regarding child care. League lobbied with other campaign members in support of these five points.

The League continued its involvement in the Child Care that Works Campaign (CCtW) and in 1998-99 the League joined with other Child-welfare advocates as part of the campaign in supporting a major legislative proposal to address the critical shortage of affordable, high quality child care/early learning programs in New York State. The total proposed cost of the CCtW proposal in State Fiscal Year 1999-2000 was to be \$277 million. As a way to meet the needs of both parents and children under the CCtW proposal, investments are made in three main component areas: 1) expanded eligibility for subsidized child care, 2) a series of quality initiatives to ensure that New York's child care/early learning programs are the best possible for children, and 3) facility renovation & construction to expand supply. Currently, childcare is more expensive than public university tuition in every area of the state. The members also support proposals to improve quality by investing in teacher pay and education. The League participated in conference calls and lobbying visits.

Advocacy efforts were put on hold in 1999 when child care supporters were forced to deal with the governor's proposed 1999-2000 budget that eliminated universal Pre-kindergarten and early grade class size reduction programs. The League joined the Emergency Coalition to Save universal Pre-K, a statewide consortium of more than 40 groups, including concerned citizens, educators, unions, parents, community agencies, pediatricians and policy analysts. The coalition lobbied to save universal Pre-K and smaller class sizes in the early grades. These were part of the critical early education legislation passed in 1997. The coalition urged the governor and Legislature to:

- Rescind any legislative budget language that eliminates Universal Pre-K,
- Allocate funding for Pre-K at a sufficient level to support a minimum of \$2,700 per child for 43,920 children, and
- Fully fund reduced class sizes for Kindergarten through 3rd grade.

The League advocated that in Pre-K, children develop the cognitive, sensory-motor and social skills they need to succeed in school. Investing in children's early years lays the foundation for reading, writing and math skills, critical to academic success and economic self-sufficiency.

The coalition was successful and Pre-kindergarten was restored in the 1999-2000 state budget.

The League continues to work in the Pre-K Coalition. However, due to the "bare-bones" budget passed on August 4, 2001, no monies were made available for Pre-K programs. The supplemental budget passed after the September terrorist attacks also did not contain any monies for the program. During the budget deficit year 2002 the goal of the Pre-K Coalition was to maintain the infrastructure for this important program. During the budget of 2003 following intense lobbying by the Pre-K Coalition the legislature overrode vetoes by Governor Pataki and supported funding for Pre-k programs. This was a legislative victory.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race.

color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability. (*Impact on Issues, 2002-2004, LWVUS, p. 53*).

Since 1993 the LWVNY has strongly supported legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, credit, public accommodation, education, etc., the so-called Gay Civil Rights Bill. Since its introduction, this legislation has passed the Assembly early in both sessions—1994 and 1995—but was held in the Senate Republican conference.

The League also actively supported the “Private Clubs” Bill to prohibit discrimination in evaluation application for membership in places of public accommodation, resorts or amusement (except in distinctly private clubs). In the 1994 legislative session, this legislation passed both houses and was signed into law.

MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Support programs and policies to prevent or reduce poverty and to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families. (*Impact on Issues, 2002-2004, LWVUS p. 62-65*)

LWVNY action on welfare reform is taken under this LWVUS position.

WELFARE REFORM

The League has worked since 1970 for a decent level of public assistance and curtailment of repressive and punitive welfare legislation in New York State. Support has been given to cost of living increases in public assistance allowances. In 1973 the League was successful in securing the restoration of a 10% cut in benefits, which had been passed during the budget crisis of 1971. In 1972 and in 1981, the League successfully lobbied for both a general increase, and an energy-related increase. In 1989 a year of state budget austerity, League successfully supported legislation to increase public assistance benefits by 15%.

LWVUS opposed the Family Support Act of 1988, citing inadequate funding and mandatory participation quotas for job training programs. Concerned League activists worked at the state and local levels to shape Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs to provide the best possible education and job training.

In the 1994 session, legislation was introduced and passed by the legislature to expand the pilot Home Relief fingerprinting project. The League opposed this legislation based on the lack of clear evidence that this process would have the desired result—fraud prevention and cost savings. The savings noted in the two pilot projects may have been the result of deterring bonafide recipients from seeking genuinely needed assistance.

After the governor’s proposed budget was introduced in early February 1995, the League joined with other advocacy organizations to oppose reductions in funding for programs and services vital to the welfare of children and families throughout NYS. Governor Pataki’s budget proposed a dramatic change in the way child welfare services are funded by the state Department of Social

Services. The 1995-96 State Budget created a block grant for Family and Children Services, both merging and cutting funding for multiple child welfare programs.

The Executive Budget for the 1996-97 Fiscal Year contained proposals for welfare reform predicated upon presumed federal action that would be employment-based, limit the time recipients could receive benefits, and essentially hand over welfare to the states. The League monitored this effort to reform welfare and urged the governor, and the leadership in the Senate and the Assembly to make this reform more than symbolic politics. Support was given for reform that would prevent or reduce poverty and promote sustained self-sufficiency for individuals and families. When the 1996 legislative session ended in early July the outcome of federal reform was uncertain and ideological differences between the Assembly and the governor prevented a bipartisan compromise on welfare reform. In the final budget; the proposed time limits, benefit cuts, block grants to local governments, and earnings disregard failed to be adopted.

In August 1996 President Clinton signed The Personal Responsibility Act of 1996, ending an era when entitlement to cash assistance was assumed and the oversight of the welfare system was carried out by the federal government. All states were faced with developing welfare reform designed to implement the new federal requirements. The federal reform requires that 50% of all adults in single parent families and 90% of adults in two parent families will have to fulfill the work requirements by 2002. In November the governor announced his reform proposal, New York Works. In an effort to prevent this reform would have at the local level. Local Leagues were urged to schedule an appointment with their Department of Social Services Commissioner to discuss reform and seek answers to specific questions. This provided the information necessary for lobbying based on the local effects of welfare reform.

The state League along with six other organizations released a joint position statement addressing the following pivotal provisions in the reform debate: expansion of alternative sources of income support such as child support and the state earned income tax credit; child care; transitional benefits including health care coverage; follow-up case management and other support services that help maintain someone in employment; and workable models for providing sufficient funding for training and transportation needs. In addition to these provisions, we supported expansion of the Child Assistance Program (CAP) to all counties with the local share of the administrative costs to be borne by the state and increased funding for preventive family planning services. The League opposed any reduction in cash benefits, a cashless Safety Net Program (vouchers), and allowing counties the option of accepting their funds in the form of a block grant.

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

The League recognized that by expanding the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) 1.1 million low and moderate-income working families would benefit. \$170 million would be added to their income as a wage supplement. The League advocated that this not only increases the pay of working families but also encourages thousands of other families to leave welfare for work. In 1999, this measure finally won support from both the Assembly and the Senate and was included in the final budget. Unlike other tax cuts, the EITC can be fully financed with federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) surplus funds or State Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds under TANF.

MEDICAID FUNDING OF ABORTIONS

The League believes that low-income women should have the same access to legal medical procedures for which income-independent women are able to pay. From 1978 through 1997, the League lobbied against attempts to withdraw this funding in New York State. The 1995 budget negotiations included language which would mandate family planning counseling before a Medicaid funded abortion. The League opposed this budget language and, as a result of vigorous lobbying, it was not included as part of the budget. The League has and will continue to monitor this very important right for low-income women. (See Reproductive Rights, Hope v. Perales in the Government section.) During every budget vote anti-abortion legislators have unsuccessfully attempted to delete Medicaid funding from the state's budget.

FAIR HOUSING

Support for measures to meet the needs for affordable and accessible housing through use of state funds and incentives to localities.

League action in housing began in 1968 when the LWVUS added support for equality of opportunity in housing to that for education and employment. The LWVNYS reached a position in 1970 providing the basis for action in housing.

HOUSING

Statement of Position

As announced by the State Board, September 1970

Revised to reflect State Convention action, 1999

- 1) Support for increased state funds for affordable and accessible housing and for rent subsidies.**
- 2) Support for incentives to encourage communities to accept their share of the overall responsibility for providing sufficient housing for low and moderate-income families.**
- 3) Support for the participation of counties in meeting housing needs, through such methods as permitting the establishment of County Housing Authorities.**
- 4) Support for legislation which requires local governments to take affirmative action to provide some of their vacant land for low-income families.**

The League has worked to eliminate discrimination in rentals to low-income families and has supported government subsidies for housing for these families. In the early 1970s the League worked for fair housing by seeking adequate funding for the Division of Human Rights and administrative changes in, and expansion of, the Human Rights Law to make it more effective.

In 1974 and 1975 there was a successful effort for the passage of the Warranty of Habitability Law, which added an obligation by landlords to maintain rental properties in compliance with applicable codes and an obligation of tenants to pay rent. In 1979 the League successfully supported a Retaliatory Eviction bill, which protects tenants against retaliation when they notify officials of housing code violations or otherwise act in good faith to secure their rights to habitable housing.

Since 1974 the League has supported implementation of the Housing and Community Development Act which consolidated federal assistance under the block grant approach. In 1989 the League supported legislation for a constitutional amendment, which would extend to counties the housing and development powers now granted to cities, towns and villages, an amendment, which would help provide affordable housing. This bill received first passage. However, it needed two successive sessions to approve this legislation, and it was defeated in 1991. The League continues to support this form of legislation.

