

## **WELCOME TO THE LEAGUE**

*(available as a stand-alone publication, from the state League Office)*

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### **WHAT IS THE LWV?**

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization open to men and women. It encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The LWV neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for elective office, but does encourage its members as individuals to take part fully in the political process.

The League operates at the local, state, and national levels in every state, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In New York State, there are over 50 local Leagues.

### **WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE LWV?**

The LWV grew out of the suffrage movement. In 1920, after the passage of the 19th amendment, Carrie Chapman Catt, who led the battle and later lived in New Rochelle, organized the League of Women Voters of the United States. The LWV's first goal was to equip women to exercise their new right to vote. Since the 1970's, membership in the LWV has been open to women and men and now men make up a significant part of our membership. Political action based on knowledge gained from study became the cornerstone of the LWV's diverse agenda.

### **A SAMPLING OF WHAT THE LEAGUE DOES:**

#### **Voter Service and Citizen Education**

The League works to encourage citizens to register to vote and to take part in government and politics through organization of:

- Candidate forums/debates
- Voter registration drives
- Voters guides with information on election requirements and specific ballot proposals for upcoming election
- On-line voter & absentee ballot information
- New citizen information & political directories

The League also coordinates studies and educational forums for member and public education. Recent forums or studies include:

- Saving local tax dollars through governmental shared services and consolidation
- Maintaining integrity of the vote in this era of post-lever voting systems
- Running for office in New York City

#### ***Advocacy and Lobbying***

The League will lobby legislators on specific legislation supporting our issues such as:

- Transparency in government
- Campaign finance reform

- Ethics reform
- Rules reform
- Redistricting
- Court system and judiciary
- Water quality, land resource management
- Health care reform
- Domestic violence
- Equal pay
- State financing of education
- Transportation

The League's advocacy work includes:

- Developing public policy briefs with detailed information and recommendations for addressing the issue through specific reforms
- Providing forums for discussing issues and educating policymakers and the public

### **HOW IS THE LWV ORGANIZED AND HOW CAN A MEMBER PARTICIPATE?**

The LWV operates at the local, state, and national levels. Joining at one level automatically makes you a member of the other two levels. Members usually participate at the local level when they first join.

**Membership:** open to any person who subscribes to the purpose and principles of the LWV. The LWV of New York State is committed to diversity, recognizing that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making in a democracy. Diversity also enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs.

- **Voting members** are citizens at least 18 years old.
- **Household members** are two or more members living at the same address.
- **Associate members** are persons who are under 18 years old or who are non-citizens.
- **Members-at-Large (MAL)** live outside the area of and are not enrolled in any local LWV, but are members of the state and national LWV.
- **Life members** are voting members who have belonged to the League for 50 years. Life members pay no dues.

#### **Board of Directors:**

- Officers elected at each level of LWV by the membership at annual meetings or conventions
- Directors elected or appointed per the League's bylaws.
- Each board member is responsible for managing the activities of the League as well as for a specific area such as program, voter service, membership, finance, bulletin, public relations, publications, action or advocacy.

#### **Committees:**

- **Study** committees study a public issue of LWV concern chosen by members at their annual meetings. They research, clarify, and develop a focus for League consideration. Their responsibility is to present facts to the members who decide

whether there is a *consensus* (*substantial agreement of members*) to establish a *position* upon which the League can take action.

- **Standing** committees carry out the balance of the LWV's work in voter service, membership, budget and advocacy. Advocacy consists of lobbying, testifying, letters to the editor, press conferences, press releases, visits to editorial boards, letters and emails, forums, public meetings, coalitions, litigation and/or publications.
- Positions are evaluated periodically where members determine whether to retain or drop them.

#### **Meetings:**

- Each local LWV determines its own schedule, but most meet at least once a month.
- Each local LWV holds an annual meeting to elect officers, to set local dues, and to adopt local program, bylaws, and budget. All members can and should attend the annual meetings.

#### **Conventions and Councils:**

- A **national** convention: every other year in even years.
- A **state** convention is held in odd-numbered years.
- Both are comprised of delegates elected by local LWVs in numbers proportionate to their membership. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention delegate. Observers and guests may attend but may not vote. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support and bylaws, and elect officers for the next biennium.

### **HOW MUCH TIME MUST I DEVOTE TO THE LWV?**

The level of involvement is up to you.

Some Members support League activities with their dues alone. Some members attend social events and educational forums.

Busy professionals often volunteer for time-limited projects that can be completed on their time schedules. Examples of such involvement include, writing Amicus briefs, analyzing budgets, analyzing bills or preparing testimony in areas of expertise, speaking on subjects in which they have professional expertise, acting as moderators of candidate forums, writing letters to elected officials or letters to the editor in areas of expertise.

Some members with more time to devote to the LWV organize major projects or elect to assume board positions.

The LWV is unusual, in that it offers opportunities for involvement at the local, state, and national levels of government, depending upon your level of interest.

### **HOW DOES THE LEAGUE FINANCE ITS ACTIVITIES?**

The LWV is a non-profit organization that relies primarily on dues and contributions to operate and to achieve its goals. Support comes from members, nonmembers and the community at large.

Each local LWV decides the amount of its dues. From its funds, the local LWV pays a *Per-Member-Payment (PMP)* to support national, state, and regional Leagues. The LWV also conducts fundraising campaigns at each level.

Since the LWV is a lobbying organization, donations for advocacy activities and League membership dues are not tax-deductible.

The Education Foundations at the state and national level qualify as tax-deductible organizations since their funds are used exclusively for educational projects.

### **WHAT ARE THE LWV'S PRINCIPLES?**

The LWV believes:

- in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States;
- that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible;
- that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education which provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination;
- that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government;
- that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems which affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy, and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems;

that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of an international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.