

# LWV CHICAGO

## 2017-18 YEAR OF ENGAGEMENT

### CHICAGO IN FOCUS

LWV Chicago's premier lecture series once again hosted leading figures in city government as speakers:

- Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart
- Cook County Hospital System President Hil Hammock
- Chicago Board of Elections Chair Marisel Hernandez and Communications Director Jim Allen
- ACLU Illinois' Rebecca Glenberg

### HOT TOPICS

Chicago in Focus speakers addressed topics in local and national news:

- Unjust incarceration
- Health care costs and coverage
- Voter turnout and securing the vote
- Chicago as a Sanctuary City



Pat Wilder

## Outreach and Observation

League makes new connections, keeps watch on city government

Among the year's highlights:

**VOTER SUMMIT.** In mid-November, LWV Chicago and UIC held the first-ever Chicago Voter Turnout Summit. With support from the McCormick Foundation, the summit gathered 60 representatives from community groups across the city to discuss why people aren't voting and what would make a difference. Spurred by the turnout for the last midterm election in 2014--less than 17 percent--the summit explored the problem with panelists Lance Gough, Chicago Board of Elections; Andres Torres, McCormick Foundation; and Betty Magness, Rainbow PUSH, and small group discussions led by LWV Chicago member Cat Enright. Participants agreed on the need for more events like this one. As one commented: "Sharing information about the barriers to voting (cultural, language, etc.) is a great way to engage the larger community to often less-noticed challenges facing eligible voters in immigrant communities."

**COLLABORATIONS.** The League supported or sponsored events involving the Pink Hat Run, Chicago Foundation for Women, Working Women in History Project, the Chicago Public Library, the Women's March, and March to the Polls.

**DIVERSITY.** The Committee on Diversity and Inclusion was formed to serve the League's growing membership and reinforce its commitment to give a voice and a vote to people of all backgrounds.

**MONITORING CITY GOVERNMENT.** With an eye on accountability, members of the City Government Committee attended eight days of City Council hearings on the mayor's proposed 2018 budget and identified issues such as providing hiring and contracting opportunities to minority and women applicants; budgeting for overtime; and restoration of streets and sidewalks after city and utility construction. Committee members decided to interview aldermen to get their perspectives on the budgeting process.

The Evening Education Committee has been pursuing different ways to gain more oversight of the Chicago Board of Education.. In addition to the overall goal of a legislative requirement for an independent finance and audit reviewing body, the Committee has pushed for formal training of CPS board members (as required by state law but unenforced by CPS) and monitored state budgetary issues.

## ELECTION 2018

The League's more than 100 Deputy Voter Registrars participated in a wide range of voter registration activities. League members organized and led voter registration drives in high schools, colleges and universities, and senior living facilities.

In tandem with Chicago Votes, League DVRs coordinated voter registration for detainees at Cook County Jail on a regular basis. Along with the ACLU, League members helped educate voters about their rights and how to vote.

The League is tracking legislation that would expand voting access and education in county jails statewide.

In addition to the Chicago in Focus program about voter turnout and securing the vote, the League briefed members and the public about the candidates, issues, and referenda on the March 20 Primary Election Ballot.

League members also moderated candidate forums and served as poll watchers and election judges.



Leslie Chenoweth, Esta Kallen, Cat Enright

LWV Chicago education programs in 2017-8 could not have been more timely.

On the heels of a *Chicago Tribune* report about the dangers of lead levels in the city's drinking water, the Environment Committee hosted a Briefing on Water's Journey from Lake Michigan to Your Faucet. The *Tribune* report analyzed 2717 homes whose water had been tested over the last 2 years and found that 70 percent of samples had lead levels above the maximum allowed by federal law. At the May 12 Briefing, environmental attorney David C. Mueller reviewed technical issues associated with lead piping, Illinois state law, and the practical and legal considerations of water sampling, mitigation, and response. Nancy Loeb, director of the Environment Advocacy Center at Northwestern University, reviewed the health risks associated with exposure to lead, the inadequacy of

current regulations, and actions individuals may take to protect their families and push for better state laws.

Days before the release of a report on a state probe of Chicago Public Schools' handling of special education funding, the Daytime Education Committee hosted a Briefing on the effect of special education regulations in the classroom. Lorca Elementary School math and science teacher Deanne Zachacki described the data requirements that interfere with daily classroom instruction and testing that can delay delivery of services to a child for more than 60 days.

### Education and advocacy:

### Making a difference

**LWV Advocacy** efforts have been bearing fruit. The South Side Unit's efforts to rename Balbo Drive in honor of Ida B. Wells-Barnett attracted key

## Issues and Actions

### League targets lead in drinking water, special education funding, Balbo Drive, and city finances

support when two aldermen introduced an ordinance to change the name of the street designated for Italian fascist Italo Balbo and honor the civil and women's rights pioneer. Members of the African American community and the University of Chicago are already on board.

The City Government Committee helped generate support for a city ordinance that would require a comprehensive financial review of any proposal affecting city finances when it posted a TFA request on May 20. The request explained that the proposed ordinance would promote efficient and economical decision-making by requiring the City Council Office of Financial Analysis to prepare a fiscal impact statement on any resolutions affecting revenue, appropriations, fiscal liability, or the sale or lease of city assets of more than \$15 million. The proposal passed the City Council on May 25.



Annie Logue, Juan Salgado, Leslie Chenoweth, Zachary Fardon, Evelyn Diaz, Natalie Moore

## State of the City: Reaching Across the Divide

At this year's Luncheon, panelists discussed how neighborhoods and the city as a whole can "Bridge the Opportunity Divide" in three areas: housing, education, and criminal justice.

**Housing:** Evelyn Diaz, President of the Heartland Institute for Human Needs and Human Rights: "We have the power to solve complex problems inside communities, but we're stuck in our ways of thinking. Instead of looking at improvements we can make, we list barriers." There are innovative ways of addressing inadequate housing, such as tiny homes, micro-apartments, shipping containers converted into dwellings. "We can begin to get rid of barriers if we try some of these," she said.

**Education:** Juan Salgado, Chancellor, Chicago City Colleges: "We need to stop being reactive and focus on the whole person, the whole being, the whole city." He noted the proximity between Harold Washington College and Aon not only in location but in terms of partnership. Nevertheless, he said, "We need to attack collective indifference...think about our assets, bring friends along, and challenge one another: how can we become more proactive and foster leadership in institutions?"

**Criminal Justice:** Zachary Fardon, managing partner, King & Spaulding: Crimes and gun violence are perpetuated in areas that account for 10 percent of the city's geographic

footprint, in areas that have little infrastructure, no consistent quality schools, and few jobs. "We need to coordinate solutions across areas, support education and work to give young folks something to do other than join a gang." In his open letter of resignation as US Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Fardon suggested, among other solutions, creating bricks-and-mortar youth pathway centers with coordinated social services and overhauling the current money-based bail bond system so the violent are kept behind bars and the poor are not. Reiterating these points, he noted, "This is not magical. It is a path to bring resources and organizations together to break down barriers."

"The [State of the City] program is stimulating thought on ways churches might be uniquely positioned to dismantle the structures of racism and segregation in Chicago."

—Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Carlson, pastor, St. Pauls United Church.

"I was impressed by the suggestion from Evelyn Diaz that there might be a way to connect community to community and match communities that lack services and supports with those that do. This grows out of the necessity that all key areas--housing, schools, job opportunities--need to work together to bridge the divide."

—Nancy Brandt

## The Cost of Segregation

In its groundbreaking 2017 report "**The Cost of Segregation**," the Metropolitan Planning Council identified the effects of improving the integration of Chicago's communities.

By bringing the city's segregation rate down to the national median average:

- Incomes among African Americans would rise on average by \$3000 per person per year.
- The regional homicide rate would drop by 30 percent.
- The proportion of people with bachelor's degrees would rise by 83,000.

Among the short-term strategies identified in the Planning Council's 2018 follow-up study were:

- Inclusive housing
- Equity in education
- A reformed criminal justice system

Experts in each of these areas were invited as panelists for this year's State of the City Luncheon to answer the question: What can we do to make one Chicago? Some of their answers are reported above.

## League of Women Voters of Chicago

LWV Chicago has grown steadily over the last two years, with total membership now more than 300. Thanks, Members, for your activism and support.

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## LWV CHICAGO

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The League of Women Voters of Chicago is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization whose purpose is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Founded in 1920 to give women, as new voters, information on voting processes and policy issues, the League today is one of America's most trusted and respected sources for accurate and fair information about issues affecting all citizens.