

# 2018-19 YEAR IN REVIEW

EVERY CITIZEN AN INFORMED VOTER



Heading into 2019's Election Year LWV Chicago chose, as its theme: Every Citizen an Informed Voter. This report highlights League members' activities as educators and voter registrars:

- Partnering with community groups to host 18 candidate forums for mayor, city treasurer and aldermen.
- Registering more than 1500 new voters at 22 high schools, 7 community colleges, senior centers and Cook County Jail.
- Distributing 8000 voting information bookmarks before the General Election and 6000 before the Municipal Election.
- Gathering responses to questionnaires on key city issues from 5 mayoral candidates and 45 candidates for City Council.

League members worked with Chicago Votes, Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, IMAN, DePaul Prof. Christina Rivers, and others to draft a new law that will provide civics education for everyone leaving a state correctional facility, helped WTTW with the Video Voter Guide, briefed members on the General Election and the public on voting for judges.



## LITTLE VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOL FORUM

The participation of the students was critical to the success of the forum and the future involvement of our community in self-determination.--Cesar Nunez, Enhance Chicago

## CHICAGO IN FOCUS

# Connection to Communities

Public programs this past year emphasized the strength and diversity of city neighborhoods, the threats that confront them and the ways they are overcoming obstacles.



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### Importance of the Latino Community

The Latino population is not only increasing, it is driving both local and state economies. Latinos accounted for all of the state's population growth between 2000 and 2013 and accounted for nearly 80% of the growth in the state's economy, according to Sylvia Puente, speaker at the Chicago in Focus program in March 18. Puente, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum, noted that although nearly all young Latinos and 64% of adults are U.S. citizens, inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 census could reduce Latino participation in the census process. If Latinos do not participate, Puente warned, funding would not be appropriately allocated to their communities and Illinois could lose a congressional seat.

### Building Communities

Since it was formed to combat the problem of toxic pollution in their neighborhood, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) has defied conventional wisdom. Told that the community could never shut down local power plants or successfully cleanup a Superfund site, LVEJO nevertheless prevailed, retiring not one but two coal power plants, won an environmental battle with Celotex Superfund campaign, helped create the first public park in the area in 75 years, and re-established the 31<sup>st</sup> Street bus route. In the process the organization proved that, "as a community, we had a right to determine what happens in our neighborhood," said Liz Wasserman, executive director, at the May Chicago in Focus program.

The school-to-prison-pipeline, or the high inner city incarceration rate where "your zip code is a strong driver of success," can be interrupted by "advancing practices to support children," said Renya Hernandez, director of Research and Public Policy at the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement at February's CiF. The pipeline is not about "bad kids or families" but poverty, lack of affordable housing and job opportunities. "Ultimately, the family, community, school connection is the pathway to kids being successful."

# Making a Difference

The League showcased coalitions and other groups that have made a positive change and identified areas that call for action.

## Equal Rights

Thought dead, the Equal Rights Amendment has been reborn, in large part due to LWVIL and other Leagues' work. ERA Illinois Coalition, which included LWVIL and more than 100 other organizations, successfully pushed Illinois legislators to ratify the ERA in 2018. Led by Amy Jo (A.J.) Conroy, board member of the American Association of University Women, and Michelle Fadeley, Illinois NOW president, the coalition capitalized on winds of change in the General Assembly and overcame lack of funding that hampered outreach. Passage of the ERA still faces many obstacles, but Conroy and Fadeley are up to the task, as they shared ways to educate, advocate and amplify ERA messages at the May Briefing.

Reacting to the Trump administration's dissolution of the White House Council on Women and Girls created by former First Lady Michelle Obama, Kina Collins took matters into her own hands. At the May Chicago in Focus program, she described how she visited 68 of the state's 102 counties, informing legislators and others about issues affecting women and girls, including pay equity and domestic violence. But her journey did not end when Governor Rauner signed the council into law. She's encouraging the League and other groups to recommend members of the 21-person council and may help Wisconsin develop its own council.

## Drawbacks to Diversity

Over the past year LWV Chicago Briefings shed light on inequities that disadvantage the disabled and segregate the poor and people of color.

Currently, 30% of CTA rapid transit stations do not have elevators to provide access for the disabled. Alternative modes of transportation offer their own obstacles. Paratransit (pre-arranged, door-to-door service) offered by Pace is unreliable and costly. Out-of-pocket cost to users is \$3.25 per ride, about a dollar higher than CTA fare, but actual cost is \$40-45 per ride when you count labor and gas, said Adam Ballard, housing and transportation policy analyst at Access Living at the Chicago LWV Chicago Briefing. Although Ballard believes equitable transit service for the disabled is not on the radar screen for city lawmakers at the present time, that could change as they recognize the economic angle. "It seems to be true that companies that have a more diverse workforce, including the disabled, have better economic outcomes."

Chicago has been and continues to fail in urban planning because it follows developer-led plans rather than promoting sustainable, affordable housing development and preservation, said Paul Sajovec, chief of staff for the 42<sup>nd</sup> Ward who spoke at a Briefing on Affordable Housing. But the city can begin to foster affordable housing by creating a comprehensive citywide plan and conducting a racial equity impact assessment, centralizing zoning and ensuring transparency and accountability, implementing and ingraining urban planning policies, and above all, commit to the work necessary to strengthen all neighborhoods rather than focus investment on a chosen few.

# On the Local Level

LWV Chicago Committees trace the effects of national and state policies and monitor Chicago government. Here is some of what they've done in the last year.

## Public Education

LWV Chicago committees review state funding for school districts, efforts to privatize public school systems, the effectiveness of school boards and Local School Councils. Most recently, the Evening Education Committee found that, although funding through the Evidence-Based Formula is having a positive effect on inequities, increased funding will be needed to eliminate a structural budget deficit, fund education, restore human services the state's universities. Now that the Illinois legislature has voted to make the graduated fair tax a referendum issue, LWV Chicago looks forward to working for passage of the amendment in November 2020.

The committee notes that LWVIL and other advocates lobbied successfully to abolish the State Charter School Commission, which had the power to overrule local school districts' ability to deny new charters, and it informed members of the General Assembly about the drawbacks of an overly large elected school board for Chicago.

## City Government

The City Government Committee will be attending or watching videoed City Council and Council Committee meetings, focusing particularly on budget, finance and rules and ethics. The committee is developing a standardized format for observers' reports.

## Celebrating Accomplishment

Less than two years after LWV Chicago President Annie Logue proposed naming a street after Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Congress Parkway was dedicated to the memory of the civil rights leader. LWV Chicago spearheaded and mobilized 55 civic groups and Aldermen Sophia King and Brendan Reilly. The League is proud that the City of Chicago has voted to honor Ida B. Wells, local hero and American freedom fighter.



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