

AN UPDATE ON ELECTIONS AND THE PANDEMIC

May 3, 2020

All of us on the LWVSC board deeply appreciate the efforts that our members (as well as all the neighbors and other citizens our members have enlisted) have made to reach out to legislators and to the Governor in support of measures to ensure the health and safety of voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have asked for action from our local Leagues and membership, and you have responded. Legislators have told us that they have heard from many of you, loud and clear. We encourage you to continue those efforts.

So far there has been no meaningful response from the Governor or the General Assembly. However, the General Assembly will return May 12-14. In keeping with our state motto (While I Breathe I Hope), we continue to hope that legislators will act then to expand absentee voting and take other needed steps to protect our elections. However, action on a contentious issue in this short time frame is difficult. In this case, there is concern among some legislators that election issues would provoke a floor fight that would endanger passage of the continuing resolution that failed in the last meetings because of the Santee Cooper floor fight. The continuing resolution is necessary to ensure that state government doesn't grind to a halt at the end of June. Therefore, legislative action re safeguarding elections in May remains an uphill battle, although we hope that there will be some productive action.

We therefore support and appreciate the efforts of the ACLU and NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) in their federal court case on this issue. We also appreciate the efforts of Rhodes Bailey, Robert Wehrman, and the Democratic Party in their petition for emergency relief to the SC Supreme Court. We are told that in both cases we can expect rapid action from the courts since the primary is scheduled next month and in-person absentee voting begins in a few days.

What can the League and its members do? We can continue to tell legislators and the governor that we want expanded access to both mail and in-person absentee voting to protect voters and workers during 2020 elections. Beyond that, a specific long-term advocacy strategy depends heavily on what the legislature and courts do or don't do. The LWVSC

board will attempt to define an effective and useful strategy when we have that information.

In doing so we will take into account the messages we are hearing from local Leagues. We have heard local League leaders express a strong desire to take more action. We have also heard local League leaders express concern that their members could become unduly discouraged when they are repeatedly asked to undertake advocacy to which there is no response. As always, the LWVSC board will continue to seek advocacy strategies that help our members take meaningful and effective action to Make Democracy Work.

Whatever the legislative and judicial actions, the League must **continue and greatly expand its public education work to ensure that voters are informed about all of the options open to them to vote safely and securely**. Local Leagues are also strongly encouraged to create new initiatives for recruiting volunteers as poll workers.