

Dear President/Action Chair,

In these times, and as we approach 100 years of national suffrage, the League's goals of "Making Democracy Work, Empowering Voters and Defending Representative Democracy" have inspired this concurrence position. The LWV of Sacramento County is requesting that it be considered and recommended by your League at your upcoming program planning meeting. [Background and more info on Page 2]

Concurrence on Voter Representation / Election Process

Category: Government. Possible title: Voter Representation /Election Process (LWVC Board decision)

Note: We are proposing our current LWVC Elections Systems position under Government, which supports a particular election method, be replaced with this concurrence position.

Position in Brief:

Support election methods at each level of government that encourage participation, are verifiable and auditable and enhance representation for all voters."

Position in Full:

The LWV-CA promotes an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive. (LWVUS)* We encourage election methods that provide the broadest voter representation possible, have a positive effect on voter participation, and are expressive of voter choices. (AZ & CO)*

Whether for single or multiple winner contests, the League supports election methods that:

- Encourage voter participation and voter engagement.
- Encourage those with minority opinions to participate, including under-represented communities.
- Are verifiable and auditable.
- Promote access to voting.
- Promote competitive elections.
- Maximize effective votes/minimize "wasted" votes.
- Promote sincere voting over strategic voting.
- Discourage negative campaigning.
- Encourage meaningful discussion of issues.
- Require the winner to receive a majority of the votes for executive and other single seat offices.
- Are compatible with acceptable ballot-casting methods, including vote-by-mail.

(LWVUS, ME, OR, CA, MN, MA, FL, NC, OK, SC, VT, WA, Santa Monica)*

The LWV-CA believes in representative government. The League supports systems that elect policy-making bodies—legislatures, councils, commissions, and boards that proportionally reflect the people they represent. We support systems that inhibit political manipulation (e.g. gerrymandering).

The LWV-CA supports enabling legislation to allow local jurisdictions to explore alternative election methods, as well as supporting state election laws allowing for more options at both the state and local levels. With the adoption of any election system, the League believes that education of the voting public is important and funding for startup and voter education should be available. We encourage a concerted voter education process.

(LWVUS, AZ, CA, OR, SC, WA)*

End of Statement

* All language from LWVUS Principles and multiple State positions.

Background

We take pride in our name, The League of Women Voters, and our work as a multi-issue organization over the last century. The LWV has positions on a multitude of public policy issues decided by our elected representatives, however, *we do not have a position on how we elect those representatives.*

And yet, those representatives decide the public policy we care about...healthcare, environment etc.

Our plurality system came with the British and it has limits when it comes to “Making Democracy Work.” Just one example: a voter’s choice can help elect their least favorite candidate due to vote splitting. Potential good candidates often choose not to run because they don’t want to be a “*spoiler candidate.*” Unsatisfied with the limits of the plurality system and its impact on representation, 14 state Leagues as well as many local Leagues have undertaken studies and developed positions supporting alternatives to the plurality system, which is also known as “first past the post.” originating in the late 1800’s.

Here in California and cities around the country, advanced systems have saved taxpayers and candidates money, reduced negative campaigning, achieved majority winners while preventing vote splitting among similar candidates, minimized “wasted” votes and provided more voters a meaningful voice. Additionally, they have helped elect women and candidates more representative of their communities.

Leagues that did studies and consensus discovered no electoral method is perfect. However, some are better than others at representing voters and creating more opportunities for women and under-represented voters. These Leagues recommended election methods as a result of their studies as well as criterion for evaluating a method and best practices.

This concurrence position does NOT support any particular election method but rather supports the LWV goals for “an open, governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive.” It allows for Leagues to use the position to evaluate or propose electoral options. In many jurisdictions, options are needed as remedies to voting rights lawsuits that seek minority representation.

Why Adopt the Concurrence?

This concurrence provides us a clear, but flexible, base of principles to explore election method reforms and take action when appropriate for voters. Across the nation, cities in various states have adopted new election methods, including Minnesota, California, Washington, Texas, North Dakota, Illinois, New York and many others, including new methods used for statewide office and Congressional contests in Maine. Most major newspapers have editorialized in support of electoral options to improve representation and reduce voter apathy, recognizing that democracy depends on it.

Our Process

This proposed concurrence position is a compilation of positions adopted by AZ, CA, CO, FL, MA, ME, MN, NC, OK, OR, PA, SC, VT, WA, and established LWVUS principles on representation.

While this is not an exhaustive list of state & local leagues that have conducted related studies, these states were instrumental in the formulation of the proposed concurrence.

How can the League use this Position in the Future?

- Local Leagues can use it to propose or evaluate an electoral system proposed in their community.
- Local Leagues can propose or support a suitable election method as a remedy to voting rights lawsuits that are filed when a protected group is under-represented by the current system.
- LWVC can use it to support or oppose state legislation.
- Meets language requirements for future LWVUS concurrence.

Submitted by: LWV of Sacramento County. For more information or questions, contact Action Chair Paula Lee (916) 704-0195 paula.lee@comcast.net