

THE VOTER

July 2026

Empowering Voters - Defending Democracy

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A Message from the LWVML Presidential Triad

In a time when the daily news can feel discouraging, it is worth pausing to notice the good news close to home. Our League has a great deal to celebrate.

This year, we celebrated our fifth anniversary as a recognized League. From the beginning, when 10 founding members first met in the Sonora fire station meeting room, we have grown into a League of 75 members. That growth is not just a number; it reflects the energy, skill, and commitment members bring to civic life in the Mother Lode.

Our public forums have continued to improve with each event. We have learned, adapted, and set a high bar for nonpartisan civic forums in our community. We also held a very successful fundraiser last year and are looking forward to another one this August.

Our interest groups remain active and engaging, helping not only our members but the broader community learn. We now have four, including Water (WIGs), Democracy in Action (DIGs), Fire (FIGs), and Homelessness (HIGs). The Observer Corps continues to attend and monitor meetings of the Board of Supervisors, Sonora City Council, and Tuolumne Utilities District. In addition to their monthly reports to our members, they have written an end-of-year report for The Union Democrat on the work of these local government bodies.

Our Voter Service team has hosted voter registration and education tables at numerous events throughout Calaveras and Tuolumne counties, partnering with other local organizations, including Columbia Community College and the Jamestown Family Resource Center, to name a couple. We also shared voting information with people in the Calaveras and Tuolumne County jails, extending our commitment to voter education and access to underserved communities.

At our membership meetings, invited speakers have addressed topics that matter to our community. These programs help us learn together, stay connected, and deepen our understanding of local issues.

Most importantly, our members continue to make all this possible. You have volunteered as greeters, ushers, question collectors, set-up and take-down crew members, educators, registrars, group leaders, presenters, poster hangers, fundraiser supporters, and ticket sellers. You bring treats when asked, offer rides to other members, attend meetings, write articles, and step forward when help is needed. You are what makes our League a success!

This is only an incomplete list of good news about our League. I hope it reminds you of many more examples. If you have a League success, a member kindness, or a moment of civic hope to share, please send it to us at info.lwvml@gmail.com so we can continue celebrating the good work we are doing together.

We also hope you'll join one or more of our committees, interest groups, and/or the Board, and be a part of our success in the future. In addition, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have ideas on where we can do better.

Jane Braga, Leonides Russell, and Maria Benech



Please Save The Date and Volunteer

Once again, LWVML will be doing a fundraiser with the Murphy's Creek Theater. We will be hosting the preview night for their production of "What the Constitution Means to Me." **Please help us sell tickets to this fun and poignant event.**

Heidi Schreck, the playwright and main character, performs some scenes as her modern self and others as her 15-year-old self. The play was a finalist for the 1989 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. Schreck funded her entire college education with these debates. The play's themes include immigration and domestic violence as they relate to women in her family. She also dives into the 14th Amendment, describing the pitfalls of the Constitution and discussing citizenship rights and what it means to be an American.

We are looking for volunteers to serve on the organizing committee, help set up and take down at the event, bring a sweet or savory appetizer to the reception, post flyers, and, of course, to sell tickets. If you are interested, attend the next Membership/Fundraising meeting on Tuesday July 7th at 1 pm at the Senior Center in Sonora or contact Patricia Horsthius at 209-559-5242.

Fundraiser **LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®]
OF THE MOTHER LODE

*What the Constitution Means
to Me* Thursday,
August 6, 2026

Pulitzer Prize Finalist

...a thought-provoking play by Heidi Schreck that explores the profound impact of the U.S. Constitution on the lives of individuals, particularly women.



Murphys Creek Theater

580 S. Algiers St., Murphys, CA

6:00-7:00 Reception

7:00-9:00 Performance

**TICKETS \$25 available at MOUNTAIN BOOKSTORE
or contact Brenda at BMCHENRY209@GMAIL.COM**

The 28th amendment was ratified and Congress has not acted to make it part of the Constitution. Add your name to demand Equal Rights for women at
<https://www.lwv.org/take-action/add-your-name-demand-equal-rights>.

No General Meeting in July

July and August Meetings/Events

Thursday July 2nd, until 2 pm

Comments to the US Postal Service regarding their proposed barriers to mail in voting.

Go to the [LWV website](#) for a quick and easy way to comment via email.

Tuesday July 7th, 1 pm to 2 pm

Membership/Fundraising — Patricia Horsthius
Chair/Deborah Rei Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday July 8th, 8 am to 3 pm

LWVML Board Retreat
Murphys

Friday July 10th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead
Starbucks in Angels Camp

Wednesday July 15th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Monday July 20th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair
Jane Braga's Home

Wednesday July 22nd, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday July 27th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

Fire and Homelessness Interest Groups—On hiatus until September

Saturday August 1st, 10 am to noon

General Meeting
Library in Sonora

Thursday August 6th, 6 pm to 9 pm

LWVML Fundraiser—"What the Constitution Means to Me" - For tickets, contact
BMcHenry209@gmail.com or go to the
Mountain Bookshop in Sonora

Murphys Creek Theatre

August 12th, 1 pm

Membership/Fundraising — Patricia Horsthius Chair/
Deborah Rei Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday August 17th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair
Jane Braga's Home

Wednesday August 19th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Friday August 21st, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead
Starbucks in Angels Camp

Monday August 24th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday August 26th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Fire and Homelessness Interest Groups—On hiatus until September

Committees, **WHERE THE REAL WORK HAPPENS!**

Voter Services Committee:

Committee Members: Leonides Russell, Pam Vlach, Maria Benech, Cris Barsanti, Jane Braga, and Susan Medeiros (Chair)

Thanks again to the amazing 37 League volunteers who helped to make the four Candidate Forums a success in preparation for the June 2 Primary Election. Races: Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors District 3 and District 2, and Calaveras County Board of Supervisors District 5. Also, thanks to Leonides Russell and Jane Braga for the help at the TC Elections Office.

We are now beginning to organize our Voter Services activities for the upcoming November Election. In addition to Voter Information Tabling at local events, we will be conducting Candidate Forums, Pros and Cons presentations of upcoming state propositions / local measures, and Vote 411 services.

Vote411 is a State League online voter information service that allows local and state candidates to share their goals and qualifications briefly. We need volunteers to contact our local candidates and assist them in submitting their campaign information for Vote411. To make this happen locally, we need a few volunteers who will be trained. Do you have computer technology skills? We especially need your help! We also need people to contact the candidates and encourage them to complete their information; phone calls are best for this work, no computer skills needed.

As you see, there will be lots to do in the coming months. Please get in touch with Susan Medeiros by email or phone to volunteer, susanmedeiros@gmail.com or 209-840-2066. Without your help, we will not be able to do this important work. Thank you so much!

Our next Voter Services Committee meeting will be on Monday, July 20th, at 1:30 at the Senior Center in Sonora. All are welcome to attend.



In case you missed us in the Mother Lode Round-Up Parade in May. We had a small, but well-dressed and decorated contingent. Thank you, Brenda, for providing the "float".

Observer Corps (OC):

Committee Members: Lynn Johnson, Leonides Russell, Susan Medeiros, Stefani Reichle, Maria Benech, Kate Segerstrom, and Jane Braga (Chair)

The Observer Corps Team is working on our mid-year report. Look for it in July. It will go out to our League first and then will be in the Union Democrat.

Observer Corps meets the fourth Wednesday of the month, 1:30. Senior Center.

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors (BOS)

June 2nd. Pretty quiet meeting. Election Day. Rural Counties are looking at \$50 million in cuts to MediCal and MediCare.

June 9th. Supervisor Kirk absent. In Consent Calendar the County approved the Master Agreement with Yosemite Community College District for fire captain services, fire station facility use, and the development of a student firefighter internship program term expiring June 30, 2028. This agreement, which began in 2023 replaced the Columbia Fire Protection District which was a volunteer run department with insufficient funds.

Pioneer Community Energy representatives provided an update on the new service launch in October 2027. This will be an alternative energy provider, alternative to PG&E. Pioneer will be serving Tuolumne County and the City of Sonora as a Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program, working with the California Public Utilities Commission. A CCA is an energy procurer. Its focus is on the most cost-effective energy for customers.

June 16th. Supervisor Kirk was absent. When Supervisor Holland recused himself on the discussion of Consent Calendar Item #6, on mobile home rent control, Supervisor Griefer (chair) questioned whether he needed to. County Counsel agreed with Holland. Brief tense exchange between Griefer and Supervisor Brandon.

Chair Griefer got confused with two items on the Consent Calendar. He excluded them from the CC vote.

The Board announced Walter Wall as the new County Counsel. Interestingly, in making the announcement, CAO Roger Root said he was "pleased" to make the announcement. There were no comments from the Board about the appointment except for Supervisor Brandon who said how difficult the process was and that it is a very competitive field. Mr. Wall was not present. He is still under contract to Mariposa County as their District Attorney. The Board waived the government code residency requirement, saying that he lives in north Mariposa County and didn't want to move his family.

Sonora City Council

June 1st. Brief meeting. After much discussion the removal of two crosswalks on Washington Street was approved. Chief VanderWiel pointed out that crosswalks are an indication to the public of safe places to cross the street. He felt that the two crosswalks identified were not safe. Passed with a 3-2 vote. Merrill and Levine opposed.

June 15th. Soap Box Derby update. City Council authorized the Fire Chief to apply for a \$90,000 Firefighters Grant. 4-0 vote. (Opie not present for vote.)

Council reviewed and approved the 2026-2027 Operating Budget and adopted Resolution 06-15-2026C, including any supplemental funding requests approved by City Council. Passed 5-0.

Tuolumne Utility District (TUD)

June 23rd. Agenda Item #2, Update on District Operations Director Ringen commented on the Sierra Pines project, saying that it was no longer in pristine condition. General Manager (GM) Perkins commented that TUD practice, for the last 5-6 years, has been to mow the grass for fire protection. Report approved with a 3-2 vote; Ringen and Reel opposed.

Public hearing on adopting the Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP). The preliminary report was presented at the previous TUD meeting. The final update was presented here. A letter from the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC) raised some concerns about projected growth. They felt some growth figures were inflated. The UWMP is to ensure that TUD has enough water to meet future, 5-year needs. President Hollis stated that CSERC had indicated to him that their concerns were only in the projections, not in the current figures. Director Ringen expressed concern that the public needed more time for input. TUD legal counsel Jesse Barton stated that there have been public postings of the UWMP meetings, as required. He further stated that TUD was in full compliance with regulations regarding keeping the public informed. The UWMP is due to the state by July 1st. TUD would be out of compliance if the report is not received by July 1st. After much discussion, the plan was approved 3-2. Directors Ringen and Reel opposed.

Agenda Item #5. This was the approval of GM Perkins' contract. A group of audience members, who appeared to be organized, spoke in opposition to the contract. Opposition centered around GM salary and high TUD rates. Much discussion. During the discussions, it became apparent that the contract, if approved, would go into effect immediately, not after the performance review. With this recognition, the board voted to table this item until after the performance review.

NOTE. Director Ringen opposes many agenda items at every meeting. Looking to point out discrepancies. He states that his concern is for the rate payers or the public. At times, he appears unwilling to listen to other opinions. He lashed out at Director Kerns when he told him, "Don't put words in my mouth," when Kerns asked for clarification about a statement of his.

Homelessness Interest Group (HIG)

Members: Ted Michaud, Patricia Horsthus, Trudy Craig, Suzanne Hennessy, Cindy Roberts, and Leonides Russell (Lead)

On hiatus.

Democracy (in action) Interest Group (DIG)

Members: Tia Andersen, Janis Ossa, Brenda McHenry, Trudy Craig, Irene Wetzels, Susan Medeiros, Maria Benech, and Martha Rubin (Lead)

The DIG committee will meet on Friday, July 10th, at Starbucks in Angels Camp, from 1:30 - 2:30/3:00 pm. We will set the focus and calendar for the next few months.

Our local elections will be certified on July 10th, so we'll have information to plan for VOTE 411, the state propositions, and local ballot measures. We will work with the Pros and Cons committee on possible presentations, election forums, LWV tabling opportunities, and events to attend to educate the public.

*****We are still watching the Save Act, as it has been passed in the House, and the President is continuing to pressure the Senate to pass it as well.**

For more information, contact Martha Rubin at 650-619-7136 or email rubinmartha@gmail.com.

Water Interest Group (WIG)

Members: Patricia Horsthuis, Leonides Russell, Suzanne Hennessy, Jeff Hollis, Tom Parrington, Cris Barsanti, Margaret Willits, and Jane Braga (Lead)

1) The SB552 discussion and invitation to Sean Hembree to speak to us have been postponed until Suzanne returns. 2) Jeff talked briefly about Sierra Pines, the TUD water treatment plant that will be built in Twain Harte. When completed, it will replace six current water treatment plants. 3) The Chicken Ranch Rancheria and TUD have been promised 10-acre feet of water from New Melones, but the contract has never been signed by BLM. Still working on this! 4) We will follow LAFCO as it relates to the water districts. Jeff will keep us posted. 5) Not much change in South County. 6) Jane reported on the California Renaissance Plan. The LWVC will be discussing this at their June meeting. This plan is the result of a collaborative effort between conservation groups, water experts, and Tribal leaders. The focus is to shift from water imports to local sustainable solutions.

Tom and Jeff both attended a Tribal Water Rights in California Zoom meeting. The numerous Native American tribes in California have few water rights.

At our June General Membership meeting, Jimmy Retzlaff from the Mi-Wuk Water District introduced himself to Jane. He offered to do a field trip to their facility. Jane will contact him to set this up.

New member Margaret Willits expressed concern about the amount of sediment that seeps into our reservoirs. The state regulations regarding clearance guidelines may be adding to this problem. Much discussion on this topic. As a retired Forest Service employee and as a botanist, she shared her concerns.

Jeff shared that California is the fifth-largest economy in the world. At the beginning of 2026, the Northern Sierra watershed provided 40% of California's water. Now, with the decline of the Colorado River, the same watershed delivers 60% of California's water. There has been no increase in the amount of water available. The change is in the amount of water needed.

We briefly discussed the impact on local water and electrical supplies in communities that have AI data centers.

WIGs meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 11:30, at Schnoog's Café.

Fire Interest Group (FIG)

Members: Karen Caldwell, Martha Rubin, Maureen Kelley, Stefani Reichle, Elsie Bruno, Deborah Rei, Patricia Dunlap, Julie Johnson, and Maria Benech (Lead)

Our League will not be commenting on the closing of the fire station off Phoenix Lake Road because the League does not currently have any positions (state or national) that would support this action. It was suggested that we could do our own study and then take a position based on our research, but the group decided that this was not where we wanted to spend our energy at this time. In addition, a study would take a year or more and not be a timely response to this current issue.

If you have any questions, contact Maria Benech at runmcb@gmail.com or 209-559-3504.

Tell Your Senators to Oppose the SAVE Act

The House of Representatives passed the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act for the second time in February 2026. The SAVE Act would require citizenship documentation to register to vote even though voters in every state are already required to affirm or verify their citizenship status when registering.

Now, the Senate must reject this bill to prevent it from becoming law.

It is already illegal for noncitizens to register and vote in federal or state elections. The bill's requirement of a document to prove American citizenship to register to vote in federal elections is unnecessary and seeks to divide us. It also creates another barrier to voting.

Many communities of eligible voters would be unnecessarily burdened by the requirements of the SAVE Act. Among them are military voters who would be required to present documentation every time they re-register to vote when their families move. Families who have been impacted by natural disasters may have lost necessary documentation and would be required to jump through hoops to replace these documents to register to vote while also going through the traumatic process of rebuilding their lives. Additionally, Americans who have changed their names, like married women, would also be required to secure updated documentation to register to vote.

Americans do not need MORE obstacles to vote. The SAVE Act would create one more barrier to the voting process, as many eligible voters do not have easy access to the necessary documents. Compared to white US citizens, citizens of color are three times more likely to lack documents such as birth certificates, passports, naturalization certificates, or certificates of citizenship or face difficulties accessing them. For example, while approximately half of all American adults possess a passport, two-thirds of Black Americans do not. [Tell your Senators to oppose the SAVE Act.](#)

Senator Adam Schiff—(202) 224-3841

Senator Alex Padilla—(202) 224-3553



2026 LWV National Convention Delegate Report by Jane Braga and Karen Caldwell

It was an honor and a privilege to be a delegate at the LWV National Convention. We were so proud to say that we were from the Mother Lode. Forty-nine states were represented by 1,983 delegates. It was an exercise in democracy in action. Talking with delegates from around the country, we found that some issues were the same - whether or not to participate in No Kings rallies, and some were different – North Carolina as a lab to test authoritarianism.

The convention has two elements – Plenary and Breakout. The Plenary sessions are the nuts and bolts of the league, democracy in action. The Breakout sessions are about the committees, Interest Groups, and lobbying for Plenary issues. This month, we will talk about Plenary. Next month, the topic will be the Breakout sessions.

During Plenary sessions, no photos are allowed. Diana Wynn, 2024-2026 LWV President, presided. Friday, we ‘warmed up’ by voting on basic business items and 2026-2028 officers. Saturday, we passed the Proposed 2026-2027 Program, which our LWVML passed in February. This is Defending a Democracy Under Siege. The LWV Washington State Protecting the Rights of Immigrants position-in-brief was then passed. It reads in part, “The League of Women Voters believes that all residents of the United States, regardless of immigration status or citizenship, should be treated with dignity and respect. This means that all residents, regardless of immigration status or citizenship, should have access to essential federal, state, and local services, have the opportunity to avail themselves of legal representation in court and immigration proceedings, and have the opportunity to live and work in safety.” This passed with near unanimity, a very proud moment for the League. All LWVUS positions in the areas of Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources, and Social Policy were approved.

There were some items not recommended by the National Program Committee for Consideration and Adoption. Following a process outlined in our national Bylaws, delegates may move a not-recommended item for consideration. This is where things got very interesting. This was truly democracy in action. The LWV Colorado proposed a Religious Freedom Position. The National Program Committee had not recommended it for adoption. National stated that we already have a Position on Religious Freedom, which this duplicates. After several hours of motions, votes, and points of order, the floor did pass the position. This was a fascinating process in which to be a part. Like our US Constitution, the League Positions are open to interpretation. While National felt these items were already covered, Colorado and a majority of delegates present did not. Throughout the lengthy process in which the Parliamentarian and League CEO were repeatedly consulted, leadership remained focused and respectful.

We did not get out of Plenary on Saturday until 6 pm, and our days began at 6 am. As noted by one of our California delegates, the Convention is exhilarating and exhausting!



California Delegation

Photo Left—LWVML Delegates to the National Convention, Jane Braga and Karen Caldwell. Both are also pictured above in the very back row behind the women in red.

From MyMotherLode.com (June 26, 2026)

Written by BJ Hanson

The final two Tuolumne County Grand Jury reports of the current cycle were publicly released today.

The Grand Jury serves as a government watchdog, reviews issues and complaints related to local government, and makes recommendations. The term of the current Grand Jury expires at the end of the month, and five reports were completed.

We noted earlier that the [first report focused](#) on correctional facilities, and the [second and third](#) were in relation to past responses by county leaders to last year's reports and the payroll practices of the Twain Harte Fire District.

The fourth installment is a 26-page report entitled, *Governance Practices Impacting Public Trust*. A big focus was on complaints made surrounding Tuolumne County District One Supervisor Mike Holland. The main aspect was that Holland did not recuse himself when the county debated a mobile home rent control ordinance (he owns spaces within Hill Haven and rents out a mobile home there). It also examines whether it is ok for him to continue to serve on both the board of supervisors and the Sonora High Board of Trustees simultaneously.

Regarding the conflict-of-interest matter, the Grand Jury made various recommendations, including that all publicly elected officials complete training on the Political Reform Act of 1974, the Levine Act, and the Fair Political Practices Commission.

Related to the issue of serving as both a county supervisor and school board member, the Grand Jury's investigation stated it "creates the appearance and opportunities for a clash of duties," and recommended that the County Counsel submit the issue to the California Attorney General's Office for further guidance.

The Grand Jury also highlighted challenges in doing the investigation, including Supervisor Holland requesting that two members of the jury be removed due to bias. There was also difficulty in finding specifics about past meetings (all accessible via video). In response, a recommendation was to have all of the board meetings transcribed, potentially using AI software. There were also concerns about a policy where county emails are automatically deleted after 90 days.

[Click here to view the full 26-page report.](#)

The fifth and final report that the Grand Jury will release this cycle was 80 pages and entitled *Behind the Devastation: Tuolumne County Community Development Department*. The report highlighted the handling of the departure of the Community Development Director, staffing losses, declining morale, and moving the CDD forward. It is partially focused on Supervisor Holland, again, and a property he owns at 17411 High School Road.

The report made 19 findings with various related recommendations. [Find the 80-page report here.](#)

Calaveras 2026 Grand Jury Reports

- ♦ [Calaveras County Animal Services](#) Road Map to a Modern Shelter: Policies and Procedures (June 2026)
- ♦ [Detention Facilities of Calaveras County](#) A Model of Excellence and Innovation (June 2026)
- ♦ [Fire Agencies of Calaveras County](#) Taking the Measure of Measure A: Local Fire Protection Ordinance Review (May 2026)

Hit the links (blue type) above to go to the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury webpage. Scroll to the bottom to find these 2026 reports.

June LWVML Board Decision

- ♦ Our League as a whole will submit formal comments to the US Postal Service (USPS) regarding their proposed rule earlier this month that would erect barriers to the transmission of mail-in or absentee ballots for federal elections. We are also encouraging our individual members to do this (see the June 28th email from LWVML.INFO@gmail.com).

How You Can Renew/Join

Renew/join today online at LWVML.org. Your dues support national, state, and local League efforts. When you go to the website, you will see the “Join” button in the top right corner of your screen. Remember to identify our local league, League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode. This ensures you remain on our mailing list, or if you are a new member, you will receive our monthly newsletter and other important messages (not too many, though).

LWVML is a 501(c)3 organization, and all donations are tax-deductible—tax ID #873922182. LWVML receives only \$15 of the \$75 from National dues. This part is tax-deductible, but the remaining \$60 is not. LWV and LWVC activities include political lobbying and advocacy, which disqualifies donations from being considered as charitable donations.



League Cheer

Do you know another member who is:

- Ill or suffered the loss of a loved one;
- Celebrating an important accomplishment?

Call or text Augusta Parrington at 209-770-0211 or email her at aparrington13@gmail.com to ask her to send out a Care Card.

LWVML 2026/2027 BOARD OFFICERS:

Presidential Triad — **Maria Benech, Jane Braga, and Leonides Russell**
Vice President - **Karen Caldwell**
Treasurer — **Suzanne Hennessy**
Recording Secretary — **Janis Ossa**
Program Director—**Brenda McHenry**

Action Director—**Leonides Russell**
Publicity Director - **Stefani Reichle**
The Voter Editor—**Maria Benech**
Membership Director - **Patricia Horsthuis**
Voter Services Director—**Susan Medeiros**
Observer Corp Director - **Jane Braga**
Fundraising Director—**Deborah Rei**

LWVML 2025/2026 Non-Board Positions: Nominating Committee Chair - **Leslie Klay**; Nominating Committee Members - **Maureen Kelley** and **Charlene Dambacher**; Greeters — **Cris Barsanti** and **Jeff Klay**; Webmaster—**Dorene Hensler**; Historian—TBD

The League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode is a tax exempt organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code: Tax ID #87-3922182.