

THE VOTER

September 2026

Empowering Voters - Defending Democracy

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A Message from the LWVML Presidential Triad

Fall brings change — leaves turn, daylight shortens, and this November, we hope the midterm elections bring change too.

Each fall we can count on two things: the return of pumpkin spice and elections. For our local races, we have plans for getting out the vote, including a candidate meet-and-greet and forums. Now more than ever, every vote matters in supporting and defending our democracy.

We will continue registering voters at community events. Our League forums are well attended, allowing local candidates to speak directly to residents on the issues that matter to our community. Both efforts will need volunteers.

The SAVE Act still looms on the horizon. It appears the Senate will make one last push to pass it before the November midterm elections. If enacted, it would make voting more difficult for some citizens of color and naturalized citizens.

On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. Both parties worked across the aisle to pass it by overwhelming margins. This law prohibited racial discrimination in voting. It outlawed literacy tests that had long been used to disenfranchise minorities, and it barred state and local rules that restricted citizens' right to vote based on race, color, or ethnicity. The Act was designed to protect the voting rights guaranteed in the Constitution.

Today, key provisions of the Voting Rights Act have been narrowed by the Supreme Court, and the SAVE Act, stalled in Congress, presents another threat. So, what are we to do? We take action by continuing to register voters. We contact our state and federal representatives to voice our opinions, and we contact the White House to leave messages voicing our concern about voting rights. We cannot, and will not, accept the erosion of hard-earned voting rights.

Thank you for all you do to help defend democracy and educate and empower voters!

Maria Benech, Jane Braga, and Leonides Russell



General Meeting Changes

Hopefully, you saw in the August Voter that the Board has decided to have fewer General Meetings. These meetings, held on the first Saturday of the month, are important, but we want to make sure they are timely and provide critical information for our members and the public.

We made this decision because we felt our meetings were not well attended and that we needed to focus on members joining and/or attending our committees and interest groups to better understand the work of the League and participate more if they want to and have the time.

We still plan to have General Meetings when we have a critical topic such as the Pros and Cons presentation in October and the Holiday Party in December, but you won't see us in November or January.

We really hope you will consider joining one of our committees or interest groups. Or just attend meetings to observe what is happening and learn more about what the League is doing. Another option is to volunteer during critical times, such as the next two months; we have several opportunities to help defend democracy and educate and empower voters; please join us if you can!

Lastly, there are many ways to support the League, and your membership is definitely one. By joining and renewing, you help our local League as well as the National and State organizations; your membership is valued and appreciated.

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). You can also just mail a check to our Post Office Box if that is easier for you. Make the \$75 check payable to "League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode or LWVML" and mail it to: LWVML, P.O. Box 5393, Sonora, California 95370.

Our League offers full scholarships for anyone who wants to join, and LWV also has a sliding scale for members (pay as little as \$20 per year). Please don't hesitate to ask us about this; we do not want money to be a barrier to membership.

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.

No General Meeting in September.

See you on October 3rd for a presentation on the Pros and Cons of all the
California Ballot Initiatives.

Bring your friends and neighbors!

September & October Meetings and Events

Saturday September 5th, All Day

Voter Registration/Education

363 Main Street, Murphys

Wednesday September 9th, 1 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthius Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday September 16th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead

Senior Center in Sonora

Wed. & Thurs. September 16th and 17th, All Day

National Voter Registration / Constitution Days

Columbia College

Saturday September 19th, All Day

Children's Fair sponsored by ICES

Tuolumne City Community Park

Monday September 21st, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday September 23rd, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Thursday September 24th, 6 pm

Tuolumne Utilities District 1 [Forum](#)

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Chambers

Monday September 28th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board

Senior Center in Sonora

Monday September 28th, 6 pm

Calaveras County Board of Supervisors District 5 [Forum](#)

Rancho Calaveras Clubhouse, 3995 State Highway 26,
Valley Springs

Thursday October 1st, 6 pm

California State Senate District 4 [Forum](#)

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Chambers

Saturday October 3rd, 10 am to noon

General Meeting—Pros and Cons

Library in Sonora

Wednesday October 14th, 1 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthius Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Friday October 16th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead

Starbucks in Angels Camp

Saturday October 17th, All Day

Calaveras Firewise Community

Ironstone Vineyards, Murphys

Monday October 19th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday October 21st, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead

Senior Center in Sonora

Monday October 26th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday October 28th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

A Very Fun and Successful Night!

Our second year of partnering with [Murphys Creek Theatre](#) on Thursday, August 6th was another huge success! We made over \$3,000! Thank you to all our League members, families, and friends who came together to prepare for the evening and contribute to its success! It does, indeed, take a village to plan and create a big fundraiser.

As the crowd trickled in, past the voter information and check-in tables, our League volunteers enthusiastically greeted guests. The reception area held three tables that beautifully displayed savory appetizers and desserts for everyone's nibbling pleasure.

The staff were very helpful and opened the theater by 6:15 pm for additional mingling space. The reception area was lively with conversations and meetings with friends. We had a full house waiting to see the performance of "What the Constitution Means to Me." A perfect evening!

Many thanks to our amazing League members who sold tickets and attended. Special thanks to Patricia Horstius and Deborah Rei, Fundraising Co-Chairs; Brenda McHenry, who created, printed, distributed, and tracked the tickets; Karen Caldwell, who designed the flyer; Jane Braga and Cindy Roberts, Food Committee; and all those who distributed over 100 flyers around Tuolumne and Calaveras counties. Thanks also to the Mountain Bookshop for ticket sales. Most importantly, we want to thank Muphys Creek Theatre Artistic Director, Todd Thomas, House Manager Caitlin Schenstrom, and star of the show Jodi Vaccaro, for being amazing partners and supporters of our League.



Committees and Interest Groups, WHERE THE REAL WORK HAPPENS!

Voter Services Committee:

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

Sonora Area Foundation recently presented our League with a \$200 donation to educate our community on non-partisan and current voting issues. Voter Services will use these funds for our Voter Registration and Education activities and for the Easy Voter Guides that we distribute throughout Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.



We need lots of volunteers to help us make our candidate forums, our “Meet the Candidates” evening, voter registration, and Vote411 successful. Contact Susan Medeiros, Voter Services Chair, at susanmedeiros@gmail.com or at 209- 840-2066, or Patricia Horsthuis, Membership Chair, at phorsthuis@yahoo.com or at 209-559-5242 to sign up. Thank you!

Here’s what’s happening before the election!

Voter Registration/Education at the following events:

- ♦ September 5 – Murphys Pride Event, 363 Main Street, Murphys
- ♦ September 16 and 17—National Voter Registration/Constitution Days at Columbia College
- ♦ September 19– Children’s Fair sponsored by ICES at Tuolumne City Community Park
- ♦ October 17 – Calaveras Firewise Community – Ironstone Vineyards, Murphys

Easy Voter Guides will be arriving the week of September 21. We will distribute copies.

Pros and Cons - preparing for presentations and hand outs on pros and cons of propositions:

- ♦ October 3 for LWVML General Meeting
- ♦ October 22 for AAU
- ♦ Copies at our tabling events, and on our website, and Facebook pages.

Vote411 – online resource for voters on candidate information.

Candidate Forums

- ♦ September 24 – Tuolumne Utilities District 1 Forum at 6 pm at the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Chambers – Candidates Ron Ringen and Tom Crosby
- ♦ September 28 – Calaveras County Board of Supervisors District 5 Forum at 6 pm at the Rancho Calaveras Clubhouse, 3995 State Highway 26, Valley Springs – Candidates Clyde Clapp and Bruce Giudici

Voter Services Committee continued

- ♦ October 1 – California State Senate District 4 Forum at 6 pm at the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Chambers – Candidates Jaron Brandon and Alexandra Duarte

Meet the Candidates Event (something our League has never done before)

We are still finalizing the date and location for this event. Watch your email for details.

If you can help at any of these events, please call now. Thank you. Susan Medeiros (209- 840-2066).

Observer Corps (OC):

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

Do you have a question that you would like to ask our State Senate Candidates (Brandon/Duarte) at our upcoming October 1st forum?

Send it to Jane Braga at jbraga49@gmail.com.

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors (BOS)

August 4th. During Public Comment, the lawyer representing the homeowners who live by the Industry Way unpermitted dump said that a lawsuit has been filed against the county citing 'inexcusable neglect'. This unpermitted industrial waste facility has been operating since 2021. Four years ago, an asbestos report was filed. For more information, go to Industryway.org.

Board approved 4-1-0, Griefer nay, \$25,000 for engineering plans to repair the floating fuel platform at Tulloch Reservoir Public Fishing Access project area. Monies will come from contingency funds. Monies to be repaid from a trust. Trust will be created. Revenue from the pump station will go into the trust. Once fully operational, the pump station has generated revenue of about \$100,000 annually. The pump and the platform need to be replaced to be operational. The County contract gives Tuolumne County 10% of the revenue.

With a 4-1-0 vote, Brandon was nay; Tamara Blankenship was hired as the part-time director of the Community Development Department. She is currently the director of Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC). She will be a 75% FTE for both CDD and TCTC, with a 150% salary. This has been a difficult position to fill. Ms. Blankenship was a Housing Development Specialist at CDD before her TCTC position.

August 11th. Board met to give direction on the Adopted FY2026-2027 Budget Preparation and Priorities.

August 18th. Supervisor Holland commented on Sonora City Councilmember Andy Merrill's comments about the BOS at a recent City Council meeting. Unfortunately, there has been conflict between the two agencies. As part of the Consent Calendar, the Board waived the state requirement for rebuilds to install sprinkler systems and solar panels regarding Chinese Camp reconstruction. Concern that these would be cost prohibitive for Chinese Camp residents.

Public hearing . BOS approved the vacation of Road and Public Utility Easements for the Groveland Hotel Development LLC noting that projects planned provide economic development for South County and TOT

Observer Corps continued

revenue for the County. *[This info will be shared with the WIGs and FIGs regarding water, sewage, and fire safety concerns.]*

Low Impact Camping Areas (LICA). BOS gave direction to create County Regulations for low-impact camping, using the state regulations, but adapting them to the needs and concerns of Tuolumne County, especially regarding fire, water, and sewer issues.

Sonora City Council (SCC)

August 3rd. Mayor Segerstrom welcomed attendees to the “summer of our discontent.” Supervisor Holland was not present to give the District 1 report. The Mayor and Councilmember Merrill expressed dismay at this.

Mayor thanked Fire and Police staff for their work during the recent fires.

Council approved advertising for bids for the FY25/26 Parking Lot Project.

Council approved moving the fence as part of the Tuolumne Heritage Trail Project (Gold Rush Path) with \$500,000 savings.

August 17th. Mayor Segerstrom noted that “flock cameras” are not being used in Sonora. The cameras in the city are only being used by the Sonora Police Department. They do not track the comings and goings of citizens. The Sonora Chief of Police stated the same.

Economic Development. SCC adopted a 5-Year Economic Development Strategy with a 5-0-0 vote. Plan includes community input. Action items will be brought to the SCC for approval in 90 days. Councilmembers shared input.

Next OC meeting Wednesday, September 23, 1:30. Senior Center.

Pros and Cons Subcommittee:

Members: Kim Williams, Tia Anderson, Deborah Rei, Leonides Russell, Susan Medeiros, Maria Benech, and Jane Braga (Chair)

The group met twice in August to discuss the 14 Statewide Ballot Initiatives that will be a part of the November 3rd General Election. Many of us had not worked on pros and cons in the past, so Jane walked us all through references, websites, and formatting questions. Lots of discussion on what should be included and what should not. How to stay unbiased and non-partisan. The goal is to have them finalized by early September.

Our League will present these pros and cons at our October General Meeting and to any group who would like a formal presentation. We only present the pros and cons; we do not state a position on them.

If you know of any group that would like to learn more about these propositions, contact Jane Braga. Please invite your friends and neighbors to our October General Meeting. We will present them and hopefully have a lively discussion.

The League of Women Voters of California has taken a position on all of these propositions, and if you would like to learn more, use [this link](#).

Water Interest Group (WIG)

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

The WIGs did not meet in August, but the State Water Group continues to publish monthly articles highlighting water issues throughout the state. [Click here to read this month's issue](#). The synopsis is below.

Water Spotlight: Restoring and Managing California's Watersheds

September 2026 by Leslie Leach, with Shirley Nixon and Cathy Weber

Summary: The landscapes of a watershed vary according to size, topography, climate, and human activities. Healthy watersheds sustain healthy aquatic and terrestrial environments by filtering pollutants, directing the movement of water, nutrients, and sediment, and providing water to sustain life.

WIGs meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 11:30, at the Senior Center in Sonora.

Democracy (in action) Interest Group (DIG)

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

The DIG is supporting the Voter Services committee to help prepare for the upcoming midterm election forums and voter registration/education opportunities.

Discussed how initiatives and measures get on the ballot in California. Tia will provide information, as we think this is important for the public to know. Create a fact sheet?

We also discussed political advertising; who is actually promoting and sponsoring the ad? Read the small print. Our task is to collect direct mail advertisements and check out who is really promoting the candidate, measure, initiative.

We need volunteers for the October 17th Calaveras County FireWise Event at Ironstone. LWVML will have a voter registration/education table. See pages 5 and 6 for all the upcoming events and where we need help.

NO MEETING IN SEPTEMBER. There is too much work to do.

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

Homelessness Interest Group (HIG)

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

On hiatus until further notice.

If you have any questions or interest in joining the group, please contact Leonides Russell.

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)

On hiatus until November 10th, after the election.

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

August LWVML Board Decisions

- ♦ Approved using \$150 to design fundraising banners. Janis has the lead.
- ♦ Business card discussion. Customized backside! Karen designing.
- ♦ Decision to have a meeting of Interest Group leads to ensure all leads understand the League Way and League Guidelines.
- ♦ Decision to have at least one board member or 'seasoned' member be a co-chair if chair is new.
- ♦ Approved helping (providing a moderator team and timekeepers) for a forum of the Groveland Community Services District. They have seven candidates running for ??? seats.



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.

LWV Fighting Back

BOSTON — Voting rights organizations today supplemented the complaint in their lawsuit challenging President Trump’s executive order restricting mail voting to add claims against the US Postal Service’s (USPS) newly-finalized mail ballot rule. The groups simultaneously asked a federal court to immediately block USPS from implementing that rule for the November midterm elections.

The **plaintiffs** in this case, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts v. Trump, are the **League of Women Voters, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts**, Association of Americans Resident Overseas, US Vote Foundation, OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. They are represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Massachusetts, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, Legal Defense Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC, and LatinoJustice PRLDEF.

On Aug. 11, 2026, the court issued an order in League of Women Voters of Massachusetts v. Trump, blocking USPS from implementing Section 3 of the executive order for the upcoming Nov. 3 midterm elections.

The Supreme Court later stayed a different court order issued in the separate Trump v. California case blocking implementation of the executive order. Of note, the Supreme Court did not decide whether President Trump has the legal authority to impose these restrictions or whether the USPS rule is lawful; it simply held that it was premature for the California plaintiffs to bring that case.

Earlier this afternoon, the court vacated the Aug. 11 injunction issued in League of Women Voters Massachusetts on the same narrow basis. Acknowledging that “Plaintiff Organizations have substantial arguments that might persuade the Supreme Court to reach a different result if Plaintiff Organizations have an opportunity to present them,” the court found “that in light of the Supreme Court’s decision in Trump v. California, Plaintiff Organizations are not likely to prevail as to ripeness without amending their complaint to reflect the fact that a Final Rule has now issued.” Plaintiffs have now supplemented their complaint to do exactly that, adding challenges to the newly finalized mail ballot rule and seeking emergency relief on those claims immediately.

In their papers, the plaintiff organizations argue that USPS’s newly-finalized mail ballot rule violates the Constitution’s separation of powers, which put the states and Congress in charge of election administration rules, not USPS or the president, as well as a number of the laws that govern how USPS operates.

All of these violations are causing irreparable harm to plaintiff organizations, their members, and the voters they serve. The harm is particularly acute as there are now less than 70 days before the November midterm elections, which is why the plaintiff organizations are asking for emergency relief.

After filing, counsel and plaintiffs released the following statement:

“The court has already found that the executive order unconstitutionally usurps the authority of the states and Congress to regulate elections, and the newly-finalized rule eliminates any doubt about the harms stemming from these unlawful acts. Implementing the newly-finalized rule less than 70 days before the general election would dramatically impair plaintiffs’ core voter engagement work and pose a grave risk of disenfranchisement. We are asking the court for emergency relief to prevent this harm and to affirm the public’s confidence in the systems voters rely on to conduct our elections.

The filings can be found [here](#) and [here](#).



2027 Convention

Save the Date!



Westin Anaheim Resort
Orange County, CA
June 25-26, 2027
Pre-Convention events on June 24



2027 LWVC Convention in Anaheim!

The state holds a convention every other year, and in 2027 it will be in Southern California.

Mark your calendars! Join League members, leaders, and supporters from across California as we gather to connect, collaborate, and chart the future of our work. Stay tuned for registration details, speaker announcements, and agenda updates in the coming months. We can't wait to see you in Anaheim!

Our Mother Lode Chapter will send delegates as well as other members who wish to attend and learn more about the League of Women Voters. If you would like to be a delegate or join us at the convention, contact Maria Benech at runmcb@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>.

Help California Voters Make Informed Decisions

The League of Women Voters of California is seeking dedicated volunteers who are passionate about voter education and civic engagement to support our work on VOTE411.

What is VOTE411?

VOTE411 is a nonpartisan online election guide operated by the League of Women Voters. California's volunteer network helps provide voters with information about local candidates and ballot measures across the state.

Join a team that helps voters access trusted election information before they cast their ballots.

VOTE 411



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Support VOTE411 efforts in your county and help keep local election information accurate and complete!

Responsibilities include:

- ✓ Researching & collecting candidate contact info
- ✓ Making phone calls and sending emails to candidates
- ✓ Entering local ballot measure information into the VOTE411 system
- ✓ Coordinating with local League volunteers
- ✓ Promoting VOTE411 in your community



No technical experience is required for most volunteer tasks.



TRAINING & SUPPORT

We Set You Up For Success!

- ✓ Live training sessions
- ✓ Weekly office hours and volunteer support
- ✓ One-on-one guidance from experienced VOTE411 Liaisons
- ✓ Access to the CA VOTE411 volunteer community & resources



Every volunteer receives a CA VOTE411 email address to maintain professionalism and protect personal contact information.



TIMELINE

Key dates for the November Election

- Volunteer training sessions
Week of August 3
- Volunteer work begins
August 2026
- Ballots mailed to voters
October 5, 2026



Estimated time commitment:
Approximately 5-10 hrs/week
between August & October



WHY VOLUNTEER?

- Support nonpartisan voter education
- Help voters make informed choices
- Connect with local candidates
- Strengthen democracy in your community



INTERESTED IN JOINING THE TEAM?

Contact:

Sharon Stone

Director of Voter Engagement and Membership

sstone@cavote411.org

(916) 442-7215