OUR NEW LWVSC POSITION:
LET’S MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR!

“LWVSC supports gender and racial equity, including the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, and promotion of fairness in hiring, advancement, pay, and in representation in public appointments.”

Equity and equality are the core values of this position proposed at LWVSC state convention by the League of Women Voters of the Charleston Area. We deeply appreciate LWVSC’s leadership and the convention’s unanimous support of the position which will be included in the 2019-2021 Agenda for Action. We believe it is also an important commitment to the convention’s overarching message – Celebrating Democracy, Embracing Diversity.

In principle, the words of the position are woven into many different dimensions of the Charleston League’s work including support for LWVSC’s redistricting and ethics reform initiatives. The values have also been carried forward in locally focused work on the importance of voter education and engagement; public education and school board election; education on criminal justice reform; and partnership with organizations supporting the City of Charleston’s Apology for Slavery.

The Charleston League embedded the Equal Rights Amendment in the position because of its energetic program of community ERA education that began two years ago. Only 13 states have failed to ratify the ERA. It now stands as a legislative issue in 11 of those 13 states – including South Carolina. One more state is needed to meet the threshold for an amendment to the United States Constitution.

The tallest hurdle for ratification of the ERA stands deep in history. The United States foundational structure was created by men who did not allow for diversity.

For example, Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the Declaration of Independence wrote sometime later: “Were our state a pure democracy there would still be excluded from our deliberations women, who, to prevent depravation of morals and ambiguity of issues, should not mix promiscuously in gatherings of men.”

The ERA looks forward to a legal system in which each person will be judged on the basis of individual merit and not on an unalterable trait of birth that bears no relationship to need or ability.

— Melinda Hamilton, President, LWV of the Charleston Area

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OR call 803-636-0431 and leave your name and tell us which of the three options above you prefer.

If you take no action, we will assume you are happy receiving the SC Voter through the mail as you do now.

Thank you!

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CONVENTION: WE LISTENED, LEARNED, DEBATED, VOTED, — AND ENJOYED CHARLESTON!

The 2019 biennial convention of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina was exciting, exhaustive, informative, uplifting and productive. We listened, we learned, we debated, we voted, we ate (well) and came home empowered to get back to work—a rest. Nearly 100 League members representing 12 of our 13 local Leagues converged on Charleston for a very intense day and a half.

Our speakers were outstanding. Jennifer Bremer from North Carolina led off with lessons from her state’s redistricting. Catherine Cotten from the LWVUS board was with us for the whole convention and shared some of the challenges and innovations at the national level. Anton Gunn inspired us on the subject of inclusiveness and diversity, and Judge Richard Gergel shared the fantastic story of Isaac Woodard, Harry Truman, and Judge Waties Waring who, together with Thurgood Marshall, helped to end legalized segregation forever.

Plenary sessions were lively. We changed the bylaws to allow us to become a 501©(3) corporation, making contributions and dues tax-deductible (but not yet!). We approved all the recommended changes to program in five areas: criminal justice (access to education), election management (open primaries, paper ballots), home rule (appointment of local councils and commissions), state and local taxation (means-testing any additional property tax relief) and health care (adding domestic and family violence as issues to be addressed). We added a proposal from Charleston for a new position, drawn from LWVUS positions, to promote racial and gender equity and the ERA. It passed unanimously. A proposal to change the SC Voter to electronic-only was hotly debated and referred to the next budget committee because of a need for more information about options and preferences. (Please see more information on page 1.) A proposal to do polling was likewise referred for further study and more information. Our parliamentarian, Katarina Moyon, reminded me that I said it would be an easy job. Not.

Finally, there was the issue of program priorities. These are the positions in Agenda for Action that local Leagues agree to give some attention to in the next two years by offering education to members and the public and looking for opportunities for individual advocacy. Near the end of the third and final plenary session, using ranked voting, we adopted three program priorities:

- Redistricting, racial and gender equity/ERA,
- K-12 education,
- and health care.

(See more about how to address these program priorities in separate articles about working groups.)

Six roundtables hosted by eight experienced and knowledgeable presenters provided local members with good information and ideas for program advocacy in six areas: dark money, diversity, education, environment, status of women/ERA and health care. We welcomed new LWVSC board members Nancy Williams (treasurer) and Marie Vandivort (secretary) and said a fond farewell to retiring members Julie Hussey, Fran Holt, Eleanor Hare and Sally Huguley. We celebrated two new local Leagues in Beaufort and Horry County and a new MAL unit in Aiken and presented growth awards to Greenville and Charleston. We visited the displays from seven local Leagues on their activities over the last two years and our judges (Keller Barron, Barbara Zia, and Sheila Haney) gave awards to all of them for excellence on a variety of criteria. We introduced our new very part-time administrative assistant, Kim Baker, and celebrated passing the 1,000-member mark in January.

And then we staggered home, with your co-presidents particularly happy to note that convention only comes every other year. And with gratitude in our hearts for everyone who helped to make it happen, and for the gracious hospitality of Charleston and the Charleston League.

— Holley Ulbrich, LWVSC Co-President
2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION – WE’RE HALFWAY THERE!

We have now ended the first year of a two-year legislative cycle in South Carolina, so bills introduced during the past session remain alive for the next. We have made progress in some areas, and regretfully little or none in others.

The State Board of the League is most intensely focused, as they always have been, on the national League mission of “Making Democracy Work.” The specific MDW areas in which we were active in 2019 were redesigning reform, elections and voting systems, ethics reform, and government accountability and transparency.

We have not yet had a hearing for the bills reflecting our thinking on the very important and time sensitive issue of redesigning reform, H.4045 and S.230. We plan for continued advocacy for maps that pass the first during the redistricting process as it moves toward resolution in 2021.

The League has prioritized a new voting system that meets League standards for security and voter verifiability. This session provided our last opportunity to have a significant impact in this area for the foreseeable future. And, so, I testified expert Duncan Buell testified in subcommittee on S.182, a bill that would have required a “paper trail.” The bill did not pass. Other bills were filed in 2019 in support of our preferred hand marked paper system (H.3616 and S.374), but they were not heard.

However, we were instrumental in passing H.4157, which provides a procurement process protected from known sources of bias. Also, we worked to pass a budget proviso that allocates $40 million for a new system. The only remaining step is a decision by the Governor’s procurement panel, which is expected on June 10. We may or may not be entirely satisfied with the outcome, but we have successfully made a less biased and better informed process possible.

I testified in support of S. 142, which would provide no-excuse early voting, and H.3035 which allows poll workers to work in any SC county. Both remain under consideration in Senate subcommittee.

I testified on behalf of H.3031 which would have allowed added time for voter registration prior to elections. It was defeated in the House on third reading. In general ethics reform we have seen too little activity. This year bills requiring disclosures of “dark money” campaign expenditures received House subcommittee hearings, too late for passage this year but sending them on their way with a favorable report. H.4202 addresses what should be simpler aspect of this problem, correcting the definition of “committee” when requiring disclosure from groups established specifically to influence elections.

H.3045 addresses the more difficult issues surrounding disclosure requirements for other organizations that engage in electioneering. A recent federal district court ruling in CREW’s v. FEC and Crossroads GPS has made requiring disclosure of funding sources for electioneering “social welfare” groups genuinely feasible.

In 2019, I testified for H.4260, which combines a series of smaller bills to enact major accountability and transparency improvements in utility oversight. This bill has passed the House but has not been heard in the Senate. Acting “pro se” (for myself), I participated as an intervenor in Public Service Commission dockets associated with the V. C. Summer case and the SCANA-Dominion merger.

I have also testified in support of H.3145, a bill to ensure more accountable governance and stronger ethical standards for electric co-ops, stressing that like all ethics bills it will instruct officials who wish to do the right thing far more often than it will be used to define and punish wrongdoers. This very positive bill passed and we participated in the Governor’s bill signing.

In other areas, we have worked closely with partner organizations. In women’s reproductive health, in 2019 we testified against H.3020, the “fetal heartbeat” abortion restriction bill. Both WREN and Planned Parenthood provided strong leadership in this effort. Sadly, the bill has been reported favorably out of House Judicary. However, we remain optimistic about stopping it in the Senate in 2019.

We also worked with sponsors of H.3279 in the House and S. 187 in the Senate, bills that would allow women to access medical abortion care in the later stages of pregnancy at once, thus preventing unintended pregnancies and, as a consequence, abortions. A subcommittee hearing late in the session failed to reach a conclusion and negotiations will continue through the summer.

Janelle Rivers, president of the Columbia League and an experienced expert on educational accountability, has testified for the League on accountability issues in the major educational bills H.3749 and S. 419. The General Assembly, and the League, now await a report from the Department of Revenue on current education funding mechanisms before taking on the task of considering improvements in the current system.

We also await action on bills to reform the larger system of state taxation, and we will again take advantage of Holley Ulbrich’s deep expertise in this area. Our testimony on environmental issues has included opposition to S. 105, H.3653, and the various “ban the plastic bag” bills.

Other bills that did not pass in 2019 include many of interest in our “Making Democracy Work” focus and in other areas such as women’s social and economic rights, environmental protection, and health care.

As always, we deeply appreciate our legislative partners from both parties who have worked with us.

— Lynn S. Teague

Vice President for Issues and Action

BUILDING STATEWIDE STRENGTH THROUGH WORKING GROUPS

Over the decades, the state League has attempted a variety of ways to create networks across local Leagues and draw on the expertise and work ethic of local members to manage our education, advocacy, and voter service activities. With the shift in focus of the state board to an expanded support and co-ordination role, we have chosen to experiment with working groups in the next two years. Currently, there are three working groups in the development stage. One group will address redistricting (for which we already have a well-formed nucleus), one is focused on education, and the third will work on gender and racial equity issues/ERA. We expect to see three more ad hoc groups emerge, one for mineral resources, one for redistricting issues, the 100th anniversary celebration of VOTE411. These groups may function differently, but they will all have one or preferably two coordinators, at least eight members (with as many local Leagues as possible represented), and a liaison person from the state League as well as regular contact with our state issues directors, JoAnne Day, and our state director for issue specialists and coalitions, Suzanne Rhodes. We will try to make effective use of our newly purchased ZOOM communications tool, so be sure to download the ZOOM app, preferably to a desktop, laptop, or tablet with a camera so we can see your smiling face (or scowl, or rolling eyes, as the case might be). ZOOM is our hope to reduce travel to Columbia for face-to-face meetings.

I know you all love to see the bit to join in one or more of these groups! We offered an opportunity to sign up at convention and got lots of responses. Those names have been shared with state board. But we need to make sure that we have balanced representation from as many Leagues as possible, so we will be recruiting through local presidents. If there is one working group in which you are interested, put your name in the hat with your president. If there are too many in one local League (which seems to be happening in redistricting), we will ask you to send no more than two and form a local working group to support them back home.

There are still a lot of operational details to be worked out for our working groups. We want to emphasize the role of local Leagues in offering education — good information widely shared with the public and forming the basis for any advocacy that may emerge. We want to advocate in ways that are effective, and advocating from a basis of good information is part of that, but so is the style of advocacy, so we will need to work on our advocacy skills from a mindset of working closely together in continuous close coordination with our Vice President for Issues and advocacy, Lynn Teague.

However, networking among local Leagues is not limited to working groups. By forging connections among local Leagues, we hope to use the ideas we have, the programs we create, and best practices developed at the local level to strengthen every local League. The working groups are a start. Look to hear more about them in the fall after the Board retreat in July as we start to gear up for another exciting and challenging legislative and election year.

— Holley Ulbrich
Co-President, LWVSC

New LWVSC Officers 2019-2021

Secretary: Marie Vandivort
(Charleston Area)

Marie currently serves as Natural Resources Director of the LWV of the Charleston Area. She has been a member of the LWV for six years, beginning with the Green League. Marie and her husband Dan reside on the Charleston Peninsula. A native of California, Marie earned a B.A. in History from the University of California, Berkeley. She graduated from Law School and is a licensed, though inactive, California attorney. In addition, she holds an MA in American Studies. In the past she has volunteered at her children’s schools including a stint as President of the Parent Association and as Chair of the major fundraiser. Marie volunteers every year as a docent for the Festival of Houses for Historic Charleston Foundation, in addition to being a member of HCF’s National Advisory Council. Most recently, Marie was awarded the Frances R. Edmunds pin in honor of her volunteer efforts for HCF.

Treasurer: Nancy Williams
(Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area)

Nancy Williams has been a member of the LWV of Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area since 2011. After her retirement in 2013 as Executive Director of Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry, Nancy served as LWVHHB’s Vice President (2014-2016) and Co-President (2017-2019). Prior to moving to the Lowcountry from Hartford, Connecticut in 1987, Nancy was employed as a human resources manager for CIGNA and Aetna and a high school English teacher. Nancy has a passion for women’s rights and women’s issues and is a past board chair, state director, and member of various regional and national committees for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. A graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University (BA) and Wesleyan University (MA). She and her husband are parents of a son who lives in Athens, Georgia.
Established in 1951, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina is a nonpartisan, political organization that encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Any citizen of voting age, male or female, may become a League member. All members receive the National Voter, the SC Voter, and a newsletter from their local League.

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Contribution can be mailed to LWVSC, P.O. Box 8453, Columbia, SC 29202 or a donation can be made on line at www.lwvsc.org. You can donate with a one time or recurring gift. Every little bit helps support advocacy efforts at the SC Statehouse and grassroots efforts in our local communities.

Thank you for your support!