



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON AREA

# ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

May 8, 2019



EMPOWERING VOTERS. DEFENDING DEMOCRACY.



## **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND-BLUFFTON AREA**

### **2018-2019 Leadership**

#### **Board of Directors**

Dot Law, Co-President

Nancy Williams, Co-President

Kay Roshnow, Secretary

Barbara Swift, Treasurer

MaryAnn Bromley, State Issues & Advocacy Chair

Ellen Dahl, Co-Membership Chair

Joan Kinne-Shulman, Observer Corps Chair

Sally McGarry, Local Issues Chair

Kathy Quirk, Education Chair

Sandy Stern, Communications Chair

Ruth Wilwerding, Voter Service Chair

#### **Off-Board Chairs and Specialists**

Jan Billingslea, Meeting & Events Planner

Heather Bragg, Asst. Communications

Mary Agnes Garman, Lighthouse Editor

Barbara Hammes, Equal Rights Amendment Specialist

Joan Kinne-Shulman, Nominating Committee Chair

Dave Rice, Webmaster

John Riolo, Vote411 Administrator

Flo Rosse, Co-Membership Chair

Connie Voight, Archivist

In 2018-2019 The League of Women Voters of Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area achieved significant results in advancing our mission while growing our membership and enhancing our League's visibility, impact, and capacity.

In the past year, under the leadership of our Board of Directors, we have:

- Achieved a 6.2 percent net gain in membership, exceeding our goal of 5 percent. Achieved 15 percent since 2017;
- Strengthened connections with African-American and Hispanic organizations and communities;
- Launched Vote411.org and educated over 4300 voters with a 94 percent participation rate of candidates;
- Sponsored and moderated 5 candidate forums for municipal, county, and Board of Education elections with average attendance of 72 people (high of 170). Four were broadcast live by the Beaufort County Channel;
- Registered 364 new voters at local high schools, colleges, organizations, and community events in partnership with other organizations. Efforts garnered coverage by WSAV in Savannah, GA;
- Continued our redistricting campaign, recruiting 24 new advocates (for a total of 99) and educating the general public through 2 public forums and 2 outside speaking engagements;
- Held 2 public forums featuring state or town elected officials, one in partnership with the Social Action Committee of Campbell AME Chapel;
- Launched a local ERA ratification campaign as part of the Charleston League's Equal Means ERA Coalition, including designation of an ERA Specialist and 2000 postcard mailings to state representatives;
- Monitored Board of Education and Hilton Head Island Town Council meetings and activities;
- Collaborated with the Coastal Conservation League in resisting proposed federal plans for offshore seismic testing and oil drilling and in supporting a rural and critical lands ballot issue, which passed with 70 percent approval; testified at County Council on a land use issue;
- Rebranded our publications and publicity to reflect a refreshed and common appearance;
- Published *2019-2020 Guide to Elected Officials* in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce;
- Increased traffic to our Facebook page by 228 percent from March to April alone;
- Utilized Mail Chimp to send out appealing monthly newsletters and periodic e-blasts;
- Upgraded our website, utilizing MyLO platform;
- Augmented our operating income by raising over \$3350 in contributions; and
- As part of leadership development efforts, sent 8 members to LWVSC's 2019 LEAD Day and 5 delegates to the LWVSC Convention in Charleston.

We also found time for socialization—as well as education-- at our holiday luncheon, featuring Mitchelville CEO Ahmad Ward, our March celebration of Women's History Month at the home of Flo Rosse, and our May annual meeting and luncheon, when we celebrated our successes and recognized our own.

More detail about what we've accomplished this year appears in the following reports.

--Dot Law and Nancy Williams, Co-Presidents

Because 2018 was an election year, candidate forums and meetings with newly elected officials dominated our program schedule. In addition, we held our annual program planning meeting and two meetings on current topics. We also found time for socializing and celebrating our successes. All meetings were open to the general public and attracted from 30 to 170 attendees.

The following are the titles of our programs and the speakers, from September 2018 through May 2019.

- September: Beaufort County Council Candidates Forum, Loretta Warden, Moderator
- October: Board of Education Candidates Forum, Nancy Williams, Moderator  
Hilton Head Island Town Council Candidates Forum, Sally McGarry, Moderator  
Hilton Head Island Mayoral Candidates Forum, Sally McGarry, Moderator
- November: Newly Elected S.C. House of Representatives Forum  
Speakers: Bill Herbkersman (District 118), Weston Newton (District 120), and Jeff Bradley (District 123), MaryAnn Bromley, Moderator
- December: Holiday Luncheon  
“Women, Get It Right Side Up, NOW”  
Speaker: Ahmad Ward, CEO of the Mitchelville Preservation Project
- January: “ERA... Let’s Get It Done!”  
Speaker: Barbara Fry, Equal Means ERA Coalition  
HHI Town Council Ward 6 Candidates Forum, Joan Kinne-Shulman, Moderator
- February: State and Local Program Planning, Nancy Williams, Leader
- March: Celebration of Women’s History Month and Viewing of *Legalize Equality*  
“Meet with Your Representatives,” in partnership with Campbell AME Chapel’s Social Action Committee, MaryAnn Bromley, Moderator  
Featuring: State Senator Tom Davis and County Councilman Michael Covert
- April: “The State of Our Towns”  
Speakers: Mayor of the Town of Hilton Head Island, John McCann  
Mayor of the Town of Bluffton, Lisa Sulka
- May: “Celebrating Our Own”: Annual Meeting, Luncheon, and Member Recognition

--Nancy Williams

## LWV MEMBERSHIP

The League of Women Voters Hilton Head-Bluffton area currently has 139 members as of April 30, 2019. We increased membership from January 31, 2018 (119) to 2019 (137) by 6.2 percent, exceeding our goal of 5 percent. Since our last annual May meeting, we have welcomed 17 new members to our League. We have lost 18 members due to a variety of reasons: relocation, illness, death or other interests. However, we achieved a retention rate of about 85 per cent. Where appropriate, every effort has been made to encourage continued involvement with the League. While most of our members have single memberships, we also have 12 family memberships. Both single and family memberships include individuals who reside in Hilton Head Island, Bluffton and Beaufort as well as in island areas of the Lowcountry.

In an effort to diversify our membership, our Board of Directors created an ad hoc diversity task group, which began work on a plan to make connections with African-Americans, Hispanics, and youth in areas of mutual interest.

*--Ellen Dahl, Membership Co Chair*

## LWV OBSERVER CORPS

A core group of four members—Joan Kinne-Shulman, Sally McGarry, Barbara Swift, and Ruth Wilwerding—observed at most of the Hilton Head Island Town Council meetings throughout the year, generally two meetings a month.

The Corps also observed at many of the HHI Planning Commission meetings, which are held one or two times a month.

The group wore League pins to make sure the officials know the League is paying attention to their deliberations. We did not speak out about any issues, but we did particularly note discussions about promoting the development of affordable housing, extending sewers to all parts of the Island, reviewing the Land Management Ordinance (LMO), and conserving the environment.

The Corps attended County Council meetings when they were held on the Island—once or twice a year.

Additional observers are needed to attend the Bluffton Town Council and Planning Commission meetings. Each body meets once a month.

The Beaufort League asked our League's help in developing an Observer Corps. Sally McGarry and Joan Kinne-Shulman met in late March with eight Beaufort League members to share information and advice.

*--Joan Kinne-Shulman, Observer Corps Chair*

The major focus of the committee this program year has continued to be on education and advocacy around a number of important S.C. House and Senate bills, with particular focus on establishing a S.C. Independent Redistricting Commission (H. 3054/S. 230). Our most important advocacy and organizing efforts were on organizing and carrying out our campaign for an independent redistricting commission. Other S.C. Legislative issues of focus for us this year included: State Ethics bills (H. 3045 & H 4203), Voting Technology (H. 3616/S. 374), Fetal Heartbeat Abortion Prohibition Bill H.3020/S.32), ERA (H.3391), College Access & Development Act (H. 3404/S.431), Permitless Carry bill (S.139) and Extending Background Checks “Charleston Loophole Bill” (H. 3058).

Our kick-off event this year was an LWVHHI-BA sponsored general meeting on November 14 on democracy in action: a dialog with our S. C. State Representatives before the opening of the next legislative session. All of our local S.C. State Representatives won re-election from South Carolina House Districts 118, 120 and 123, and all three participated on a panel moderated by the State Issues and Advocacy Chair. The program was well-attended by both League and non-League members and was favorably received by approximately 45 persons. All three representatives answered questions from both the League and members of the audience. MaryAnn, as moderator, also discussed the need for an independent redistricting commission. She also spoke at a Gullah Leadership meeting (9/24/18) about the need for a S.C. independent redistricting commission and participated in a panel discussion about the upcoming state legislative season at a luncheon meeting of the Democratic Club South of the Broad (1/6/19).

On March 30 we held a second LWVHHI-BA general meeting which we co-sponsored with the Campbell Chapel AME Church in Bluffton where the meeting was held. We specifically designed the program as a community forum for the Hilton Head and Greater Bluffton areas. General issue questions, as well as questions about specific legislation, were raised by the League, Campbell Chapel and most importantly, by many of the 85 people who attended the meeting. Questions included: support for independent redistricting legislation (specifically H. 3053), education reform bills, ERA, pay equity for women, seismic testing and off-shore drilling, affordable housing for workers with low-paying jobs, health insurance, common sense gun laws, medical marijuana, fetal heartbeat abortion prohibition bills, in-state tuition for Dreamers (DACA) and others, storm water regulations, and predatory lending practices. Participation was so active that we were unable to get to all of the questions that people had. An article was written about the community meeting by Dan Hunt, a reporter for the local newspaper *Bluffton Today* (4/1/19). The article was entitled “Group pushes for redistricting commission” and ran daily for two weeks in its online edition.

#### **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

As State Issues and Advocacy Chair, MaryAnn provided information on Vote411 at all of our candidate forums in the fall. In addition, she and other committee members spoke with attendees at two outdoor festivals this year, the VegFest and the annual Hispanic Music Festival. Materials were given out and questions were answered about Vote411, the need for a S.C. independent redistricting commission and information on the “how to’s” of legislative advocacy in S.C. We estimate that we provided handouts and spoke with over 150 attendees at the two festivals and an estimated 640 handouts were distributed, including the materials given out at the fall candidate forum.

“Redistricting: Where do we go from here?” was the title of our article in the summer 2018 *Lighthouse*. We hope to have more time in the coming year to write more articles of interest in the *Lighthouse*. MaryAnn was also active in keeping Facebook up-to-date with current national, state and local legislative issues, calls for action and informational pieces, in particular with regard to redistricting and gerrymandering.

Our redistricting action sub-committee currently has 99 members. Active participation is at a low ebb currently; however, all members receive regular updates about events and legislation of concern to our committee as well as calls for action. We added 24 new members this year.

-- MaryAnn Bromley, State Issues and Advocacy Chair



**NATURAL RESOURCES:** Off-Shore Seismic Testing and Drilling

We have written to our elected officials about the damaging effects of such actions on our marine life and the quality of life in our resort community. We have coordinated with the Coastal Conservation League in this effort and will continue to do so.

Our objective is to forestall these destructive practices by oil and natural gas interests.

We were reassured that the previous national administration agreed with our position and opposed off-shore seismic testing and drilling. The current administration wishes to allow it, so we have resumed our efforts to save our coastline and our beaches from such activity.

We have positions on Sensitive Land Areas, preservation and protection of Waterways and Wetlands. All of these are addressed by the Rural and Critical Lands bond referendum which our League supported and which was approved by the electorate, once again, in the 2018 election.

**TRANSPORTATION**

The need for a comprehensive transportation plan is one we should address in the near future.

**ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY:** Redistricting

In anticipation of the redrawing of political district lines as a result of the 2020 Census, our League is drawing attention to the gerrymandering which characterizes S.C.'s current election districts. We are also investigating how municipal, Board of Education, and county district lines are determined so as to ensure that they are fairly drawn without partisan intent.

--Sally McGarry, Local Issues Chair

**BACKGROUND:** As of January 26, 2019, two bills to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) have been introduced in the South Carolina House of Representatives. HR 3391 was introduced by Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter (D-Orangeburg) and Rep. Mandy Powers Norrell (D- Lancaster). By the end of April, a total of 13 representatives had signed on to co-sponsor this bipartisan bill, 8 Democrats and 5 Republicans. HR 3340 focuses on the passage of this same amendment. Both bills were referred to the House Judiciary Committee. At that point, efforts were underway by supporters to secure nonpartisan support for the passage of these bills that address/endorse equality for all in the Constitution.

The US Congress approved passage of the ERA in 1972 (33 states within the first two years). Many states were quick to ratify. The S.C. legislature first considered ratification in March, 1972. It passed in the House of Representatives, but was defeated in the Senate.

#### **2019 AND THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS:**

Following a highly informative presentation in January by Barbara Fry, ERA specialist for the Charleston League of Women Voters, LWVHHI-BA embraced the goal of working toward passage of the ERA in the S.C. legislature. Specifically, 3 focus areas emerged:

1. Contact members of the House Judiciary Committee, asking them to support the ERA.
2. Contact individual state representatives asking them to sponsor and support H3391.
3. Take the message to churches, organizations, businesses, family, and friends. Educate the community on the importance of passage of the ERA.

#### **OUTCOMES TO DATE:**

- Approximately 2000 postcards were sent out to all 29 members of the House Judiciary Committee by the second week in April asking for their support in moving H3391 forward for a vote by both the House and the Senate during the current legislative session. Despite the fact that approximately 2000 postcards were sent by many individuals throughout Hilton Head and Bluffton, H3391 was NOT advanced and will not be reviewed further in the current session.
- Several information sessions were provided to small groups, primarily women, informing them about the status of this critical constitutional amendment. More than half of the participants were not aware that S.C. did not ratify the ERA and that there was a current movement to ratify it.
- Mayors of HHI and Bluffton were addressed in a forum sponsored by our League. Mayors Sulka and McCann were asked that each of their town councils consider adopting a resolution of support for passage of the ERA in South Carolina.
- On April 22, an Equal Means ERA (EmERA) conference call was held with representatives from various Leagues throughout the state. Goals and action plans were developed from this point forward through the summer to move the bill forward, identify who is opposed and who is a supporter. This core group will continue to work together for the next several months.

*--Barbara Hammes, ERA Specialist*

In support of our League's goal to increase core issue impact, the Voter Service Committee was charged with registering and engaging 370 new voters and educating 1500 voters. Our committee has exceeded both goals.

As of May 5, the Voter Service Committee has registered 364 voters. We did so through the efforts of 24 volunteers, collaboration with six area non-profit organizations, and our presence at community festivals. Registration drives occurred at the Technical College of the Lowcountry, the University of South Carolina-Beaufort, and the three area high schools south of the Broad River, with spring drives yet to occur at Hilton Head Island and May River High Schools. In the fall, the committee capitalized on National Registration Day, which occurs on the fourth Tuesday in September, to register students and to garner television coverage from WSAV TV in Savannah. WSAV reporter Stassy Olmos interviewed the League members who were registering students, and the interview was aired that evening.

We greatly exceeded our goal of educating 1500 voters. 4300 visitors, alone, visited theVote411.org website to read candidates' answers to questions written by our League. An average of 72 persons attended each of five candidate forums. An even larger audience was reached through live broadcasts of the candidate forums by Beaufort County television station. We also took advantage of fall community festivals, where we set up a tent and reached out to the general public with information about voting and Vote411.org. Following the 2018 election, we updated *Guide to Elected Officials* for 2019-2020, which has been distributed to local libraries, local government offices, and the Chamber of Commerce.

A particular success this year was the launching of Vote411.org, an LWV one-stop, online guide to candidates and election information at the national, state, and local levels. Under the leadership of Vote411 Administrator John Riolo, LWVHHI-BA developed questions for a myriad of local candidates competing in the June primaries and the November general election. Our League experienced the highest level of candidate participation in the state: 94%. We also increased the number of visitors from the primary season to the general election season over seven-fold. Comments from voters and candidates alike were very positive, and we look forward to providing this helpful educational resource in the 2019 and 2020 elections.

Active members of the Voter Service Committee are Sharon Butler, Kay Roshnow, Diana Heitman and Ilene Schwartz, who assisted with voter registration. The committee is reaching out to the 45 League members who want to help with registration or other voter activities to assist in these various efforts in 2019-2020.

-- Ruth Wilwerding, Voter Service Chair

The Education Committee began the year with the preparation of a questionnaire for the seven candidates for Beaufort County School District (BCSD) Board of Education seats who were running in the November election. The candidate responses were posted on LWV's Vote411.org site as part of our effort to educate voters. Members of the committee also worked with Voter Service Committee at the October 10 LWV Candidates' Forum for those candidates running for Board positions south of the Broad. We were committed to encouraging good vetting of the candidates and a strong voter turnout due to the previous Board's high level of dysfunction.

Currently the committee is focused on two important BCSD Board initiatives: (1) the search for a new superintendent and (2) the work of the newly appointed School Facilities Task Force. The committee stayed involved and visible in the process of superintendent selection by submitting questions for the final candidates and by our presence at the community forum. Members of the committee will continue to maintain League visibility by monitoring school board meetings and the work of the School Facilities Task Force which will be making important recommendations regarding the local tax referendum and possible school closings.

At the state level, we will continue to follow the progress of the S.C. Career Opportunities and Access Act which has passed in the House and is seeking to address the state's problems with teacher recruitment and retention. S.C. continues to rank at the bottom nationally on test scores and college readiness. Currently there is no movement at the state level to undertake a much-needed reform of S.C.'s 1977 Education Funding Act. LWVSC supports comprehensive tax reform to address problems in school funding. Our local committee recommended that we consider the following addition to that position: The state should consolidate PK-12 funding and revenue sources to eliminate duplication and administrative costs with an equitable new formula where the money is allocated on a per pupil basis.

As a committee, we have worked to increase new member participation in our League by welcoming new members into committee participation and by inviting new members to committee meetings, most recently to one at the Bluffton Public Library on April 25.

*--Kathy Quirk, Education Committee Chair*

The Communications Committee has been busy increasing visibility of the League. Our goals this year were met by:

- Increasing our presence on Facebook with news updates and reports;
- Informing the public of our monthly educational meetings, public forums, and candidate debates via news releases, fliers, our website, and social media;
- Notifying the public about sources of voting information via TV, radio and newspaper public service announcements, letters to the editor, and op-eds.;
- Increasing traffic to LWV's Vote411.org website;
- Updating our LWVHHI-BA website in time for the primaries in June and our mid-term elections in November 2018; and,
- Increasing the League's visibility in the community and by bringing awareness of its mission and the policy positions it supports and advocates.

Committee members joined other League members in marching with a banner in the Martin Luther King Parades in Bluffton and on Hilton Head Island on January 15, 2019. Members also participated at the Latin Music Festival on October 14, 2018 and the VegFest on October 20, 2018 at Shelter Cove Community Park by staffing a table with voter information.

Through the collective efforts of the Communications Committee, we rebranded all of our League's signage and publicity; redesigned our website; produced fliers, rack cards, and business cards publicizing Vote411 as well as our general meetings and forums; and drafted a new membership brochure. Look for our new table, podium and standing banners! Due to our increasing technological expertise, we were able to "boost" Facebook postings, resulting in a one-month gain in visitors of 228%, and were able to live stream our March 30 public forum. Regular news releases and occasional op eds and television appearances also kept LWVHHI-BA in the news.

The Communications Committee consists of Heather Bragg, Assistant Chair; Mary Agnes Garman, editor of our monthly newsletter, the *Lighthouse*; John Riolo, our technology specialist; Mary Ann Bromley, our Facebook poster; and David Rice, our webmaster. Each member contributed a wealth of knowledge and expertise.

--Sandy Stern, *Communications Chair*

