



Legislative Interview Kit 2021-2022

****Legislative Interview Reports [Due February 28, 2022](#)****

Introduction

Every year, the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) encourages local League members to interview their state legislators or staff. Legislative interviews are a powerful tool - increasing League visibility, gathering information, and raising awareness among California's state representatives about our interest in policies they are considering.

Legislative interviews are an opportunity for legislators to share their priorities with local Leagues and develop an understanding of League positions and priorities. Local Leagues discover plans for state legislation that may impact their communities. Furthermore, the state League learns more about legislators and the interests of local Leagues, gaining information useful in planning statewide advocacy and education.

Use interviews to become better acquainted with your legislators and their staff. It's a chance to emphasize that while the League never supports or opposes candidates or parties, we are a political organization, and after thorough study and consensus we take positions on issues.

While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, most will opt for online meetings. Although this isn't the same as face-to-face interviews, our hope is that using an online platform will give you more flexibility and make the process easier for all involved, including by simplifying scheduling, note taking, and sharing of resources.

Making Democracy Work: An Equity Lens

The League of Women Voters of California applies an "equity lens" by analyzing what we do from the perspective of how it impacts underrepresented individuals and communities. Legislative interviews offer an excellent opportunity to develop representative League leadership and add rich, diverse perspectives to your work.

In that spirit, we encourage you to front end diversity, equity and inclusion in legislative interviews by proactively reaching out and including League members and potential members who are young, Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, have disabilities, are in the [LGBTQI+ community](#), or otherwise underrepresented.

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Legislative Interview Questions

The following are short versions of the questions to be posed to your legislator. The full versions of the questions and background information for Questions 1 through 3 may be found starting on [page 8](#).

Question 1: Redistricting Changes in Advance of 2031

California's Citizens Redistricting Commission, and the standards they are required to follow, represent the gold standard for independent nonpartisan redistricting.

For the 2021 redistricting cycle, the legislature adopted some groundbreaking reforms for local redistricting, establishing requirements for public outreach and ranked criteria to be used for city and county redistricting.

What changes, if any, would you support for the next redistricting cycle in 2031?

- Expanding the current requirements for cities and counties to school district and/or special district redistricting.
- Requiring independent redistricting commissions for local redistricting.
- Expanding the public outreach and transparency requirements beyond what is currently in place.

Question 2: Climate Change, Water, and Equity

Scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimate that the overwhelming majority of the impacts of climate change will be connected to water – drought, floods, unreliable water supplies, poor water quality, and ecosystem devastation. Historically, within the U.S., low-income communities and communities of color, both urban and rural, have been experiencing the greatest harm, although global warming affects everyone.

What do you see as ways California can help these communities while dealing with the water effects of climate change upon the state? How do we move toward equity and sustainability? Please tell us about both proposed and potential legislation and funding sources.

Question 3: California's Children and Youth Mental Health Emergency

The pandemic has exacerbated existing problems related to the mental health of California's children and youth, and the ensuing crisis disproportionately impacts under-resourced communities. California's new [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative - Detailed Proposal](#), which allocates \$4.4 billion over five years to address these issues, may help reform our overburdened system. The challenges, however, are

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significant and there have been [recommendations](#) made for further legislative action to ensure success.

What more needs to be done to address the mental health needs of California's children and youth? Do you anticipate proposing or supporting any legislation to confront the growing problem?

Question 4: Personal Priorities of Legislator

What other major issues do you think the legislature must deal with in 2022? What are your personal priorities? Please make sure to ask this question. It provides us with very valuable insight about your legislator.

Optional Question 5: Local Issues

Local League Question(s) related to issues of particular local concern. This is entirely optional, but you are welcome to include a question related to local issues.

The Legislative Interview Process

Advance work by League interview team members is essential to success. This is a short-term project that includes preparation, the interview, and wrap-up. It's advisable to hold a few organizing meetings for your team, especially if it includes people who are new to the process.

1. **Schedule the interview.** This can take time so start early!

- While some Leagues may prefer to meet their legislators and/or staff in person, it's fine to conduct these interviews through Zoom or some other online platform.
- If a legislative district encompasses **multiple League districts** please coordinate your visit among the relevant local Leagues. The [Local League Legislative Directory](#) lists all of the local Leagues in each district (legislators will be updated post-cavass). If you wish to schedule separate interviews because you have different issues to discuss with a particular legislator, feel free to do so.

It is critical that you keep all other Leagues in the district informed if you choose to schedule a separate interview.

- While it is important to try to get an appointment with the legislator, it may be difficult to schedule. Cultivating a relationship with the district director or other staff involved in legislation (as opposed to constituent services) can also be very valuable. If a meeting with the legislator is not possible then ask to meet with staff who have a substantive role in legislation.

2. **Assemble your interview team.** Teams of three to five members are ideal.

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- Coordinators should try to include at least one person with a long-term League background, someone with a history of working with the legislator, someone well versed in the relevant issues, new and young members, and people from underrepresented groups to develop representative League leadership and add diverse perspectives.
 - Check [the FAQs](#) for recommended meeting roles and responsibilities.
3. **Prepare the team.** Hold advance meetings to go over interview roles and the questions and topics to be covered.
 4. **Prepare materials.** There are a number of substantive materials we offer associated with each question and [general resources](#) provided for your team's use. You can also develop a set of materials to [send to the legislator's office](#) either ahead of time or afterwards.
 5. **The interview.** Read over [interview etiquette tips](#) and the [FAQs](#) for detailed recommendations.
 6. **Wrap-up and report back**
 - Review reports to be sent to the LWVC and presented to your membership. This should happen as soon as possible after the interview.
 - Please fill out the online [Legislative Interview Report Form by February 28, 2022](#). This makes it easier for us to compile and analyze your responses effectively. Please let us know if you need help using the online report form by emailing Andrew Muse-Fisher at amusefisher@lwvc.org.

Interview Etiquette Tips

- ★ Be prepared. Study the background materials and the substance of the topics covered in the interview questions.
- ★ Follow your assigned role on the interview team and make space for underrepresented voices among your teammates.
- ★ Opinions expressed should be only those of the League, not of individuals.
- ★ Do not overstay your welcome - stick to the time allotted for the meeting.
- ★ **Secure the legislator's permission and specific conditions under which you may print any part of the interview in a VOTER or other newsletter. If you plan on recording the meeting, make sure you get the legislator's permission to do so.**

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FAQS for the Legislative Interview Process

Should we send the questions we plan to ask beforehand?

Our recommendation is **not to share the actual interview questions with your legislator in advance**. We believe there's a clear benefit in legislators' unrehearsed responses. The purposes of an in-person interview are to look the representative or their staff in the eye, hear their tone of voice, and get a sense of their interest in an issue. In addition, this gives the legislator an opportunity to interact with our local League members and develop or further an ongoing relationship. A preformed statement of positions that could simply be mailed to us fails to accomplish these goals.

Please feel free to share the issue areas (water, mental health, and redistricting) with the representative in advance so that they may broadly prepare themselves for your questions. Tell them that the specific questions asked by your interview committee will come from those issue areas.

How do we divide up roles?

Here are some ideas about roles and responsibilities derived from prior experience.

Team Leader

- **Make the appointment.** Contact the legislator's local district office. Be persistent. **Ask for an hour, but accept less if necessary.** If you cannot get a meeting with the legislator, ask to meet with the district director. They are often extremely well versed about everything going on in a district and in the legislature. At the very least, make sure that your visit is scheduled with someone involved in legislation and not solely in constituent services. Your visit will still be noted and remembered.
- **Confirm.** Send the legislator and staff a message confirming the appointment, mentioning the topics you will discuss. **(Do not send a copy of the "Questions," "Background," or the "Legislative Interview Report Form" sections of this kit.)**
- **Set a team prep meeting.** Brief the members of the team on interview etiquette, determine the role each member will take, and discuss each participant's responsibilities as an interview team member. If your team includes members of historically underrepresented communities, please ensure that other members step back to provide an opportunity for that voice and perspective to be heard.
- **Make introductions.** Lead off the introductions at the start of the interview and invite League members to introduce themselves.
- **Watch the clock.** Pace the interview and tactfully keep everyone (including the legislator) on the subject. You will know in advance how much time the legislator has agreed to spend with you, and allot an appropriate amount of time to each question.
- **Send a thank you.** Write a follow-up thank you after the interview. A thank you note gives you an opportunity to underscore points made at the interview, answer any questions you were not sure about, or send a League publication you may have

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referred to during the course of the interview.

Researcher

- **Background.** Brief the other members of the interview team on the legislator's relationship with the League and his/her voting record. What are his/her committee assignments and/or leadership positions in the legislature?
- **Check legislator's League membership.** Is the legislator a member of your League or another League in the district? If they aren't a member, then the interview team should ask the legislator to join the League.
- **Check bill history.** Check the [LWVC Bill Status Reports](#) for the past few cycles for information about bill(s) your legislator authored and the League either supported or opposed. You can dig even deeper by checking the legislator's history using [California's legislative information site](#). You may want to take a moment to express the League's appreciation or disappointment about a particular bill on which the state League took a position, and briefly state the League's position.
- **Keep a digital research file.** The information you develop should become part of an ongoing file about each legislator.

Background Briefer

- **Team briefing.** Inform team members as to League positions and history on the interview question topics.
- **Team discussion.** Lead a discussion with team members about the background information on question topics and the substance of the interview questions.
- **Legislator briefing.** If your legislator is new or does not know the League well, plan to spend some time talking about the mission of the League and briefly explain the difference between the League's advocacy and education roles. Describe how we take positions on issues.

Recorder

- **Document.**
 - ✓ Have the interview questions in front of you.
 - ✓ Make note of bills or policy objectives mentioned by the legislator.
 - ✓ Make note of requests for information or League materials from the legislator.
 - ✓ Write up the material from your notes promptly.
- **Debrief.** Conduct a debriefing with team members shortly after the interview.
- **Report.** Complete the online report form by [February 28, 2022](#). Responses received by this date will be the most useful for action on League priorities.

What materials should I provide?

Before or after your interview we recommend sending an email attaching or linking to materials.

- **Membership information** from each local League represented. Ask the

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legislator and staff members present to join!

- **League publications.** Send links to publications that are appropriate and relevant. You can send the League's [Action Positions and Policies](#) as a way to help elucidate the areas in which we work. And you might include publications like a local Facts for Voters and copies of local League newsletters.
- **Voter's Edge.** Tell the legislators about [Voter's Edge](#) and ask them to spread the word. Voter's Edge is our unbiased online elections guide covering federal, state, and local races in California. With over 2 million users each in the 2018 and 2020 elections, the site allows candidates to reach voters with direct, unfiltered messages and in-depth information about priorities *at no cost*. Voters access a full, personalized ballot by address, learn about candidates and issues, get clear explanations of ballot measures and find out who's funding them, and check where, when, and how to vote. Check [here](#) for more info and links to flyers. You can also order [Voter's Edge bookmarks](#) and send them as a post-meeting thank you!

Are there resources to help our team prepare?

You'll find resources related to the substance of the questions linked to throughout the "Background" sections associated with each question and sometimes a few more listed at the end. Here are some general resources.

[District maps](#) from the California Citizens Redistricting Commission

Find your:

- [Legislators](#)
- [Assembly Districts](#)
- [Senate Districts](#)

[Local League Legislative Directory](#). Please let us know if you find any problems with this cross-referenced list of districts and local Leagues. Legislators' names will be updated post-cavass.

[League Leader Contacts](#). Please contact amusefisher@lwvc.org if you need the password.

[LWVC Bill Status Reports](#). Information about bills on which the LWVC has taken a position and recommends action.

[LWVC Advocacy Resource Directory](#). A comprehensive set of resources organized by issue area and type of organization with a short description of the nature of each resource.

[LegInfo](#). California's comprehensive online site for legislation and law. Scroll down the homepage to click through to "other resources" for more useful information.

[California Legislative Analyst's Office](#). The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) has provided fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature for 75 years. It is known for its fiscal

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and programmatic expertise and nonpartisan analyses of the state budget. In addition, the office estimates the fiscal effect on the state and local government of all proposed initiatives (prior to circulation) and prepares analyses of all measures that qualify for the statewide ballot.

Legislative Scorecards. While other organizations' scorecards may not align with League positions and priorities, they do offer good insight and substantive information about legislators and their voting history. Some are [collated by Ballotpedia](#). Here are links to a few we recommend checking.

- ★ [Courage Campaign](#)
- ★ [ACLU](#)
- ★ [Sierra Club California](#)
- ★ [California Chamber of Commerce](#)
- ★ [Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association](#)

Who do I contact with questions?

If you have any questions about the interviews, please contact LWVC Vice President for Advocacy and Program, Gloria Chun Hoo at ghoo@lwvc.org or LWVC Trudy Schafer Fellow for Public Policy, Andrew Muse-Fisher at amusefisher@lwvc.org.

Legislative Interview Questions

Question 1: Redistricting Changes in Advance of 2031

California's Citizens Redistricting Commission, and the standards they are required to follow, represent the gold standard for independent nonpartisan redistricting.

For the 2021 redistricting cycle, the legislature adopted some groundbreaking reforms for local redistricting, establishing requirements for public outreach and ranked criteria to be used for city and county redistricting.

What changes, if any, would you support for the next redistricting cycle in 2031?

- Expanding the current requirements for cities and counties to school district and/or special district redistricting.
- Requiring independent redistricting commissions for local redistricting.
- Expanding the public outreach and transparency requirements beyond what is currently in place.

Background on Question 1

State Redistricting

District lines for the state legislature (Assembly and Senate), and for House of Representatives members were traditionally drawn by the state legislature. In 2008, California voters adopted the Voters FIRST Act. Since then, every 10 years, after the U.S.

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Census, the [California Citizens Redistricting Commission](#) draws new boundary lines for California's Congressional districts and state legislative districts to make sure each district has about the same number of people.

The League of Women Voters of California was a leader in the movement to create California's independent Citizens Redistricting Commission in order to ensure that the process is transparent, equitable, and free of discrimination; that community members can provide input to shape district maps; that partisanship is minimized; and that our election district maps are drawn fairly. Furthermore, we built in rules to guarantee that Commission members reflect California's diversity.

The 2011 Commission's work was even more successful than supporters could have hoped. The LWVC sponsored [this analysis](#) of the process.

At this writing, the 2021 Commission's work is underway, with final maps due by the end of the year.

The Commission will write their own report, including recommendations for any changes to the laws regulating their work. They have been collecting ideas as "Lessons Learned", and will spend time next year compiling these into a report and recommendations.

The LWVC will do its own analysis, both on our own, and with our coalition partners. At this point, we do not have any specific recommendations.

Local Redistricting

Local redistricting encompasses a large variety of governments: counties, cities, school districts, community college districts, and special districts. Special districts are local governments that deliver a wide variety of specialized services such as parks, hospitals, water, sewer, fire, and library.

Each type of local government has its own set of rules about redistricting. See the chart at the end of the LWVC's [FairMaps California Local Redistricting Toolkit](#). Information may also be found in [California Redistricting for Community Empowerment: A Legal How To Guide](#) published by the ACLU and Common Cause and the [Local Government Redistricting Toolkit: A Resource for California's Local Governments in the 2021-2022 Redistricting Cycle](#) published by Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus.

In 2018-2019, the LWVC was part of a coalition of voting rights groups that discussed potential changes to the rules for local redistricting. As a result of those discussions, the group's members co-sponsored the legislation that became [AB 849 \(Bonta\)](#). The following year, it was followed by [AB 1276 \(Bonta\)](#). Together, these bills changed the rules for city and county redistricting in California. These rules include a ranked set of criteria for redistricting, minimum public outreach requirements, transparency rules, and a standardized schedule for the work.

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As we evaluate the 2021 redistricting process, and look towards 2031, here are some of the questions to consider:

- Should these kinds of reforms be expanded to other local governments?
- The current redistricting rules include special rules for Los Angeles and San Diego Counties, mandating independent commissions in each. Does it make sense to continue special rules for these two counties? Should these mandates be expanded to include other counties?
- Should the rules for redistricting be standardized for all redistricting in California?
 - Timeline
 - Criteria
 - Public engagement and transparency
 - Procedures and rules for missing a redistricting deadline

Details and Background About Each Question

Which local governments should be included?

The current rules for local redistricting are inconsistent, and scattered throughout government code. Because the rules are inconsistent, the public – and sometimes public officials – are confused about which rules apply to which government. This is further exacerbated by the fact that redistricting occurs only every ten years, so each cycle’s process tends to be built from the ground up.

Independent Commissions: Should Los Angeles and San Diego Counties have special rules?

Independent redistricting commissions for counties have spread beyond Los Angeles and San Diego counties, which are the only two counties currently required by state law to have independent commissions in place. Under state law, any other county, general law city, school district, community college district, or special district *may* establish an independent redistricting commission to change the boundaries of electoral districts following a federal census.

Should there be a mandate for independent commissions for all counties? Only for medium and large sized counties? CalMatters recently published an article examining [\[h\]ow local independent commissions are changing California redistricting](#), CalMatters, October 27, 2021.

NOTE: The following contains a lot of detailed information, and is shared only for those who really want to know all the gory details. For the purposes of the Legislative Interview, please keep the discussion to the more general question of whether or not there should be a standardized set of practices and rules for all local redistricting in the state.

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Redistricting Timelines

Timelines can create a multitude of issues. New districts need to be in place in time for elections officials to create precinct maps, which in turn need to be in place long enough before the next election to allow time for potential candidates to file for office.

State law imposes different fixed-date deadlines for when local governments must complete redistricting. Some local governments, while required to redistrict, have no set deadline. In certain cases, fixed-date deadlines artificially compress the amount of time that is available to redistrict. This may stretch the few available consultants thin and limit public participation opportunities, especially given the fact that more jurisdictions than ever before are now conducting elections by district. Conversely, deadlines that are staggered far apart can require communities to remain engaged in redistricting for multiple years, which can be difficult to sustain. State law also includes blackout periods that prohibit new district lines from going into effect if they are drawn too close to an upcoming election. In some cases, fixed-date deadlines are rendered moot by jurisdiction-specific or general blackout periods.

The final recommendations from the coalition of voting rights groups working on local redistricting is to eliminate the current system of fixed-date deadlines and establish a uniform set of deadlines to complete redistricting by E-151 (151 days before Election Day). This would establish a natural staggering of redistricting.

Redistricting Criteria

Should mandatory redistricting criteria be established for school and community college districts, and for special districts? Should these criteria be the same as those established for cities and counties in the state by [AB 849](#)?

The criteria for cities and counties established by AB 849 are:

- **Equal Population** of each district required
- **Voting Rights Act & California Voting Rights Act** must be followed
- **Population** is adjusted to count incarcerated people at their home address not their prison address

Then the following *in order of priority*:

1. **Geographic Contiguity** to the extent practicable. Areas that meet only at the points of adjoining corners are not contiguous. Areas that are separated by water and not connected by a bridge, tunnel, or regular ferry service are not contiguous.
2. **Communities of Interest Preservation** to the extent practicable. A "community of Interest" is a population that shares common social or economic interests that should be included within a single supervisorial district for purposes of its effective and fair representation.
3. **Geographic Integrity** of a city or census designated place shall be respected to the extent practicable.
4. **Geographic Compactness** should be encouraged to the extent practicable, where it doesn't conflict with previous criteria, and in a manner to ensure that nearby areas of population are not bypassed in favor of more distant populations.

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5. **Easily Identifiable by Residents** To the extent practicable, districts shall be bounded by natural and artificial barriers, including streets.
6. **Prohibit Favoritism** No partisan favoritism or discrimination is permitted.

The coalition of voting rights groups working on local redistricting recommended mandatory ranked criteria for all local redistricting.

Public Engagement and Transparency Requirements

Should public engagement and transparency requirements be established for school and community college districts, and for special districts? Should these criteria be the same as those established for cities and counties in the state by [AB 849](#)? Should these current requirements be strengthened?

The public engagement and transparency requirements established for cities and counties by AB 849 are:

Hearing & Map Requirements

- At least four hearings are required.
- One hearing prior to issuing the first draft map.
- Two hearings after the draft map was issued.
- One hearing or workshop on weekend or weeknight after 6 PM.
- Hearings must be accessible to people with disabilities.
- Hearing notices published five days beforehand; three days if election is less than 179 days away.
- Draft maps posted online seven days before adoption of final map; three days if election is less than 179 days away.
- If available, draft maps submitted by county/city must include total population, citizen voting age population (CVAP), and racial & ethnic characteristics of CVAP in each proposed district.
- Data from Statewide Database must be available for at least three weeks before the release of any draft map. This waiting period is designed to allow people to study the data and develop feedback before having to respond to draft maps. The waiting period shrinks to a week if the data is released less than 90 days before the redistricting deadline and may be eliminated if the data is released less than 60 days before the deadline.
- Board/Council's good faith outreach is required to reach underrepresented and non-English speaking communities.
- Information must be disseminated through media, good government, and community orgs, including those serving language minorities.
- Live translation required if requested 72 hours in advance; or 48 hours if hearing is scheduled less than five days before notice.
- Jurisdictions must create a dedicated internet web page with information in English and any languages in which county is required to produce ballots. Must post explanation of process and opportunities for engagement, calendar, hearing notices, maps under consideration, and final map.

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- Public comment and map drafts may be submitted in writing or electronically and must be made publicly available.

For cities: In-language requirements extended to languages spoken by residents with limited English proficiency who constitute 3 percent or more of the city's total population.

The final recommendations from the coalition of voting rights groups working on local redistricting are more extensive than those adopted under AB 849. These include hearing and outreach requirements that increase based on the population of the government, and standardized language and transparency requirements.

Missing Redistricting Deadline Procedures

There are widely variable remedies for local governments that fail to meet a redistricting deadline.

- Should the remedy for missing a redistricting deadline be the same or different for each type of local government?
- What should the remedies be?

Existing state law on remedies:

- **State:** The Secretary of State petitions the California Supreme Court to appoint special masters to draw the maps, subject to approval by the Supreme Court.
- **Counties:** A redistricting committee made up of the District Attorney, Assessor, and Registrar. If the Registrar is not elected, then the Superintendent of Schools or the Sheriff is substituted. This committee draws the new lines.
- **Charter Cities:** The next city council election is held using the existing (unchanged) district lines.
- **General Law Cities:** The next city council election is held at-large – without districts.
- **School and Community College Districts:** The County Committee on School District Organization¹ draws the lines.
- **Special Districts:** The next board election is held using the existing (unchanged) district lines.

The final recommendations from the coalition of voting rights groups working on local redistricting are to require that the Superior Court adopt new district lines, based on the recommendation of a special master.

League Position References for Question 1

- [Redistricting \(state\)](#)
- [Redistricting \(national\)](#)

¹ The County Committee on School District Organization is a committee created in each county by the California State Legislature and is elected by the representatives from local boards of education.

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Resources for Question 1

Most resources are linked in the main body of Question 1's background. Other information you might find helpful is about the process and results of local redistricting in your local area—cities, counties, schools, and special districts. Local examples of how the process worked well or badly could be useful in your discussion.

Question 2: Climate Change, Water, and Equity

Scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimate that the overwhelming majority of the impacts of climate change will be connected to water – drought, floods, unreliable water supplies, poor water quality and ecosystem devastation. Historically, within the U.S., low-income communities and communities of color, both urban and rural, have been experiencing the greatest harm, although global warming affects everyone.

What do you see as ways California can help these communities while dealing with the water effects of climate change upon the state? How do we move toward equity and sustainability? Please tell us about both proposed and potential legislation and funding sources.

Background on Question 2

In 2012, California became the first state in the nation to pass groundbreaking legislation that recognized water as a human right – that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.

However, recognizing a right does not ensure that right can be realized. Even before we became aware of the water supply uncertainties caused by a warming climate, we knew that California had issued surface water rights for at least five times more water than the state received on average from precipitation. Colorado River flows, on which Southern California and neighboring states have relied, have been dramatically reduced by climate change and drought. In California and throughout the West, we built storage and transfer infrastructure using assumptions about climate patterns and water availability that we now know are no longer reliable. With drought and rising temperatures, we are discovering that there is a limit to how effectively water infrastructure can be managed to provide water to all users who expect it, even if the needs of the environment were to be shortchanged.

The practical unavailability of surface water has led to widespread reliance on groundwater. In some agricultural areas, overdraft has led to land subsidence, with subsidence even damaging canals built to transfer water. One consequence of groundwater reliance, particularly in rural areas, is the failure of domestic wells and wells serving small community water systems, including communities of agricultural workers.

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Unlike their neighbors who derive agricultural income from the land, many of these domestic well users and small water systems cannot afford to drill increasingly deeper wells. In addition, cities, and especially small rural communities, in the agricultural southern Central Valley cannot meet local affordable housing needs because of water scarcity and lack of water and sewer infrastructure.

[SB 200 \(Monning\), Chapter 120, Statutes of 2019](#) put in place ongoing funding to “provide safe drinking water in every California community, for every Californian.” However, a framework for a low-income water affordability assistance program has still not been established. Organizations working with vulnerable communities report that over 50 percent of Californians have a water service provider that does not offer water rate assistance to low-income customers. Public water systems face financial and constitutional ([Prop 218](#)) challenges that limit their ability to address this problem.

About 20 percent of water developed for economic purposes goes for urban uses, including municipal and industrial uses, and about 80 percent goes for agriculture. Additional “undeveloped” water meets environmental needs, such as instream flows that support fisheries and other water-dependent terrestrial and aquatic life. While urban water users are urged to maximize their conservation efforts to deal with drought, agriculture points to economics as operating against growing less-thirsty crops or fallowing land so that less surface water or groundwater is needed. Water itself can become a commodity. Furthermore, because California agriculture is attractive to large investors, smaller growers and under-resourced farmers and ranchers can be short-changed on access to the water they need to sustain their livelihoods.

Urban areas use water more efficiently, with ongoing public education campaigns about conservation and rebates for switching to more efficient appliances and outdoor foliage. The opportunity to link water efficiency uses to water rates during this drought, and into the future, allows the water customer to consciously decide how much water to use, based on personal needs and budget considerations.

Aging water delivery infrastructure must be maintained, and the costs must be spread equitably. An important conservation strategy is potable and nonpotable reuse. However, new infrastructure for reuse is expensive. Many areas of California depend to a degree on imported and/or reused water. It is anticipated that in the future, water reuse will be a significant supplement to imported water. Seawater desalination can be a solution in some areas, but it represents an even more costly investment and poses difficult environmental challenges. Until recently some areas of California seemed drought-proof, but that is clearly a fiction. Water delivery and treatment costs will always be substantial for most of California.

In addition to availability and affordability challenges, we face challenges with the quality of the water supply. Over one million California households have only poor quality water available in their communities. In some areas, groundwater or surface water—or both—may be polluted by agricultural or industrial chemicals. In the San Francisco Bay-Delta, reduced flows resulting from water diversions to other parts of the state, coupled with rising temperatures, are worsening the problem of toxic harmful algal

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blooms (HABs). Vulnerable users in all areas of the state, unlike more prosperous communities, are often unable to supplement or replace water for drinking and sanitation with bottled or treated water. Quality issues will increase, barring intervention and assistance by government at all levels.

The inexorable increase in heat and its impacts upon water supply, human lives, and the environment will require more and better responses as we face aridification and snowpack decline, deaths related to heat, and fires, floods, and population growth. It will take money, ingenuity, and cooperation at all levels to deal effectively with the crucial issues we face as a state.

League Position References for Question 2

- [California Water Resources](#): 1.f.; 1.h.; 2.c.; 3.b.; 3.d.; 4.c.; 4.d.; 5.a.; 5.c.; 5.d.
- [Water Resources \(national\)](#)
- [Agriculture \(state\)](#): 2
- [Agriculture \(national\)](#)
- [Climate Change \(state\)](#)
 - Promote policies that mitigate impacts of climate change by adaptation in urban, rural, agricultural, and natural settings.
 - Promote solutions that ease consequences of climate-related hardships to low and moderate income households.

Resources for Question 2

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- [California has given away rights to far more water than it has](#)
 - [100 years of California's water rights system: Patterns, trends and uncertainty](#). Theodore Grantham, Joshua Viers. UC Davis and UC Merced. August 2014. Environmental Research Letters 9.
- [Climate Change and Water Technical Paper VI](#). Bates, B.C., Z.W. Kundzewicz, S. Wu and J.P. Palutikof, Eds., 2008: Climate Change and Water. Technical Paper of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC Secretariat, Geneva, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2008.
- [Department of Water Resources 2021 Small Community Drought Relief Awards](#). California Department of Water Resources. September 22, 2021.
- Editorial Board. "[There is no drought.](#)" *Los Angeles Times*. May 6, 2021.
- [EPA Report Shows Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Socially Vulnerable Populations in the United States](#).
 - [Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts](#). U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2021

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- [Harmful Algal Bloom \(HAB\) outbreaks](#). Kate Poole. Natural Resources Defense Counsel. June 02, 2021.
- [Rethinking Colorado River water supply](#). Ken Neubecker. AmericanRivers.org. June 15, 2021
- [Lack of water for new housing](#). Jesse Vad. sjwater.org. October 20, 2021.
- [Lack of low-income water rate assistance](#). Pitzer, Gary. watereducation.org. April 30, 2021.
- [San Joaquin Valley domestic well failures](#). Rob Gailey, Jay Lund. californiawaterblog.com. June 20, 2021.
- [State Water Resources Control Board recommendations for low-income water rate assistance](#). California State Water Resources Control Board, CalEPA. UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation. February 2020.
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- [Water Use in California](#), Jeffrey Mount, Ellen Hanak. Public Policy Institute of California Water Policy Center. May 2019.
- [Yes, People Are Now Trading and Investing in Water as a Commodity](#). Nancy Averett, Discover Magazine. October 23, 2021.
- [20th century an unusually wet period](#), Lynn B. Ingram. Ohio State University. March, 2015.

Question 3: California's Children and Youth Mental Health Emergency

The mental health of children and youth was a major statewide concern prior to the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19—the social isolation, remote learning, family stress, and depression—has worsened the mental health of all segments of our society. But it has been particularly difficult for our young people. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) have jointly declared a [National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health](#). Living in poverty, gender, gender identity, and being multiracial, or an immigrant are key structural determinants of adolescent psychological distress. And Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander children and youth have been shown to experience the highest rates of serious emotional disturbance.

California's new [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative - Detailed Proposal](#), which allocates \$4.4 billion over five years to address these problems, may help reform our overburdened system. The challenges, however, are significant and there have been [recommendations](#) made for further legislative action to ensure success.

What more needs to be done to address the mental health needs of California's children and youth? Do you anticipate proposing or supporting any legislation to confront the growing problem?

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Background on Question 3

Mental illness in young people is most often evidenced by depression, anxiety, or anger and is frequently associated with drug or alcohol abuse. It can range from mild to severe and is the leading cause of hospitalization for children. Before the pandemic, there was already evidence of widespread mental health problems.

- In 2019, more than 35 percent of California's high school students said they felt chronically sad or hopeless, up from 31 percent in 2017. Sixteen percent said they had considered suicide. ["Student depression and disengagement were increasing even before the pandemic, data shows."](#) EdSource reporting of Children Now's [2020-21 California County Scorecard of Children's Well-Being](#).
- In 2019, according to the [CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey](#), 45 percent of high school students felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row, to the extent that they stopped doing some usual activities within the past year. This was up from 32 percent in 2017.
- The same CDC survey reported that in 2019, almost 27 percent of pupils in grades 9-12 reported considering suicide attempts (up from 17 percent in 2017), while 9 percent reported they attempted suicide at least once within the past 12 months.
- According to a 2013 [CalMHSa Student Mental Health Campus-Wide Survey](#), Over 19 percent of California public higher-education students reported psychological distress within the last 30 days, and high numbers of students reported impairment in academic performance associated with anxiety or depression.

See also [Mental Health in California: Understanding Prevalence, System Connections, Service Delivery, and Funding](#), California Budget & Policy Center, 2020; [California College Students Are Increasingly Experiencing Mental Health Issues and Need Improved Support](#), California Budget & Policy Center, 2019.

A survey of county mental health service providers reported that since COVID, clients have experienced significant increases of family stress, isolation, school-related stress, increased trauma symptoms, unemployment, need for service, need for housing support, and physical health concerns. (Survey of COVID-19 Related Impacts, [MHSOAC Framework for Responding to Covid 19 Impact](#), page 7).

Additionally, service providers and stakeholders report increases in domestic abuse, violence aimed at the transgender community, mental health concerns and gaps in services in LGBTQI+ communities, underreporting of child abuse, intergenerational trauma, and substance abuse. Isolation and lack of motivation stemming from limited social connectivity and distance learning challenges are especially prevalent in high school students. (Key Findings, [MHSOAC Framework for Responding to COVID- 19 Impacts](#))

As noted by the California Surgeon General,
COVID-19 has only furthered the mental health issues children face. For many children, the school is a bedrock of community belonging. The

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pandemic has not only disrupted children's academic opportunities and connections with their peers and educators, it has also surfaced new and difficult experiences in the home: fear, anxiety, financial distress, food and housing insecurity, and countless other challenges. Economic uncertainty is associated with increases in harsh parenting, which increases risk for child abuse and neglect, and the loss of friends and family through illness and isolation can also increase the total dose of acute stress and adversity and reduce the dose of buffering supports available from caregivers, educators, and other adults.

[Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health, 2020.](#)

Although there may not be a direct causal link between problems experienced by young people and mental illness, we see the prevalence of mild to serious mental illness among adolescents living with common risk factors. These risk factors are discussed in both the previously cited [Mental Health in California: Understanding Prevalence, System Connections, Service Delivery, and Funding](#) report and in [Nearly 1 in 3 Adolescents in California Reports Serious Psychological Distress](#), UCLA Health Policy Brief, January, 2021. They include:

- **Poverty.** Living conditions for families in poverty often cause stress on parents and children. The effects of poverty on mental health are myriad, and all have been exacerbated by the pandemic. They include:
 - Lack of access to health care.
 - Soaring cost of housing in California resulting in evictions and frequent moves have affected children's school lives, increasing numbers of children living in homeless shelters or other temporary housing. Such environments often lack connections to schools, friends, and "normal" activities.
 - The emotional effect of abuse and neglect by parents and caregivers.
 - Foster placements when mental illness or drug abuse of a parent are present. These placements are often not stable; some youth experience as many as ten foster placements before adulthood.
- **Racism.** Among adolescents who identified as multiracial, [42.9% said they had experienced serious psychological distress](#) – the highest among all racial and ethnic groups. And Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander children and youth have been shown to experience the [highest rates of serious emotional disturbance](#).
- **LGBTQI+ teens** experience a higher rate of emotional stress compared to the general teenage population. Suicide rates among these groups are exceptionally high.
- **Youth with disabilities** often show depression and anxiety due to the stress of "being different."
- **Peer pressure and other emotional pressures.** Peer pressure can affect teens regardless of economic status. An increasing problem is social media. The use of social media as a vehicle for bullying has had serious impact on teens, sometimes leading to emotional breakdown or even suicide.

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- Youth undergoing unrealistic pressure to achieve academic or other excellence has caused anxiety, depression and/or drug and alcohol abuse.
- **Juvenile Justice System.** The intersection of mental illness and juvenile justice is a growing problem. Increasing numbers of youth with existing mental illness have been identified in juvenile detention facilities, and lack of service and overcrowding frequently cause those pre-existing conditions to be worsened by the detention experience. A recent report, [On the Brink](#) published by the [Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice](#) in November 2021, found among other negative impacts:
 - Hundreds of suicidality incidents at California's Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). With a population averaging approximately 700 youth, DJJ reported 467 total instances of suicide risk from July 2020 to June 2021.
 - Youth at DJJ are subject to a culture of violence, with about 19 youth out of every 100 involved in or affected by a violent incident each month from July 2020 to June 2021.
 - Staff's frequent use of force traumatizes youth and erodes staff-youth relationships. DJJ's use of force incidents were investigated at a rate nearly 10 times higher than the rate for California's adult prisons.

Recognizing the failure of the DJJ's penitentiary model, the state halted new admissions in July 2021 and the system's final closure is due to occur by June 30, 2023. A combination of new laws extends juvenile court jurisdiction for youth with DJJ-eligible offenses, allocates funding for counties to provide local care, supervision, and services, establishes a state oversight agency, limits sentence length, and allows counties to develop treatment facilities. Vigilance is critical to guard against worsening conditions in light of the impending closure. [Juvenile Courts](#) have been established specifically to address drug and mental health problems of youth in trouble.

California's Response to Mental Health Needs of Youth

Since voters passed Proposition 63, the [Mental Health Services Act \(MHSA\) in 2004](#), the state of California has attempted to address growing mental health concerns. The MHSA provided a dedicated source of state funding to transform the state's mental health system and support a wide range of prevention, early intervention, and treatment services. However, over the years the state has struggled to make changes and adjustments to state programs.

In 2020 and 2021, several bills addressed expanding the role and responsibilities schools have in supporting children experiencing behavioral health issues. Most significantly, the [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative - Detailed Proposal](#), recently signed into law by the Governor, is a major new state commitment of \$4.4 billion over five years. See also [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative: Understanding and Distilling a Big Thing](#). This sweeping plan envisions the development of a comprehensive system of mental health for children and youth. It will create a statewide virtual platform for behavioral health services and invest in expanding school-linked mental health services, developing a larger, more diverse mental health workforce, building a continuum of care, and promoting public awareness. It is designed to improve screening and offer new

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services like comprehensive, home-based support and treatment for emerging, novel mental health challenges. Whether the initiative will be successful is yet to be seen.

Challenges Ahead

New funding will help support historically underfunded programs geared toward improving the mental health of California's youth. However, the pandemic has exacerbated the problem and there are challenges, some of which are outlined in [COVID-19 and Children's Mental Health: Addressing the Impact](#), a recent report from the Little Hoover Commission. The current system is highly fragmented and decentralized, funding is complicated and administratively burdensome, and there is a shortage of capacity and qualified workforce. The report recommends strong new leadership, a more centralized approach and a system centered around school hubs. Getting there will be a challenge. Furthermore, as the Hoover Commission notes, "it is probable that the pandemic will disproportionately impact the mental and emotional well-being of children from communities of color and low income communities, which have borne the brunt of the pandemic's economic and physical health effects."

Additional problems or barriers in the current system to keep in mind are:

- **Overlapping delivery jurisdictions.** Shared responsibility between schools and behavioral health agencies create problems related to bureaucratic impediments, funding access, and excessive administrative time and effort.
- **Shortage of inpatient beds for youth in crisis.** [California's Acute Psychiatric Bed Loss](#), California Hospital Association, February 2019 (page 3 for child/adolescent data).
- **Financial assistance for youth in crisis.** Insurance authorization and/or Medi-Cal coverage is needed in order to place a youth in crisis into an in-patient setting. This may take days when the person in crisis needs immediate attention. See the [Medi-Cal Maze: Why Many Eligible Californians Don't Enroll](#) for more information.

League Position References for Question 3

State:

- [Community College System](#)
- [Criminal Justice](#)
- [Education: PreK-12](#)
- [Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [Juvenile Justice/Dependency](#)
- [Mental Health Care](#)
- [Public Higher Education](#)

National:

- [Equality of Opportunity](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Meeting Basic Human Needs](#)
- [Childcare](#)
- [Early Intervention for Children at Risk](#)

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Resources for Question 3

These resources are in addition to the ones linked to in the main body of Question 3's background.

- [California Children's Report Card of 2020, Children Now.](#)
- [California Health and Human Services: California's Comeback Plan](#)
- [California Health and Human Services: Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly on the Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health.](#)
- [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative of 2021 - Executive Summary](#)
- [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative of 2021 - Detailed Proposal](#)
- [Children's mental health a cause for concern in report on California youth policies.](#)
- [Evaluation of California's Statewide Mental Health Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives, RAND Corporation.](#)
- [Intersection between Mental Health and the Juvenile Justice System, Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Model Program Guides.](#)
- [Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Services: Demand Exceeds Supply Despite Expansions, California Healthcare Foundation, September 2021.](#)
- [The Medi-Cal Maze: Why Many Eligible Californians Don't Enroll, California Healthcare Foundation, September 2021.](#)
- [The Mental Health Services Act: A Framework for Responding to COVID-19 Impacts, Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission, December, 2020.](#)
- [Stranded in the ER: Can California change its treatment of kids in crisis? CalMatters, September 27, 2021.](#)