



**Letter from the President**

**April 2023**

Dear LWVSC Friends,

You’ve probably seen or heard the expression, “Democracy is not a spectator sport.” Many of us have particular issues that concern us, and we’d like to contact a legislator, government officials and agencies, or a specific elected official. Where to start? How do we get in touch, and when we do make a connection, what is the best way to say what we mean? The League of Women Voters of New York State has provided us with answers to these questions, and much more. They have published a handbook called “The Citizen Lobbyist – Making Your Voice Heard: How you can influence government decisions”. You can view a PDF version of this booklet here: [https://lwvny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CitizenLobbyist\\_NY\\_Feb26\\_2017.pdf](https://lwvny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CitizenLobbyist_NY_Feb26_2017.pdf) (If you have trouble opening this link, just copy the link and paste in your browser.)

Questions like the best time to lobby for an issue, how an idea becomes a law, how to get your point across, phrasing yourself correctly in a letter to a legislator or official, where to find out about current legislation, and especially how YOU can have an impact on issues are all answered and suggestions are given.

Before we make plans to become a citizen lobbyist, we must keep in mind that as LWV members, we cannot speak on behalf of the League. Although the LWV encourages us to participate in our government, we need to speak as individuals if we are lobbying on our own.

In League,

Ann Hatke

**SAVE THE DATE:**

**Events Calendar**

June 2-4, 2023      The LWVNYS Biennial Convention will be held on **June 2-4, 2023**, at the Crowne Plaza Albany – Desmond Hotel (yes, it’ll be an in-person Convention).

## HELP WANTED!

Our County League is working on ideas (and looking for help) as we identify ways in which we can increase voter registrations and voter turnout, particularly in underrepresented areas of the County. **We have always depended on member volunteers whose efforts are central to our successes.** Below are some of the initiatives that we are hoping to implement this year:

### Voter Registration:

1. Increase the number and locations of Voter Registration sign up sites, by seeking approval from large retail stores such as Target, Lowe’s, Home Depot, Walmart, as well as Stewart’s, Market 32, and other high-volume locations, to conduct VR sessions at their entrances. Continued work with green market, library, college, and SICM sites are also part of our efforts.
2. Publicize scheduled VR efforts in community news publications.
3. Conduct presentations at high schools for students to learn about the voting process and register new voters, in conjunction with the County Board of Elections.

### Voter Turnout:

1. Conduct radio ads/public service announcements on area radio stations to announce voting opportunities and the importance of voting.
2. Identify new voters from the Board of Elections database and mail post cards to ~~them~~ encourage them to vote.
3. Continue and expand distribution of paper handouts identifying early voting sites, dates, and times, at libraries, other sites, and through neighborhood associations.
4. Continue and expand placement of GOTV lawn signs, especially in low turnout areas, again with assistance from neighborhood associations.

The League’s VR/GOTV team will be reaching out to our members who have indicated interest in working on these and other efforts, but we would welcome any additional ideas you may have, as well as your expression of interest in volunteering to help with our efforts!

<i>President</i>	<i>Ann Hatke</i>
<i>Vice President</i>	<i>OPEN</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Heide Westergaard</i>
<i>Bulletin Editor</i>	<i>Nicole Salamone</i>

Mission Statement: The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We work to increase the understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

**“Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy”**

***Save the date for the  
Annual June Dinner Meeting  
Thursday, June 15  
5:30 pm  
Turf Tavern~Scotia***

***Guest Speaker:  
Gazette Columnist Andrew Waite  
More information to follow soon***

**Proposed Leaders of LWV of Schenectady County 2023/2024**

<b>President</b>	<b>Ann Hatke</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>open</b>	
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Judy Middelkoop</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Heide Westergard</b>	<b>2024</b>
Inside Albany	Maxine Brisport	2024
Letters to the Editor/ Press Releases	Anita Sanchez Anita Sanchez	2024 2024
Voter Services	Cheryl Nechamen	2024
Forums	Sandra McGarraugh	2024
Niskayuna	Heide Westergard/ Ellen Daviero	2024
Scotia/Glenville	Connie Young	2024
Rotterdam	Maxine Brisport /Sandra McGarraugh	2024
Schenectady	Janet Hutchison/Julia Holcomb	2024
Poll Reporting	open	
Voter Registration	Connie Young/Mary Jane Shave Vicki Hoshko	2024 2024
Get Out the Vote	Pauline Kinsella/Ellen Daviero	2024
Bulletin	Nicole Salamone	2024
Advocacy/Lobbying	Open	
Nominating Committee	Sally Knutson Johanna Petersen/Mary Pritchard Connie Young	2024 2024 2024

	Carmel Patrick	2024
Membership	Connie Young/Johanna Petersen	2024
	Betsy Chase/Vicki Hoshko	2024
	Carmel Patrick	2024
Community Outreach		
Fliers	Gwynneth DeLong	2024
Membership Mtngs	Connie Young / Cheryl Nechamen	2024
Mail Chimp	Judy Middelkoop	2024
Facebook	Anita Sanchez	2024
Website	Judy Middelkoop/Barbara Vivier	2024
Observer Corps	Connie Young/Membership	2024
At Large Board Members	Cathy Lewis/Joan Fucillo	2024
	Ellen Daviero/Nancy Tudor	2024
MHA Elections	Sandra McGarraugh	2024
	Vicki Hoshko/Cheryl Nechamen	2024
Citizen’s Police Review Board Representative	Victoria Cooper	2024
▣ CPRB Alternate	Megan Haessig	2024



**New York State Equal Rights Amendment**

On January 24, 2023, the New York State Assembly passed the Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution. Proposed amendments must be approved by the state senate and the state assembly in two successive state legislative sessions before they can be presented to the voters. The assembly’s January vote was the final legislative step in the amendment process, as required by New York State law. Having reached that milestone, the amendment will be on the ballot in the November 2024 general election, and voters will have the final say as to whether to add the ERA to the state constitution.

The NY ERA prohibits discrimination based on a person’s ethnicity, national origin, age, disability or sex, including gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes. The League of Women Voters New York State and our state local leagues support this proposed constitutional amendment. Its passage will protect and ensure equal rights for all New Yorkers – all 20 million of us.

It would not be the first time New York has added an equal protection clause. In 1938, the state constitution was amended to guarantee protection from discrimination based on a person’s race, religion or creed. The problem with the amendment, which the NY ERA will correct, is that it is too narrow,

applying only to discriminatory behavior as it relates to race, religion or creed. The ERA's expansive language will guarantee that all New Yorkers have the right to be free from discrimination.

Despite this, some will argue that the NY ERA is unnecessary. After all, New York's 2019 Reproductive Health Act (RHA) added new protections for women to make their own healthcare decisions, including expanding and clarifying abortion rights, and ensuring that any federal decisions to limit abortion rights would not impact New Yorkers' rights.

Yet, the RHA is narrow, affecting only a particular set of people. Passage of the ERA will bring the RHA's provisions into the state constitution, as part of the amendment's language securing equal rights for all New Yorkers.

More than 50 years ago, Congress passed a federal ERA, which sought to enshrine similar rights in the US Constitution. The proposed 27th Amendment stated simply: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was sent to the states for ratification. For the amendment to be added to the US Constitution, three-quarters of the states must vote in the affirmative.

Some 10 years later, the debate continued. In 1983, Dr. Mary Frances Berry, historian, activist, law professor and then-commissioner on the US Commission for Civil Rights, appeared before the House Committee on the Judiciary's hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment. In her testimony, she argued that passage of a federal amendment was necessary because laws such as Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity that receives federal funding or assistance, were "not being enforced vigorously," citing "continuous efforts to narrow the scope of what the language means . . . until it means practically nothing."

The issue, she said, comes down to this: "we lack a firm constitutional basis for equal rights on the basis of gender."

In answer to the argument that the 14th Amendment already ensures equal rights, Dr. Berry pointed out that US Supreme Court did not agree. The Justices were not applying 14th Amendment's "standards to sex discrimination that they do to race discrimination." Justice Lewis Powell had noted that 'sex' was not considered a suspect class under the 14th Amendment; therefore, it was not entitled to that amendment's protections. "Ratification [of the ERA] would," in Justice Powell's words, "'resolve the substance of this precise question.'"

In other words, without the ERA, 'sex' cannot be considered a suspect class. "The result," said Dr. Berry, "is a 'catch-22.'"

Dr. Berry further observed that "in the absence of a formal constitutional foundation for gender equality, a hostile legislature . . . could wipe off all the antidiscrimination laws that are now on the books." In the past year we have seen this in real time.

The 2022 US Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which sent the question of abortion back to the states, made clear that lack of "a firm constitutional basis for equal rights" made abortion rights vulnerable. Meaning, an inferred right is not a right – it is a potential loophole.

The federal ERA was not ratified, falling three votes short of the 38 states required. The time for ratification

has long expired. There is a movement in Congress to declare the amendment ratified, because in recent years several states reversed their 'no' votes to 'yes.' However, five states have in that time decided to rescind their 'yes' votes on the ERA.

While a federal amendment is preferable, the tool we have available to ensure equal protections for all New Yorkers is amending our state constitution, so our rights will not be subject to the whims of politics.

In February, I joined members of the Albany County League on a visit to Assembly member Phil Steck, whose district includes parts of Albany and Schenectady. When it came my turn to speak, I thanked him for his vote in favor of NY ERA.

Assembly member Steck smiled and said, "It was a no-brainer." I concur, yet also understand that is not so for everyone.

The NY ERA passed with two-thirds of state legislators voting 'yes.' A very comfortable margin. Yet, we do well to note the reverse: one-third of state legislators voted against the amendment. The 'no' votes were disproportionately cast by men, but a half-dozen women voted 'no' as well.

For many of us, it is a 'no-brainer'; for others, it is not; and some may be either undecided about or unaware of NY ERA. Passage of the amendment may not be easy and likely will take more effort than we have anticipated. Our commitment and our work are needed. The rights of 20 million New Yorkers are worth it.

Joan Fucillo

LWV Schenectady County

Member, LWVNYS ERA Taskforce

Our League goals are to educate citizens about government and public policy, encourage citizen participation in elections, and influence public policy relating to issues we've studied. Membership makes working on our goals possible.

**Membership for July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024**

Return to: LWV of Schenectady County, P.O. Box 9135, Schenectady, NY 12309

***New or Renewing Members Please Confirm This Contact Information***

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$60 Individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$85 Household \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 Full time HS student

Additional support for the League, dues plus \$10 contribution (\$70 or \$95 – circle one)

Confidential arrangements for special payment or partial assistance can be made. Contact Connie Young at 518-393-7061 with questions about dues or payments. Dues and contributions are not tax deductible.

I am sending my membership dues payment, but please consider me an **INACTIVE** member.

**ACTIVE MEMBERS:** The League depends upon the work of its members, even if for just a short task. Please check any areas that interest you. We appreciate your help.

Register Voters \_\_\_\_\_ Candidate Forums \_\_\_\_\_ Get Out the Vote \_\_\_\_\_

Citizenship Mentoring Group \_\_\_\_\_ Environment \_\_\_\_\_ Students Inside Albany \_\_\_\_\_

Observer Corps \_\_\_\_\_ Judicial \_\_\_\_\_ Health \_\_\_\_\_ Membership \_\_\_\_\_

Facebook \_\_\_\_\_ Website Work \_\_\_\_\_ Other Technical Skills (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Other areas of interest \_\_\_\_\_