



Letter from the President - June 2024

Dear LWVSC Friends,

How time has flown.....and I'm afraid this will be my last letter to you as president of the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County. I've had the great good fortune to serve with a board of talented, creative, opinionated (in a good way!), hard-working women who take their positions seriously and who are always thinking of ways that we can best support our community. I inherited the president's job from Cheryl Nechamen, who had already served in just about every other position in our League. You can be sure that I put her on speed-dial immediately! Cheryl has never failed to answer my questions, give an opinion or suggestion, help me with a new report, and give me support when it was needed. Luckily for our League, Cheryl has agreed to serve as president once again and her name has been listed on the Proposed List of Leaders for 2024. We will vote upon that list at our annual dinner in June.

I'm grateful as well that I had the opportunity to meet and work with so many of our members during the years since I joined LWVSC. I've found that our membership is made up of women and men who deeply care about the mission of the League of Women Voters, who volunteer in a variety of ways, and who support us both financially and in spirit. I'm sure you all know that an organization doesn't run on it's own steam but on that of its members.

In the last few years, our League has begun to work on some projects in conjunction with the other capital region Leagues. This has broadened our scope and I've been able to meet and work with an even wider group of League members, both officers and committee members. It's been wonderful to see how many of our board members have joined with members of other Leagues to work on shared projects and programs. I look forward to seeing what new plans emerge in this framework of shared opportunities.

Over the last few years we have gone through several trials together - a multi-year pandemic, a national government that was like no other we had ever seen, culminating in a violent attack on our democratic institutions on January 6, as well as seeing a growing divide between our political parties and our ideas on what truly makes America great. During this uneasy months, I always felt cheered by having our League and members hold together and work with great hope and courage. And so, I want to thank each and every one of you for that spirit and commitment, and I wish all of us a secure and happy future as we go forward.

In League, Ann Hatke

The New York State Equal Rights Amendment

As of this writing, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (NY ERA) to the NY State Constitution is off November's ballot, after a state supreme court ruled that a procedural misstep in the legislative process invalidated the ballot measure. NY Attorney General Letitia James has appealed the ruling. New Yorkers for Equal Rights, the statewide coalition advocating for the amendment's passage, is confident that the ruling will be overturned. The League of Women Voters of New York is a member of that coalition.

Article 1 of the New York State Constitution is our state's Bill of Rights. Section 11, the equal protection clause added in 1938, ensures that "no person shall, because of race, color, creed or religion be subjected to any discrimination in his civil rights."

In 2001, Section 11 was amended to include women: "no person shall, because of race, color, creed or religion be subjected to any discrimination in his or her civil rights." A limited, but important step.

The NY ERA would expand Section 11's protected categories of "race, color, creed or religion" to include "ethnicity, national origin, age, disability" and "sex, including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, and reproductive healthcare and autonomy." Whew – that sounds like a laundry list. Do we really need all that? Yes. We do.

In *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the US Supreme Court found "a fundamental right of privacy under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment" of the US Constitution, which, it said, covered women seeking to terminate their pregnancies. This followed a trend in the Court's thinking that found a right of privacy for married couples seeking contraceptives (*Griswold*, 1965), for unmarried couples seeking contraceptives (*Eisenstadt*, 1972), and, later, for homosexual activity (*Lawrence*, 2003).

In 2022, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Org.*, the US Supreme Court overturned 50 years of *Roe*, finding that the right of privacy does not provide a right to abortion. It is unclear whether this thinking can or will be used to review other rights that fall under the rubric of personal privacy, but at least one Justice opined that the *Dobbs* reasoning may be applied in a case regarding same-sex marriage.

At present, women's autonomy in their reproductive healthcare belongs to the states, which can differ wildly. Some guarantee abortion rights for women; some impose bans at varying intervals – six, 10, 15 weeks; some carve out vague exceptions to their bans; and some, by extension, seek to punish those who aid or abet women trying to get the care they need.

The late Justice Antonin Scalia joined the US Supreme Court in 1986. He did not get to weigh in on *Roe*, but he wrote a stinging dissent in *Lawrence* and was the lone 'no' vote on allowing women to attend a public military school in Virginia.

When asked in a 2010 interview whether the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment applied to sex discrimination, Justice Scalia said that it did not. He added that "the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn't. Nobody ever thought that that's what it meant."

In other words, if the Constitution does not explicitly prohibit sex discrimination, then you have no protection. Justice Scalia, often an outlier during his tenure, has found a home in today's Supreme Court.

Which brings us back to the NY Equal Rights Amendment.

We have seen the fragility of the rights and freedoms we have relied on as US citizens. *Roe* fell because "sex" is not in the US Constitution. Our state has some of the strongest anti-discrimination laws in the country, but laws can easily be changed by a majority vote in the state legislature or thwarted by a governor's veto.

If we want to ensure that we, and all our fellow New Yorkers, at every stage of life, are protected from discrimination, then we *all* need to be in the state constitution.

Joan Fucillo
Representative to the NY ERA Taskforce

Voter Services Report

Voter Registration

We are ramping up our planning for voter registration drives. So far, we have drives scheduled at Juneteenth Celebration (6/22), I Am Father Festival (8/10), Schenectady Caribbean Day (9/7) and Fulton Montgomery Community College (9/11 and 10/1). We'll be adding many more voter registration events, so check out [LWV Voter Registration](#) if you'd like to volunteer.

Candidate Forum

We recently held a forum for candidates running for Schenectady City School District Board of Education on May 21. There were 3 candidates running for 2 seats. The candidate forum was well-attended and the audience submitted lots of interesting questions. Thank you to the League volunteers who helped at the forum: Ellen Daviero, Joan Fucillo, Carol Furman, Maxine Brisport, Pat Lambert, Inge-Lise Pangburn and Maria Khwaja.

Cheryl Nechamen
Voter Services Chair



*Please join us for the
LWVSC Annual June Dinner
Tuesday, June 11 at 5:30 pm
Turf Tavern - Scotia*

*Menu Selection:
Chicken Milanese
Panko Tilapia
Grilled Vegetables with Salsa
\$35.00*

*Please RSVP
Ann Hatke
hatkeann@gmail.com*

The New York Equal Rights Amendment

On Nov. 5, 2024, we will go to the polls to elect a president, congressional representatives and local officials. Also on the ballot will be a proposed amendment to the New York State Constitution, to ensure equal protection under the law for all New Yorkers.

New York Constitution has a limited equal protection clause – it applies only to those experiencing discrimination based on “race, color, creed or religion.” The NY ERA would expand those protections to include, for example, sex, gender, age, disability, ethnicity – in other words, all New Yorkers.

The NYS League of Women Voters is working in partnership with the New Yorkers for Equal Rights Coalition to educate voters and to advocate for passage of the amendment. A simple explanation of the amendment’s purpose and what it entails is in this flyer from the coalition:

“Right now, New York’s State Constitution does not protect all New Yorkers – for example, pregnant New Yorkers, women, LGBTQIA+ people, those with disabilities, older adults, and people from different countries and cultures.

“We need a constitutional amendment so our rights and freedoms are protected – no matter who is in office.

“The NY ERA would:

- “Explicitly prohibit discrimination by the government based on a person’s ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, and sex – including their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression – in addition to pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes.
- “Add to existing protections based on race and religion.
- “Ensure New York’s Constitution includes the strongest legal protections for all New Yorkers.”

But, do we need an amendment? Don’t New York’s laws protect people’s rights and freedoms? Yes. But, as we have learned in recent years, rights that we have relied on for decades can be diluted or even eliminated by a simple majority of a legislature or a court.

On the other hand, it is very difficult to amend New York’s Constitution. It is not affected by political whims the way laws, acts or regulations might be. This amendment is as close as we will ever get to a guarantee that “our rights and freedoms are protected – no matter who is in office.”

Joan Fucillo
NYS ERA Task Force Representative

<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”



Welcome New Members:

Malcolm Provost

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, 2024 – JUNE 30, 2025

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 _____ No Fee Full-time 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 _____