






September 2024

Brought to you by:



Election Integrity.

McChesney Room at the
Central Library

**Tuesday, September 10
6:00pm**

There has been a lot of misinformation circulating about the security of our elections. Join us for this presentation by the Schenectady County Board of Elections Commissioners, Laura Fronk and Darlene Harris, to address these concerns.

This is a FREE drop-in event for the public.

Prop 1: Panel Discussion on NY's Equal Rights Amendment



Thursday, September 19th, 6 PM
Reamer Campus Center
Union College

Panelists:

- Helen Hellmuth, Senior Advocate, Disability Rights NY
- Nicole Margiasso-Tran, Director of Organizing, Planned Parenthood of Greater NY
- Dr. Zoe Oxley, Professor of Political Science, American Studies, Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies, Union College
- Rev. Dr. M.G. Martell Spagnolo, Senior Pastor, 1st Reformed Church Schenectady

Please submit requests for accessibility accommodations by Sept. 5

Sponsored by [League of Women Voters](#) and [Union College](#)

Letter from the President – September 2024

President's Letter

Presidential elections generate a lot of interest among voters. Our hope is to build on that excitement to get people interested in local elections in the coming years. Let's face it- most of us are never going to talk to the President of the United States or the Governor of our state. But we often have an opportunity to talk to the local officials in our city or town as well as county officials and state or even Congressional representatives to discuss issues that affect our daily lives.

The Voter Services Committee has made a tremendous effort to expand our voter registration drives. As of this writing, we've held 12 voter registration events and have another 13 drives scheduled (take a look at our schedule at [LWV voter registration signup](#)). I expect more organizations to contact us to hold events as summer comes to an end. If you know of other venues for voter registration drives or would like to volunteer, please contact Joan Fucillo, Voter Services chair, at lwvschenectady@gmail.com.

We have more good news- the NYS Court of Appeals recently upheld the constitutionality of Early Vote by Mail. This is similar to absentee voting, in which voters could request a ballot by mail, but needed to have a reason for not being able to get to the polls.

In Early Vote by Mail, voters no longer need an excuse to vote by mail. It's a temporary request though. Voters must apply annually for a ballot by mail.

Whenever voters have had a widespread opportunity to vote by mail, voter turnout has been noticeably higher. This ruling is good for our democracy.

Cheryl Nechamen

Voter Services Committee Report

Our committee is busy.

From June 1 through August 17, we held Voter Registration drives at five separate community events, handing out 17 voter registration forms, two absentee applications, and 10 VR forms that were completed at the tabling site. As of this writing, we have a dozen-plus VR dates scheduled – and that is just through October 1. Please periodically check the Voter Registration sign-up sheet ([LWV voter registration](#)), and when you do sign up, please add your phone number along with your email address. This way, if there are any time snags or last-minute emergencies, you can contact your shift partners, or they can contact you.

Our Get Out the Vote drive is focused on early voting. We are working with Rensselaer and Saratoga counties on contracting for early voting ads on buses that run from our three counties throughout the capital region. Albany County has its own advertising contract, but we will work together so that our ads have a measure of uniformity.

We also are trying to nail down as much free media as possible, including messaging on town, village and fire station electronic signs, and posting early voting flyers and handouts in libraries and in local businesses that have community bulletin boards.

All presidential elections show an uptick in voter interest – even more so if the race is hotly contested. The onslaught of advertising and news coverage keeps that election top of mind, but the single-minded focus on the top of the ticket does a grave disservice to down-ballot races, particularly those at the local level – like contests for state legislature, town justice and town supervisor, county executive, county legislature and county judge. These offices have a direct effect on the quality of our lives and those of our neighbors.

Our voter-education efforts must include building awareness of the importance of voting in local contests. This year's races in Schenectady County include two state senate and three assembly seats (two-year terms), one town council position in Duanesburg and two village trustee positions in Scotia (four-year terms), and two judgeships – for family court and county court (10-year terms).

The winners of these seats will have the power to allocate state and local funds and to help determine the fates of those who are facing, or seeking, justice. Our VR tables will now include a list of open offices and the names of the candidates vying for those offices.

Joan Fucillo
Voter Services Committee

A League History - The Citizenship Mentoring Group

The Citizenship Mentoring Group was formed by members of the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County in the Spring of 2017. The League had already shown an interest in immigration issues, and we chose this project as a way to celebrate the upcoming anniversary of Voting Rights for Women. We formed a small committee made up of Cheryl Nechamen, Johanna Petersen, Judy Middelkoop, Connie Young, and Ann Hatke. We met with the local field office director of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, the program coordinator of the Office for New Americans (a NYS program that assists those applying for citizenship), and spoke with immigration officers at USCIS (Department of Homeland Security – Immigration Services). We received an enormous amount of advice and information from these people, and USCIS continues to provide us with free citizenship preparation materials. We also began researching all facets of the citizenship process, how to work with adult learners, and best practices for this type of instruction. We designed our program, including most of the forms and study materials that we would use. Then we began the process of advertising at libraries, mosques, the Annur Islamic School, and Washington Irving Adult & Continuing Education Center which has a number of immigrant students.

Although Schenectady has a large immigrant community, there were no specific programs to help this group prepare for US citizenship. We wanted to offer class sessions and also have a group of tutors who would be trained in citizenship preparation and could work one-on-one with students. We needed a site for our classes and a place where our tutors could work with their students, and we found the perfect spot at the Phyllis Bornt Library and Literacy Center. This branch of the Schenectady library system was not only located in an area where many immigrants have settled and close to a bus stop, but it also had a dedicated staff who were fully behind our plans. Our first class session began in October 2017, and was taught by Cheryl Nechamen. Our tutors began working with students. The following year, Ann Hatke became the instructor of the classes, and we began four year-round class sessions of eight-weeks each. We wanted to be able to offer this program free of charge and open to the public, and we are pleased to have received generous grants from LWVUS every year since 2018.

Currently we have taken a hiatus from the classes but continue to offer tutoring. In fact, we will be holding a tutor training session on September 24 which will be open to League and interested community members. (Please see more information about the training in this issue of the Bulletin). To date, the program has served a very diverse group of students of all ages from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guatemala, Guyana, Singapore, St. Lucia, Turkey, Peru, Dominican Republic, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia and Viet Nam.

In 2018, we also added another component to the program when a group of League volunteers began to attend Schenectady's monthly naturalization ceremonies. There we were able to provide voter registration forms to the new citizens and help them to complete the forms, answer questions, and give them written voter information. Sadly, the pandemic closed these ceremonies and we have not been allowed to assist in any way since then. However, we have been in frequent contact with the Schenectady County Clerk's Office to find a way to return to the ceremonies, and we plan to be successful.

Ann Hatke

Tutor Training to Help Community Members Prepare for US Citizenship

LWVSC's Citizenship Mentoring Group will be holding a training for those interested in helping Schenectady's immigrants prepare for their US Citizenship interview and exams. You'll learn about the citizenship process and what your student will need to know to pass their interview. This training is open to League members and other interested persons. (Please feel free to spread the word!) All materials will be supplied. We'd love to have you!

Date: Tuesday, September 24

Time: 3:00 - 4:30 pm

Where: Phyllis Bornt Library - 948 State Street, Schenectady

For more information and to register, please contact **Ann Hatke** at ash.lwvsc@gmail.com



In Praise of Early Voting

Early voting is the best-kept secret in America. Even though it's available in 46 states and has been around for years, amazingly few people understand how early voting works, or even know it exists.

Early voting can provide a huge boost to voter turn-out, especially in urban low-income areas. It opens doors to so many people who wouldn't otherwise vote: the busy, the frazzled, the harassed and overworked and overtired. Who's got time to vote on Election Day, on a cold and rainy Tuesday in November? If you have kids in day care, if you have a late shift, or two jobs, or no car, voting is a major pain in the neck. On a weekday, by the time you get home from work and make dinner, it's past 7 o'clock, and the polls close at nine.

Early voting is mostly used by people who are informed, motivated voters who take the time to figure out when and where they need to go to vote early. But our challenge is to get new voters to vote. We want to prod the folks who are unexcited about voting and don't have time to fuss over the details.

Early voting could make it much more likely that they'll vote—but only if it's easy to do so. And being a first-time early voter means they have to *take an extra step* to figure out how it works. They need to figure out when and where early voting is available.

Our job is to make it easy to take that extra step. But how best to do that?

An organization known as [Callhub](#) is a nonpartisan digital platform for getting out the vote used by many campaigns, and they've done fifteen years of research on improving voter turnout. According to them, five "touches" as they call it, is the optimal number of times people need to be reminded to vote. A "touch" can be any reminder—a phone call, a postcard, a sign, a text, a social media post, a knock on the door.

Their research suggests that a generic message like *Voting is important* is much less effective than a message that provides specific information: *Early voting starts on Oct. 26 and is available at the Schenectady Public Library on Clinton St.*

Some years, elections fly under the radar and people might forget when Election Day is. But this year, people can't avoid the election hype, with television ads and social media posts galore. They don't need a reminder that Election Day is rolling around as much they need clear information as to how and when and where to vote.

So that's our challenge in this busy election year: to think about how we can reach out and touch new voters and nudge them a little closer to the polls--early.

Anita Sanchez



<i>President</i>	<i>Cheryl Nechamen</i>
<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Joan Fucillo</i>
<i>Voter Services Chair</i>	<i>Joan Fucillo</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Heide Westergaard</i>
<i>Bulletin Editor</i>	<i>Nicole Salamone</i>

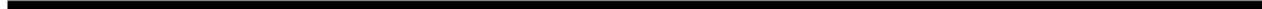
Mission Statement: The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We work to increase the understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

“Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy”



Welcome New Members:
Dana Carroll
Odell Loveless

~~~~~  
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** \_\_\_\_\_