



# Santa Cruz VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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## Calendar

### Tuesday, October 8, 2019

10 a.m.-noon  
LWVSCC Board Meeting  
Santa Cruz County Bank  
75 River Street  
Santa Cruz, CA

### Saturday, November 2, 2019

10 a.m.-noon  
The Public Education Challenge  
County Superintendent of Schools, Faris Sabbah  
Capitola City Hall, Community Room  
420 Capitola Avenue  
Capitola, CA 95010  
Free and open to the public

### Tuesday, November 12, 2019

10 a.m.-noon  
LWVSCC Board Meeting  
Santa Cruz County Bank  
75 River Street  
Santa Cruz, CA

League of Women Voters  
of Santa Cruz County  
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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

## Meeting the Public Education Challenge

*Featuring*  
**Faris Sabbah**  
County Superintendent of Schools

*Saturday*  
*November 2, 2019*  
*10 a.m.-noon*

### Capitola City Hall Community Room

420 Capitola Avenue  
Capitola, CA 95010  
*Metered parking is available in  
the city lots next door.*  
*Free and open to the public.*

At the League's November meeting, Faris Sabbah, recently-elected Superintendent of Schools for Santa Cruz County, will discuss the status of public education in Santa Cruz County, including the impact of charter schools and his plans to confront the many challenges facing our education system.

Sabbah received his doctorate in education at UC Berkeley, a master's in education at San Jose State, and his bachelor's in psychology at UC Santa Cruz. Prior to his election as superintendent, he served as deputy superintendent under Michael Watson. Over his 25-year career, he has also served as Monterey county assistant superintendent, university professor, director, assistant principal, teacher, and instructional aide.

As superintendent, Sabbah oversees the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, which provides support and training to the county's school districts, approves district budgets, and administers alternative education and other specialized programs. He is committed to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and believes in serving the whole child to prepare them to be college and career ready.

For more information, call Stephanie Harlan at 475-7184 or email [league@lwvsc.org](mailto:league@lwvsc.org).



## President's Message



On September 21, I had the privilege of hearing an engaging and very informative talk by Judge Rebecca Connolly on Improving Outcomes for Youth and

Families at the Capitola City Hall Council Chambers, which served as an inspiring start to our 2019-20 program season. I want to thank Stephanie Harlan and Karen Smith for their help arranging the program and with refreshment setup respectively, the Women Lawyers of Santa Cruz County for their co-sponsorship, and all who attended. This event began our series of programs in which we will meet some of our elected officials who will share their experiences and ideas.

Coming to our League programs is a great way to engage in civil conversations and learn about what is happening in our community. In case you were unable to attend our "Meet the Judge" program, you can read the article about it in this issue of the VOTER or view a [video of the entire program](#), including the question-and-answer exchange with the audience, on our web site, [lwvsc.org](http://lwvsc.org). Thank you to Pam Newbury, who videotaped this outstanding program, and to Jan Karwin and Jan Dwyer for maintaining our website, which has been recently updated and is a delight. Due to the efforts of these dedicated LWVSCC members, you can view this and other past programs on our local League website.

—Barbara Lewis, President LWVSCC

## The Evolution of a Judge:

*It's all about experience, acknowledgement, and engagement*

At the League's September meeting, Santa Cruz County Superior Court Judge Rebecca Connolly spoke about how her life experiences and time as a judge in the juvenile justice court have made her a better justice.

Judge Connolly didn't have a family background in law, so she didn't have family to mentor her, but she remembers one law school professor who said, "Rebecca, you're the top of your class; you should really apply for a clerkship." After applying across the state, she got a clerkship with Judge Ray in Los Angeles County.



Judge Rebecca Connolly speaks about the local justice system and how our juvenile courts work.

She stressed that Judge Ray, a Reagan Republican, hired her in spite of her differences from him ("I had long hair and was very interested in environmental law and social justice") because he loved sports. She had been one of the first generation to benefit from Title 9, and had played volleyball for UC Berkeley as a scholarship athlete: "I do credit the fact that I was one of the beneficiaries of Title 9, because that's how I got this incredibly prestigious job down in Los Angeles."

After her clerkship, she represented migrant farm workers in the Central Valley for the next two and a half years, being out in the field with them making sure that they were paid and getting basic human rights such as water and bathrooms: “It’s very politically contentious work to do, but it was incredibly honorable work. It gave me insight to just how hard those who are laboring in the fields to make sure that we have our food work.”

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*Judge Connolly also pointed out that, historically, most of Santa Cruz County’s women judges have not been appointed...three of the four women judges were elected...that’s a big proportion of elected women judges compared to her male counterparts.*

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After that, she came to Santa Cruz because she loved the area and because the District Attorney’s office was looking for individuals who spoke Spanish. She worked there for a short period before opening her own law practice. With the encouragement of her mentor, Sara Clarenbach, one of Santa Cruz’s first female attorneys and a founding member of the Women Lawyers of Santa Cruz County, Judge Connolly became a law clerk for Magistrate Judge Patricia Trumbull in San Jose, where she gained the technical skills and expertise in how to practice in federal court. After three years there, she went to work for the Grunsky Law Firm in Watsonville for seven years and became a partner. At that point, she had the qualifications she needed to be a judge: worked as assistant DA, participated in jury trials, worked for a judge, became a partner at a law firm. In 2010, Clarenbach asked Connolly if she was interested in running a campaign for superior court judge. Connolly won the election and has been a judge ever since. She acknowledged the transformational role that having women mentors in their life makes for women.

Judge Connolly also pointed out that, historically, most of Santa Cruz County’s women judges have not been appointed. When the Santa Cruz County Municipal Court was unified with the Santa Cruz County Superior Court in 1998,

Judge Kathleen Akao and Judge Heather Morris were the first two women superior court judges in Santa Cruz County. Judge Connolly praised Judge Akao’s work as a dependency judge, “She brought that very powerful trauma-informed lens to judging.” When Akao died in 2005, she was replaced with another woman, Judge Denine Guy. Judge Ariadne Symons was elected in a hotly contested race in June 2008. So, three of the four women judges were elected, and the one who was appointed replaced another female judge; that’s a big proportion of elected women judges compared to her male counterparts.

Judge Connolly currently sits in Department Four of the Santa Cruz County Court, which is a hybrid court doing domestic violence cases, misdemeanor and felony domestic violence cases as well as early-resolution court for driving under the influence cases. In early resolution cases, people are offered a different type of early resolution offer so that we can get their case expeditiously done; if they are able to resolve their case at the first appearance then they’re able to get less jail time and fewer fines.

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*These [self-help] centers essentially make life easier for everyday people who can’t afford legal representation by assisting them to be able to represent themselves and file papers in simple legal matters such as conservatorship, family law, and small claims.*

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Jury trials are done in the Santa Cruz courthouse; three of the courts there are exclusively felony courts. The other two Santa Cruz criminal courts are misdemeanor courts, and there are two civil courts. Judge Paul Burdick has been chosen by the other judges to be the presiding judge who will make assignments for the next year and handle administrative issues. Judge Timothy Volkmann is the assistant presiding judge. Judge Syda Cogliati, who was just elected last year, and Judge Timothy Schmal, who was recently appointed, are both in the misdemeanor department.



Judge John Gallagher and Judge Connolly, who were both elected at the same time, are sitting civil judges. Judge Stephen S. Siegel and Judge John Salazar are sitting felony judges. We have a new traffic commissioner, Emily Trexel. (For a list of current judicial assignments, see [santacruzcourt.org](http://santacruzcourt.org).)

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*Instead of group homes, youths struggling with emotional issues and serious mental health issues are placed in residential treatment programs—limited to a six-month period—where they receive intensive wraparound services to help them succeed.*

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The Watsonville facility has four courthouses, a family court services wing, and a self-help center, explained Judge Connolly. Department A covers juvenile dependency—a confidential courtroom—and on Thursdays it is small claims, on Fridays, adoptions; B is Juvenile Justice and misdemeanors; C and D are family law. After four years in Department A, Judge Connolly moved to Department Four in Santa Cruz in July. Judge Denine Guy is currently sitting as the presiding judge of juvenile justice in Department A. Judge Ariadne Symons is sitting in juvenile dependency. In Family courts C and D, Judge Paul Marigonda and Judge Kim Baskett hear family law cases.

The amazing thing about the Watsonville courthouse, said Judge Connolly, is how it is designed to serve the public interest. In addition to the four courthouses, they have the family courts wing and the self-help center.

Judge Connolly had high praise for the two self-help centers, one at the law library in Santa Cruz and the other at the courthouse in Watsonville. She describes the centers as being about access to justice. These centers essentially make life easier for everyday people who can't afford legal representation by assisting them to be able to represent themselves and file papers in simple legal matters such as conservatorship, family law, and small claims.

They do domestic violence restraining orders in Watsonville because they have the family court

services there. The issues that spark some of the domestic violence cases have underlying problems with custody and visitation. The judge is able to make referrals for three hours of no-cost mediation. They have licensed marriage and family therapists who can work with the parties and help them come to an agreement as to how to share custody and visitation; often, the parties are much more willing to follow along with agreements reached in this manner.

When Judge Connolly started at the family dependency court in July of 2015, she didn't know much about what happens there because it is a confidential court. The Department of Family and Children Services files a petition naming a child because that child has been abused or neglected as defined under the California welfare and institutions code. Because it is about the protection of children, the same code section is used in a slightly different manner in juvenile justice. Often the focus in juvenile justice is making sure that the child or the youth complies with the case plan; in dependency it's all about the parents complying with the case plan so that they can be a safe parent.

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*It's the judge's responsibility to ask questions and make sure every reasonable effort has been made to explore safe ways the child can remain safely in their home.*

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The California Continuum of Care Reform Act (CCR), an initiative championed by Mark Stone and enacted by the California legislature in 2015, recognizes that children thrive in family-like settings; its goal is to reduce long-term placement in residential treatment facilities, such as group homes. The aim of CCR is to make sure the system focuses on what is in the child's best interest, and to place children who must be removed from their families in the most family-like setting possible. "It's really a mandate to close group homes," said Judge Connolly.

Instead of group homes, youths struggling with emotional issues and serious mental health issues are placed in residential treatment programs—limited to a six-month period—where

they receive intensive wraparound services to help them succeed. The idea is to speed up permanent placement to a resource family (formerly called foster families).

When the Department of Family and Children Services removes a child from its family due to safety concerns, it is the job of the juvenile judge to make sure they have considered every reasonable way to keep the child safe at home. For instance, if there is an allegation of sexual abuse, they could make sure the abuser is removed from the home and put a safety plan in place, signed by the parent, to agree not to let that person have any contact with the child. It's the judge's responsibility to ask questions and make sure every reasonable effort has been made to explore safe ways the child can remain safely in their home.

In our juvenile justice system, as in the juvenile dependency system, said Judge Connolly, it's best for the youth to remain at home, and for the family to receive help with the core problems such as mental health issues, self-medicating with drugs, and acting out. The judge must determine that there's no reasonable means by which the child can be safely maintained at home without removal.

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*Youths can work with mentors at the evening center to get help with homework, solve problems, get a job, work through addiction disorders, and work with counselors and therapists.*

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Judge Connolly praised the Luna Evening Center in Watsonville for providing an alternative to detention that helps system-involved youth remain at home and in their community. The after-school program at the center engages youth in prosocial activities so they can thrive and flourish, and provides a refuge from individuals who prey on young people and don't have their best interests at heart. Youths can work with mentors at the evening center to get help with homework, solve problems, get a job, work through addiction disorders, and work with counselors and therapists.

Circling back to the role of sports in her life, Judge Connolly mentioned Watsonville juvenile parole officer Gina Castañeda, who established the Aztecas Youth Soccer Academy to engage at-risk youth in competitive soccer. Many in the program are on probation and have come from rival gangs.

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*Many parents work long hours in the fields and can't get to daytime counseling appointments. "How do you get to that mental health appointment? You miss a whole day of work, then you can't pay your rent. You can see the ripple effects for a family,"*

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Through this program they can succeed through soccer; they get to engage and become mentors and do summer camps. Most importantly, they have an opportunity to belong to an organization that does good in their community, develop skills to become independent, and feel the self confidence that comes with participating in sports. (learn more about Aztecas and Gina Castañeda, at [www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/ProbationDepartment](http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/ProbationDepartment)) Judge Connolly mentioned FUERTE Wraparound ([encompasscs.org](http://encompasscs.org)) an intensive program to address the mental health problems of youth on probation and work with their families to provide at-home counseling. Many parents work long hours in the fields and can't get to daytime counseling appointments. "How do you get to that mental health appointment? You miss a whole day of work, then you can't pay your rent. You can see the ripple effects for a family," explained Judge Connolly.

The Luna Evening Center in Watsonville also provides a way for youths arrested in Watsonville to be booked there and picked up by their families locally. Otherwise, the youths would be taken to Felton, and their parents would have to travel there to pick them up. "You can imagine, if you're a family that lives in Watsonville and has transportation issues, making it up to juvenile hall in Felton, that's a big task," said Judge Connolly. Electronic monitoring services also help keep kids at home. The judge congratulated the probation

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to men and women of voting age who are U.S. citizens. Others are welcome to join the League as associate members.

Send your check payable to League of Women Voters of Santa Cruz County or LWVSCC with this form to LWVSCC, Box 1745, Capitola, CA 95010-1745.

\_\_\_\_ \$65.00 Individual annual membership  
\_\_\_\_ \$100.00 Two members in a household  
\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 Student membership  
\_\_\_\_ Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Checks made out to LWVSCC are not tax deductible.

To make a tax-deductible donation, write a separate check to LWVC Education Fund.

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## Voter Service Report

In September, League volunteers contributed to our important mission of voter registration at both the UCSC campus and Starbucks locations. Many thanks to Jan Karwin, Eve Roberson, Sandy Warren, Dottie Fry, Kit Hein and Mary Jo Dunn-Ruiz for registering students on move-in days at the UCSC campus on 9/20 and 9/22. The students were enthusiastic to register and motivated to vote in the upcoming elections. National Voter Registration Day was held on Tuesday, September 24, with voter registration at county-wide Starbucks locations. Our thanks to Dee Takemoto and Dottie Fry for representing the League.

— Sue Becker, Voter Service Co-chair

team for working so hard to make these alternatives to detention available for families.

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*“Continuum of Care Reform is all about being much more child-centric: recognizing the fact that children who are part of our dependency system are suffering all kinds of trauma that has long-term impacts on their overall health; all the evidence shows that.”*

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“I think,” said Judge Connolly, “Continuum of Care Reform is all about being much more child-centric: recognizing the fact that children who are part of our dependency system are suffering all kinds of trauma that has long-term impacts on their overall health; all the evidence shows that.” By learning so much more about the child, their needs, and their underlying issues, as a judicial officer she can engage with the youth and their family.

In juvenile justice, because criminal charges are involved, there is more contention between the district attorney’s office and the public defenders, but, says the judge, “we’re really trying to work in a collaborative way to make sure that the youth’s best interests are met while public safety is served.”

Judge Connolly expressed her feelings that it really matters to have judges who come from a variety of life experiences, who have served as legal services attorneys, who have been college athletes, who know how hard it is to get a job or form a business or make a living, who have been engaged in their community and understand the complexity of life, “I don’t have to be the punishing judge. I can encourage and motivate people to change in ways that make sense to me based upon my experience...I can listen to people, I can take that time, I can be a different judge from what I saw when I was developing as a young attorney,” she said.

Judge Connolly reflected on how serving as a juvenile judge has helped her evolve and has changed the way she judges, “...because it’s allowed me to be a judge that actually acknowledges trauma. When people come into court, my job is to engage them and try to help them engage in services; to acknowledge that this could be the worst day of their lives.”

—Pam Newbury, VOTER Editor

A [video of Judge Connolly’s talk](https://youtu.be/XPZIOT4AZWQ) <https://youtu.be/XPZIOT4AZWQ> can be viewed on our website [lwvsc.org](http://lwvsc.org)