STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED BUDGET OF DHSS

BEFORE THE JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 20, 2019

I am Joann Hasse, President of the League of Women Voters of Delaware. I want to speak about funding for two programs which address the access to and cost of medical care in Delaware. As shown in the recent report of the Primary Care Collaborative, Delaware has a rapidly increasing shortage of primary care providers. Access to quality primary care is considered by most experts to be the most effective way to improve population health and to control the total cost of health care.

When DIMER was created in 1969, Delaware's population was just under 550,000. In 2017 it was just under 962,000. However, funding for the program for our designated slots in now two Philadelphia medical schools has increased only slightly in that period.   The increasing opportunities for students to take part of their medical school training in Delaware will hopefully encourage more of them to set up practices in our state and we applaud this effort. Having said that, we really cannot responsibly expect institutions in other states to continue to educate our residents without adequate compensation.

The second problem in the primary care provider shortage is not exclusive to Delaware. Primary Care is not reimbursed as well as some of the "specialties" and many students, looking at their student debt loads, decide it is not for them. This, coupled with the below-national-average reimbursement rates which are the norm in Delaware, exacerbate our shortage, as students evaluate their options. An increase in funding for the Student Loan Repayment Program with the increase dedicated to Primary Care Providers might help and should be tried as part of a multi-pronged approach.

We urge you to use the budget process to address the problems highlighted in the Collaborative's report. Additionally we believe the goals established in the Road to Value—to bring down costs and improve quality –will not be met if citizens cannot access primary care in a timely manner.