

## THE LWVSC AND ADVOCACY COALITIONS 2021

The LWVSC participates in state issue advocacy in many ways. One of our most important roles is as a member of coalitions and partnerships. On statewide issues, it is the LWVSC board that establishes and maintains these relationships.

“Making Democracy Work” is our on-going national League campaign and we shape the LWVSC approach to advocacy at the State House around that theme. Voting rights and elections are always front and center for us. Our other most basic issues also go to the heart of our system of government: ethics, money in politics, redistricting, judicial election reform, and regulatory reform. We are often the lead group in addressing issues in these areas at the State House. Sometimes we are the only organized advocacy group addressing an important issue.

Our Making Democracy Work Updates (MDW Updates) were begun in 2020 to communicate with partner organizations to ensure that they are aware of important developments in our MDW advocacy areas. Both state and national organizations have asked to be included in this distribution. Those groups that receive the MDW Updates include, among others, AARP, Appleseed of SC, Disability Rights South Carolina; Root and Rebound, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, ACLU, Carolina for All, SC Equality, Planned Parenthood, the National Organization of Women of Columbia, SC Women in Leadership, NAACP of SC, the Coalition of 100 Black Women, the AFL-

CIO of SC, the Campaign Legal Center, and the Center for Secure and Modern Elections. All MDW Updates are posted to our LWVSC website under “Legislative Advocacy” so that they are available to both League members and the public.

We also are often participants in coalitions and partnerships that help us broaden our reach beyond MDW to some of the other areas that are of interest to the League. These include health care, the environment, education, the school-to-prison-pipeline, and violence prevention. We are not usually the lead organization in these groups. Specialized organizations, often with very capable professional staff, are usually better prepared than LWVSC to take on leadership in these areas, with access to research and media outreach that are beyond our capabilities. They are also more likely to be recognized as spokespeople for their issues than is LWVSC.

The connection between LWVSC and other organizations varies from the very formal to loosely defined partnerships. Several of our affiliations include:

SC Healthy Families: The Women’s Resources and Empowerment Network (WREN) coordinates the South Carolina Coalition for Healthy Families, of which LWVSC has long been a member. Planned Parenthood also participates in this coalition, along with many other groups concerned with the rights of women and non-binary persons. The goals of this coalition include equal access to affordable high-quality healthcare, sound sex education for children, and the

freedom to make informed responsible life decisions.

Close the Gap: This coalition was most active in 2013-2015, attempting to close the Medicaid gap in South Carolina. Our state has not accepted this extension of health care insurance to cover lower income residents although more than 250,000 South Carolinians would receive reliable access to primary care and other benefits. Faced with strong opposition

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# President's Message (Adapted from remarks at LWVSC Convention)

I assume the role of state president at an exciting time: the beginning of the League's second century!

At my second state convention in 2017, LWVUS' then-CEO introduced us to the "transformation journey" the League was undertaking in anticipation of its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 to ensure that the League of Women Voters would remain strong, visible, and relevant in its next 100 years.

I was inspired by the work being done—to which our own Julie Hussey contributed—to grow and diversify our organization and to better tell our story and demonstrate our impact.

*I joined the League in part because I wanted to be part of an historic movement—first to empower women voters, now to empower all voters and defend democracy.*

Since then, the Transformation Roadmap was completed and posted on the national website and serves as the framework for LWV's long-range planning.

As a result of the transformation effort, exciting changes have already occurred at the national level, and your state League has taken its own steps to intentionally focus on the changes we seek.

As we look to the work to be done, your board has set five goals:

- Strengthening our advocacy and education efforts,
- Expanding our membership and geographic representation,
- Empowering our local Leagues,
- Increasing our organizational capacity – both human and financial, and,

- Making diversity, equity and inclusion an intentional and integral part of everything we do.

We have begun to execute our plans and will monitor how well we're moving toward our desired ends.

At the same time, we will be looking further ahead to create a vision for our desired future and to develop a longer-term strategic plan for how to realize our vision. In preparing for this work, I plan to invite the input of local League leaders and external stakeholders.

I joined the League in part because I wanted to be part of an historic movement—first to empower women voters, now to empower all voters and defend democracy. Although we've accomplished much in the last 100 and recent years, a movement has to keep moving!

We face serious challenges in the immediate future—both statewide and nationally. We read daily of continuing partisan efforts to suppress the vote—and even subvert the will of the voters. In pursuit of our mission of empowering voters and defending democracy, we need more volunteers, more advocates, more members, and more donors.

I've been very impressed by the talent, knowledge, and the passion for our mission that resides among our members and hope to engage more of you in work on the state level. There will be opportunities to be part of issue-



based working groups and other collegial groups. Working together, we can continue to grow LWVSC in size, reputation, and impact.

Several years ago, I visited the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York. There I purchased a mug that bears a famous quotation that has inspired me in all my work over the years. Many of you will recognize anthropologist Margaret Mead's words:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

I look forward to working with all of you to continue to build on our successes and begin work on the next chapter in our story.

— Nancy Williams, LWVSC President



## Find Us Online

**Emails from:** LWV of South Carolina

*If you do not receive these, please let us know by emailing [lwvscassistant@gmail.com](mailto:lwvscassistant@gmail.com).*

**Facebook:** League of Women Voters of South Carolina

**Website:** [lwv.org/south-carolina](http://lwv.org/south-carolina)

## Good News from Anderson County!

The Members-At-Large Unit in Anderson County is on its way! With Holley Ulbrich and Janie Shipley as their advisers, there are nine members signed up and a mailing list of 36 people who have expressed interest. There is also a small but dedicated leadership team making plans for programs and voter service in the fall. Anderson had a League many years ago; when it folded, some of its members were absorbed into the Clemson League. A few members have transferred from Clemson back to Anderson but most of the list of 36 people are new members. Anderson County is one of the largest counties in South Carolina without its own League. If you have friends or family in Anderson County who might be interested, please let Holley or Janie know and we will add them to the contact list. If all goes well, Anderson will become a full-fledged League some time in 2022.



LWVSC President Nancy Williams and LWVHHI-BA's Voter Service Director Ruth Wilwerding register voters and recruit new members at the Mitchelville Freedom Park's Juneteenth Celebration.

## Legislation Update

*Continued from page 1*

from state leadership, this coalition agreed to a hiatus in 2016 and has effectively disbanded. However, LWVSC continues to coordinate with other individual statewide organizations that are leading on this issue through the work of the LWVSC Director for Issue Specialists and Coalitions and the VP for Issues and Action.

SC Conservation Coalition: We are linked with many other organizations interested in environmental issues in a very effective long-term coalition led by Conservation Voters of South Carolina (CVSC). Members of this coalition include Sierra Club, Coastal Conservation League, and other important environmentally focused groups.

We have been members of other partnerships including the SC Disability Voting Coalition (insuring that our elections are fully accessible to those citizens who have disabilities) and the Give Kids a Chance Coalition (directed toward stopping the school-to-prison pipeline).

Beyond official coalitions and partnerships, we work with other organizations in less formal contexts. For example, we have never established a named coalition around ethics reform but AARP of South Carolina and the Coastal Conservation League have provided important help in our ongoing efforts in that area. AARP is providing the assistance of their expert on redistricting to assist us in that area, and our technical experts also work with the ACLU national team on redistricting to benefit from their information and resources. We have partnered with national and state organizations such as the ACLU, NAACP, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights on issues related to voting and elections. We have signed onto the Stop the Hate statement supporting a hate

## Working Groups

The redistricting working group, education working group, and Ted Volskay's new working group on environmental policy are **all at work!** Effort to create a working group on Gender and Racial Equity has stalled, partly because racial justice and gender equity are best addressed by different strategies. We will separate those two groups and try again! In addition, a local group in Charleston has been working on health care policy and will hopefully provide a nucleus for a working group around this issue. A working group is grounded in a state position or set of related positions with two facilitators representing different Leagues and a minimum of five Leagues represented. Their primary purpose is educational. They do not advocate as a group (on state issues, the League speaks with one voice), but are encouraged to talk about their issue as individual constituents. We encourage local Leagues to participate in working groups and to use them as a resource. If you are interested in being involved in a working group, contact Holley Ulbrich to see how to proceed.

crimes bill and work with partner organizations to advocate for this legislation at the State House.

Through these relationships, LWVSC extends both our access to specialized knowledge and our public voice on statewide issues. We also encourage local Leagues to consider coalitions with other local groups to address their local issues. A notable example is the Greenville League's excellent work with a broad array of local groups to encourage voter registration and voting. Together we can do far more than we could alone!

— Lynn S. Teague, Vice President, Issues & Action

# NEW BOARD MEMBERS

**Please welcome the newest board members elected at our state convention.**

## **Secretary — Janelle Rivers (Columbia)**

Janelle Rivers is a grandmother of four, a retired educator, and a South Carolina native. A member of the League since 2007, she was selected in 2010 to chair a national LWV committee to prepare materials on Common Core Standards and Assessments for the League's study of the Role of the Federal Government in Public Education. She has served as Vice President, President, and Membership Chair of the Columbia League. She holds degrees from Columbia College (BA), Boston University (MA) and the University of South Carolina (Ph.D.). Janelle began her career as a classroom teacher in Charleston County, studied counseling and educational research, and became an administrator, overseeing assessment, accountability, evaluation, and research activities—first at the South Carolina Department of Education, later in Richland District One and for the last 18 years of her career, in Lexington District One. She devotes time to the work of the League of Women Voters because she believes in the importance of working for good government, promoting fair elections, informing voters, and eliminating corruption.

## **Treasurer — Connie Deerin (Charleston)**

Connie has been involved with the LWV of the Charleston Area since 2015 and became Treasurer in 2016. She remained in that position through fiscal year 2018. During her time on the board, she was

active in many critical membership events such as Presenting “Who We Are – A Chronicle of Racism,” an event featuring Jeffrey Robinson of the ACLU, and for launching the LWVCAConnects program, an outreach effort to include and diversify the LWVCA message to members and the community. Connie was raised in Washington, D.C., gained her M.A. in special education from Columbia University and her undergraduate degree in English from Fairfield University. She resides on Daniel Island and is surrounded by three of her four siblings and their families, who are found throughout the Lowcountry. Her kids and grandkids live on the west coast. Connie currently works as a Realtor and up until recently also volunteered at the Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon on the Preservation Committee.

## **Director for National Issues & Action — Sharda Jackson Smith (Greenville)**

Dr. Sharda Jackson Smith currently serves as Interim Assistant Dean and Assistant Professor for the School of Education, Human Performance, and Health at the University of South Carolina Upstate. As a first-generation college student and threetime University of Florida graduate, Jackson Smith understands the importance of a quality educational experience. With the goal of creating a pathway to equitable opportunity for students, her post-secondary teaching experience caters to P-12 preservice and practicing teachers. Jackson Smith is involved in professional and community initiatives that focus on state and federal public education policy, disproportionate funding, and teacher advocacy.

Jackson Smith currently serves on the state Education Working Group and the Board of Directors for the Greenville League.

## **Director for Communications — Mary Agnes Garman (HHI-Bluffton)**

Live oaks, tidal marsh vistas, and the promise of warmer weather drew Mary Agnes Garman to retirement in the Lowcountry from a lifetime in Northern Virginia. Mary Agnes spent 20+ years as an elementary school principal in the large, diverse Fairfax County Public Schools system on the doorstep of Washington, DC. A longtime advocate for public education, she served as an officer of local and state principal associations. Responding to the advent of new technology became a priority during her tenure. Mary Agnes harnessed its power to pursue her passion: opening the lines of communication between schools and parents. In recognition, she was awarded Outstanding Communicator by the National School Public Relations Association. To help make a difference in 2017, Mary Agnes had to look no further than the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area LWV, led by women she'd already admired. Mary Agnes was instrumental in HHI-Bluffton's transition to e-news, a new MyLO website, and LWVHHIBA rebranding.

**LWVSC BOARD SAYS “MANY THANKS” TO THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED!** A hearty League thank you to Jane Turner, Marie Vandivort, Janie Shipley, Jean Wood and Suzanne Rhodes who will be leaving the LWVSC board after stellar service to our cause! We all thank you; we can't function without leadership and you have provided it!

# LWVSC AT THE SC POLITICAL COLLECTIONS

The League of Women Voters of South Carolina has for a number of years been contributing its records to the University of South Carolina Libraries. It now consists of about 50 feet of papers. If you stacked up every page, it would be approximately 50,000 sheets, 50 feet tall. The collection is available in the South Carolina Political Collections (SCPC), Hollings Library, accessed through the Thomas Cooper Library, 1322 Greene Street, Columbia. The papers are preserved, organized, and accessible for research, both for the general public and for the members of the League.

The papers of the LWVSC are only some of many held by SCPC, which collects material relating to SC government, politics, and society. Currently our holdings include the papers of 11 SC governors and 29 Members of Congress. Other collections include those of state legislators, diplomats, judges, editorial cartoonists, journalists, civil rights activists, and the major state political parties and party leaders. These collections are used for research on a wide variety of topics— for scholarly articles and books, biographies, journalism, school projects.

The history of South Carolina's League and its many local Leagues is well documented in SCPC's collection. Most of the content dates from the 1950s to the present, although at least one document, "The New Voter," is 100 years old and has been digitized here: <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/sclwv/id/80>.

The LWVSC collection includes publications, membership files, program and event files, research and advocacy on issues, photos, scrapbooks, correspondence, and news items reflecting the work of the League. There are dozens of topics that are documented in the collection, including both federal and state government programs and policies, housing, education, the Equal Rights Amendment, land use and other environmental issues. As we receive



*The Sarah Leverette League of Women Voters Endowment was established in her honor and memory to support these SC League Collections.*

materials, we organize them, giving the files descriptive names and information that is added to the guides we have created for the LWV collections.

The guides are available on our website ([library.sc.edu/scpc](http://library.sc.edu/scpc)) and include information on the history of the organization and a description of what the collection contains, right down to an inventory of folder titles. Documents in the collection can be viewed onsite in the Hollings Library reading room and we are happy to assist with finding documents or topics that might be of interest to League members. New materials are being contributed all the time; we regularly receive numerous donations of papers each year for the League collections from around the state. Even in the pandemic year, we received five or more additions to the collection from League members.

We also have collections that are closely related to the League collections, such as the papers of League leaders Candy Waites, Mary Kelly, Nancy Moore, Barbara Moxon and Keller Bumgardner Barron, adding 48ft. for a League total of 98ft. or 98,000 pages!

The Sarah Leverette League of Women Voters Endowment was established in her honor and memory to support these SC League Collections. The Endowment has been generously supported by a number of friends of the Libraries and the League.

If you would like to contribute papers, or are interested in giving to the Leverette Endowment, please contact SCPC at [scpc@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:scpc@mailbox.sc.edu) or Director of Development Beth Well, [WellBeth@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:WellBeth@mailbox.sc.edu), 803-777-1909.

— Dorothy Walker, Director of South Carolina Political Collections

# WHY OUR STANCE ON RACIAL JUSTICE MATTERS TO ME

I'm from a small Illinois town whose only claim to fame when I was living there was that it was on the Rock Island Railway. We didn't know the definition of diversity; little did I know that I was missing half the world.

When my family moved to Western Springs to be on the Burlington RR for an easier commute to Chicago, my high school class of nearly 1,000 included one person of color; we elected him class president.

After college, marriage and five years in the Air Force, my husband landed his first job as a choral conductor at Paine College, a historically Black college in Augusta, Georgia. Now I was introduced to the real world, the complete world, the world of infinite difference as well as deep human connection, and, of course, serious inequity; I had a lot to learn.

My first mind-numbing truth came when I realized that the Catholic school where I had taken a job was segregated – a **segregated Catholic school**. I couldn't quit; we needed the income. I tithed – but not to the church! I gave 10% of my income to a Paine College student who had not sung in the last Paine College concert because the singers were told to wear white shoes and she didn't have any. (My husband never did that again.) Next I began work on a plan to overcome the segregation of the two Catholic schools. I wrote what I still believe was a beautiful plan. It involved every student having a pen pal at the other school, monthly play days that brought the two schools together, and events throughout the school year that would introduce the students to each other and hopefully build bonds and respect for each other. I was ready to present my plan to the school board when we moved to Spartanburg because my husband had been employed by Wofford College.

In Spartanburg, we looked for a way to continue to enrich our lives with otherness. We found a small black Catholic church that welcomed whites.

We joined; it brought truth, love and joy into our lives. **And I joined the League of Women Voters.** Through the League, I began to see how the two worlds of Black and white played out in government. In 1987, our City Council proclaimed that they would sue the federal government rather than establish single member election districts so that the 30% African-American population could have a voice in elections. The Spartanburg League did everything we could think of to bring sanity – including bringing Department of Justice representatives to town to try to dissuade the City Council from suing. It didn't work. The City Council stood firm. An election was coming up. Driving home from a League event, I said, "That's

it; I'm running for City Council." With me was my longtime League friend, Karen Mitchell, who responded, "I'll manage your campaign." I ran against an incumbent and won. The League had given me an opportunity to act out my commitment to racial justice and had instilled in me a lifelong commitment to making democracy work. I wish I could say the challenge has been met and overcome; it has not. We have a long way to go; the goal is worth every ounce of energy we put into it.

— Linda Powers Bilanchone,  
Editor, SC Voter

## An Oldtimer's Tale

**LWVSC supports gender and racial equity ... in the promotion of fairness in hiring, advancement, pay and representation in public appointment.**

Spartanburg 1983. Linda Bilanchone (at the time president of LWVSC) and Nancy Moore (at the time vice president of SC NOW) with Spartanburg County Councilwoman Sallie Peake, took on Spartanburg County minority hiring practices. Using data (collected by Nancy Moore, of course) these two current LWVSC board members demonstrated that county percentages of blacks and females in new hires had dropped since the adoption of the county's affirmative action plan. Thus began the Fairness in Jobs Taskforce that sought equity – a coalition of nine African American and women's organizations. We collected data and reported quarterly to the elected bodies. In the case of the City of Spartanburg, their Human Resources Department determined who was qualified and sent the names on to the police or fire department. That made it easy to demonstrate that qualified women and African Americans were available, but not being hired! As far as boards and commissions were concerned, it was easier. Just look and see: How many African Americans? How many women? And qualifications? We were quick to point out that there were NO QUALIFICATIONS for boards and commissions! One elected official just could not get his mind around it; he made it his own. He counted four categories – Black women; Black men; white women, white men!! And there was good news. After hiring began to change, the police chief thanked me (though he had opposed our efforts) because domestic violence calls were now easier to handle when both a female officer and a male officer could be sent. And, finally, some 10 or 15 years later, I opened my newspaper to see a statewide survey of sheriff's departments (I think!) with excellent numbers for Spartanburg, but no one knew why! We did!!

*So, how is your city doing? Your county? Have we made progress in gender and racial justice?*

— Linda Powers Bilanchone, Editor, SC Voter

# WE APPRECIATE OUR DONORS

*We couldn't do it without you!*

LWVSC is grateful to the 153 donors whose financial support helped advance our mission of empowering voters and defending democracy in 2020-2021. With average gifts of about \$200 and an anonymous gift of \$25,000, we were able to educate voters about issues, candidates, and voting in the 2020 elections and advocate for policy positions central to *Making Democracy Work* in South Carolina.

|                        |                          |                        |                           |
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This list reflects donations received from July 1, 2020 to June 25, 2021.



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# SC VOTER

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Established in 1920, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina is a nonpartisan, political organization that encourages people to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. League membership is open to men and women who are at least 16 years old. All members receive the *SC Voter*, email communications and news from their local League.

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Editor: Linda Powers

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- \$500 to \$999 Defender of Democracy*
- \$300 to \$499 Suffragist*
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**Any amount is appreciated! You may contribute on the LWVSC website or mail a check to LWVSC, P.O. Box 8453, Columbia, SC 29202. Checks should be made payable to LWVSC.**

*Every little bit helps empower voters and defend democracy! Thank you for your support!*