

LWVSC LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES, 2024 SESSION

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK (LYNN TEAGUE)

JUDICIAL REFORM

Judicial reform will be very active at the General Assembly for the first time since the LWVSC study on this subject was completed in 2012. It must be a major priority, as the first serious opportunity for reform since the League's very extensive 2011-2012 study on this subject. Written testimony on behalf of LWVSC has been submitted to the House Ad Hoc Committee on Judicial Appointments (posted at our website) and oral testimony will be given when/if the committee hears public testimony. To date, only invited participants have spoken. Several solicitors, the Chief of SLED, the AG, and others have all testified for an independent JMSC without legislators as members and for forwarding more than three qualified candidates to the General Assembly for a vote. The need for improved magistrate quality has also been brought up, along with in one instance a mention of the need for a protected Judiciary budget.

The League advocates for 1) an independent JMSC, 2) abolishing the three-candidate ceiling, 3) stronger qualifications for magistrates and better training, no extended holdovers of magistrates, and 4) securing the Judiciary Department budget to prevent legislative pressure on the courts through this means. Our positions do not preclude an expanded role for the Governor, but we don't expect to take up this aspect unless pressed to do so.

VOTING AND ELECTIONS

It is unlikely that many changes to election law will be taken up in the session, but we must, as always, make this a high priority. The municipal elections bill is in the Senate and proposes useful changes; we will continue to support it so long as damaging changes are not introduced.

Should Taylor's bill to prohibit Rank Choice Voting receive a subcommittee hearing, we will oppose it. We are not optimistic about any bill that would open the door to RCV, but prohibition is both unnecessary (attorneys agree that it is not possible without statutory fixes) and potentially harmful.

It is also very likely that we will be in court on the issue of SC non-compliance with the NVRA requirements regarding registration access up to 30 days before each election.

REDISTRICTING

Allen Chaney, attorney for ACLU in SC, intends to pursue an alternative route to redistricting reform. It is not too early to think about this, and we will follow up with Chaney for more information on his intentions.

EQUITY ISSUES (LYNN TEAGUE)

We must continue to work for the rights of girls, women, LGTBQ_+ persons, and persons of color. Attempts to restrict medical care for trans persons are certain to be very active this year. At present it is not expected that additional abortion restrictions will be prominent.

We will also continue to press for adoption of a hate crimes bill.

EDUCATION (JANELLE RIVERS)

Public schools will continue to be a battlefield where privatization advocates attempt to undermine public trust and divert available funds to unaccountable private schools.

Bills that attempt to restrict instructional materials are still active threats to instruction in public schools, and one has now been introduced at the college level, as well. One bill that could especially impact the teaching of U.S. History and literature classes could be brought forward at any time because it passed both the House and the Senate in different versions last year and has been sitting in conference committee over the summer. Curriculum-restriction and library-collection-access bills reflect culture-war issues that have led to a draft regulation under consideration by the State Board of Education, which would create a process for a statewide ruling in response to appeals of district decisions about library books and instructional materials.

Privatization forces will continue to push for increased funding of schemes that funnel public money to private schools with little or no accountability. The General Assembly passed an Education Scholarship Account bill last year, which limited scholarships based on family income. Privatization interests will advocate to increase funding and eligibility for private programs under the banner of "universal choice."

Eligible private programs are not required to admit all students, and they have not been required to meet the same accountability requirements as the public schools.

The teacher shortage has become a "five-alarm fire" as schools began the current academic year with more than 1,600 vacant teaching positions, more than in any previous year. Attempts to make the teaching profession more attractive will include an effort to increase minimum beginning teacher salaries to \$50,000 per year. The General Assembly revised the funding formula for public schools in 2022 but did not enact a much-needed permanent comprehensive overhaul of the school funding system. A comprehensive school funding bill, including correction of local revenue problems caused by Act 388, is unlikely to happen this spring, so the budget decisions will be especially important.

HEALTH CARE ACCESS (TERESA ARNOLD)

We will continue to advocate for Medicaid Expansion for SC with a goal of introducing a bipartisan bill in the 2025 General Assembly. Teresa Arnold represents the League on the Cover SC Medicaid Expansion Coalition and is chair of the coalition.

In addition, to support better access to health care, we also plan to support practice act expansions that allow properly trained and credentialed individuals to practice to the fullest extent of their training without physician supervision, as is allowed in more than half the states in the nation.

We also support the establishment of a legislative health care market reform study committee that will allow us to testify in favor of the above issues. The Health Care Market Reform Study Committee is a joint resolution introduced in the Senate and referred to Medical Affairs.