

THE 2026 SESSION BEGINS

The 2026 session of the SC General Assembly began on 13 January. This summary is written after three very active weeks of subcommittee hearings and League testimonies. We encourage readers to review our testimony on individual bills for details at my.lwv.org/south-carolina-state/advocacy/legislative-advocacy-2025-26.

It has already become a frustrating session. Legislators are very much aware that it is an election year. They are taking up bills that appeal to committed partisans, the people who are most likely to crowd hearing rooms when controversial bills are under consideration and are also most likely to vote in partisan primary elections. Sadly in many cases, these same people are focused on making voting more difficult and on “culture war” bills to control those whose lives displease them.

Some want to require voters to register by party and close primary elections to all but those affiliated with their party. Competing bills to accomplish this were heard in the House Judiciary Committee’s Constitutional Laws Subcommittee (“Con Laws”). H.3643 is the less restrictive of the two approaches and would allow independents to vote if they are willing to register for a party after the fact, while H.3310 would allow parties to completely exclude all but those who claimed affiliation with them.

The League opposes both approaches because closing any primary to a voter can effectively disenfranchise them. The primary is when the voice of each individual voter is most powerful. In SC’s heavily gerrymandered state, it is very often the

last competitive election to determine who will ultimately be elected to an office. It is powerful enough to shape how legislators prioritize issues and positions. The fate of these bills remains uncertain since the subcommittee adjourned without a vote. We will remain alert to their possible reappearance.

A Senate subcommittee heard another election bill, S.128, which would require voters to provide proof of citizenship to register to vote. The primary sponsor indicated that he had become aware of constitutional issues in the bill and asked that discussion of the bill be held until he had time to develop an amendment. Again, the subcommittee adjourned without a vote. The League does not oppose asking voters to swear that they are citizens, but opposes requiring proof of citizenship to register. The Brennan Center has studied this issue and found that 9% of qualified electors do not possess the necessary documents. While some might be able to obtain the missing materials, many would be disenfranchised. Those losing their ability to register would be disproportionately women whose name has changed since birth, sometimes several times, and those without the financial resources to pursue necessary documents.

The League has been active in advocacy regarding our state judiciary for decades. **League testimony was provided in the “Con Laws” subcommittee on H.4755, a bill that redefines how members of the Judicial Merit Selection Committee (JMISC) are appointed.** Despite some concerns in this bill, including ending any effort to ensure a diverse ju-

diciary representative of the people of our state, the subcommittee forwarded the bill without amendment to the full Judiciary Committee with a favorable recommendation. We will be monitoring its progress and advocating amendment or rejection of the bill. **We have also provided testimony in support of H. 3530, a bill to reform how magistrates are evaluated and appointed.**

And then there are the culture wars. **We have testified against abortion bans (H.4760 and H.3457), against restricting the access of trans student and other persons to restrooms and changing areas associated with public schools (H.4756 and S.199), and against unreasonable rights of parents to challenge their children’s school curriculum (H.4757).**

This is only the beginning. Work continues on these bills as they make their

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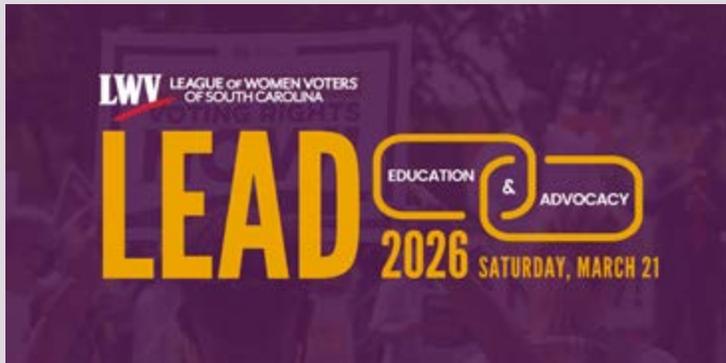
way through the legislative process.

- We continue to hope that we might get a subcommittee hearing for H.4543 or companion bill S.257, which would standardize responses when polling places fail to open on time or must close for a period during the usual voting hours.
- We are speaking on S.70, a bill addressing the crucial issue of school board ethics.
- We expect to engage on protection of funding for our public schools.
- We will work with environmental partners on issues around data centers and energy affordability.
- We will pursue opportunities to advocate for better health care access for South Carolinians, both independently and through the CoverSC coalition of which we are a part.

And there will be more. There is always more. Remember that the voices of members are crucial and please respond when you receive an action alert from LWVSC. We try to keep these to a minimum, knowing that everyone is constantly urged to act on myriad issues, but we are hoping that the issues that are central for the League are also central for you. Both personally and through your League work, remember that voting in every election is one of the most important ways to be one of the citizens who shape legislation.

— Lynn S. Teague, LWVSC VP for Issues & Action

SAVE THE DATE!



League In Action Day (LEAD) Rescheduled!

Saturday, March 21, 2026, Columbia, SC

Rescheduled due to inclement weather. If you registered for the February date, you're still registered for the new date. Contact Anita Baker, lwvscassistant@gmail.com, with questions or changes.

State Council

Saturday, June 20, 2026

Columbia, SC

LWVUS National Convention

June 25 – June 28,

Columbus, Ohio

Membership

February 2026 marks one year since the launch of the LWV Member Portal (ChapterSpot). The adjustment hasn't always been easy, so this is a good time to acknowledge the many members throughout the state who led local Leagues through the transition to the new system and more recently through the end-of-the-year membership renewal process.

It is exciting to consider some of the ways the Member Portal can now be used to grow our membership and to make membership renewal easier.

This past December, in time for the holidays, **online gift memberships** became available. A year of membership would be a wonderful gift to a student or to a friend who has expressed interest in the League. Purchasing a gift membership is not difficult. The instructions from LWVUS are as follows: Log into the Member Portal and click "Gift" in the Grow Our Community box to the right of the membership card, then choose any dues amount (min. \$20) and any League.

While in the Member Portal, members can also find a link on their membership card that serves as an **invitation to membership**. That link is portal.lwv.org/membership. Take notice of this link and see how easy it is to invite others to join.

One of the ways the Member Portal can be used to make membership renewal easier is the **auto-renewal** feature. It has been available since the launch of the Member Portal, but I only recently signed up for it and am excited to use it as an easy way to maintain my membership in the years ahead. *Note to League leaders:* As of December, there is an auto-renew column on the roster indicating those members who have signed up for auto-renew, so these members will not need reminders to renew.

Last but certainly not least, as of January, **League-paid membership** is now available. League leaders can make payments for members online within the Member Portal. See the LWVUS Portal Administrators Guide for more information about this option.

As we enter Year 2 of the Member Portal, we can be grateful that we made it through Year 1! We can also be grateful that LWVUS has been responsive to feedback and continues to make improvements and provide guidance. Their Framing the Future Office Hours are an opportunity to receive updates and to ask questions about the Member Portal. www.lwv.org/FramingTheFuture

— Christine Hait,
LWVSC Director, Member Services

LOOKING BACK. MARCHING FORWARD.

November Turnout

The 2025 elections, being held in an odd numbered year, focused on local races across the state. Voters went to the polls to elect mayors, county and city council members, sheriffs, local commissioners and candidates for special elections. As expected, the turnout was very low. According to the State Election Commission, there were 1,112,034 registered voters in SC but only 43,672 voters (3.9%) actually cast their ballots.

In a follow up survey with local League VOTE411 Directors from Greenville, Columbia, Charleston and Orangeburg who covered the bulk of the races across the State in November (134 races), most of these were uncontested races, led by incumbents. As a result, the responses from candidates to local League questionnaires for VOTE411 were approximately 50%, much lower than when Statewide races are held and where races are more likely to be contested.

However, if there is a silver lining, in locations where local Leagues exist, the data from the LWVUS for SC's use of VOTE411 shows that its use for registering to vote and learning about what's on the ballot continues to grow. In the areas where local Leagues exist in SC, voter turnout exceeded the 3.9% state average. VOTE411 continues to be an important factor in voter registration, education and turning out the vote.

Marching to the Midterms

Voters Services and VOTE411 Directors have begun the new year with the mission of increasing turnout for the midterms on November 3, 2026. On the ballot this year will be all members of the SC State legislature, all members of our seven Congressional districts, one US Senate seat, and all members of SC's State offices: Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Solicitor General, Treasurer, Secretary of State, Superintendent of Education and Commissioner of Agriculture. These races will be covered by the SC and local Leagues as will school board elections and any other local seats on the ballot. Filing dates for candidates are March 16-30.

First come the June 9 primaries when candidates from each party running for the same seats are selected by voters to run in the November 3 election. While turnout for primary elections is a little better than for local elections, the 2022 voter turnout for similar primary races was an anemic 17%. There are many reasons for the low turnout. Lack of contested races that give voters little choice is one, but mostly voters are not aware that a primary is taking place or of its importance. Primaries are often the only chance voters can make a choice for who they want on the ballot in the general election. A larger turnout by voters in the Primary can weed out fringe candidates from possibly winning in the general election.

The League is committed to increasing voter turnout this June. We will be using social media, eblasts, League in Action and old-fashioned word of mouth to get the word out. Voters Services Directors are scheduling voter registration drives and spreading the word about voting in the Primaries. VOTE411 Directors are identifying the races to be covered and preparing questions to ask their candidates. They are asking questions about education, health care, voting and elections, and the environment. The answers candidates give to these and other questions go a long way to informing voters who they want to represent them. Every League member can help in this process by contacting their local candidate and asking them to answer these VOTE411 questions. Contact your local League to tell them you're ready to help.

The LWVSC will promote the use of VOTE411 for the Primaries by posting seven digital billboards across the State in the month leading up to June 9. These billboards will be funded through a grant received from the Education Fund of the LWV and is supplemented by funding from the LWVSC. The criteria we used for selecting locations were the following: first, they had to be in areas where there was a local League who would not have a budget to support a billboard on their own, and second, the local League had to promise to subscribe to use VOTE411 to cover races for the Primary and General Election. Billboards will appear in the following counties: Anderson, Oconee-Pickens, Beaufort, Horry, Orangeburg, Spartanburg, and Florence. Messaging will ask voters to check their registration before voting, vote early, and to use VOTE411 to see who's on their ballot.

As you can see, there are a lot of moving parts to the March to the Midterms campaign. We can all help this effort by supporting our local League VOTE411 teams, spreading the word to friends and family, and by turning out to vote on June 9.

— Joan Zaleski, VP for Voters Service

Your Connections Can Help Us Reach Our Campaign Goals

Reaching new donors outside of our membership is crucial to meeting the ongoing demands of our work defending democracy. If you're willing to share a prospective donor referral with me, I will reach out on your behalf to discuss the League and giving opportunities.

Please give some thought to people and organizations you know who are concerned with the eroding state of democracy and might consider joining our Defender of Democracy or Sarah E. Leverette Circle **with a donation at or above \$500**. For example:

- Family or other charitable foundations
- Professional organizations and associations
- Women-focused groups and women-owned businesses
- Charitable individuals

You can email me your referrals or questions at LWVSCrebeccaj@gmail.com.

Thank you all for your dedication to the values and mission of the LWVSC!

— Rebecca Jacobson, LWVSC Development Manager

PRIMARIES 2026:

A Communications Checklist for Reaching Voters Where They Are

In many SC primaries, just 15-20% of voters decide who will govern us all. That's enormous influence. How do we help more voters understand why primaries matter and make it easier for them to participate? Use this practical checklist to sharpen outreach, strengthen visibility and connect with voters.

1. Keep the Message Simple and Repeatable

If voters remember one thing...Small turnout. Big influence. In many races, the primary *is* the election. For better choices in November, show up in June.

2. Lead with What's on the Ballot

Make issues local and immediate. Most voters, especially young voters, engage around:

- Affordability & cost of living
 - Transportation & roads
 - Renters' protections & development
 - School board & education decisions
- Tie posts, events, and forums back to how primaries shape these aspects of daily life.

3. Use Candidate Forums as a Trust-Building Tool

Often, the League is the only (co) host of candidate forums, building

credibility, transparency and weeks of voter education content.

- Livestream the forum (Facebook or Instagram)
- Post short clips by question or subject
- Add captions for accessibility
- Share key Q&A as social media carousels

4. Put the Most Important Info Front and Center

Don't "gatekeep" details behind extra clicks. Every post should clearly include:

- What's happening
- When and where
- How to participate

Pro-tip: When sharing posts, restate the key info in your own caption.

5. Make Your Visuals Work for You

Good visuals build trust. Bad visuals weaken it. Aim for:

- Clear, readable text
- Consistent League colors and fonts
- Simple, easy to skim layouts
- Real League photos

Use our Canva templates. Use LWVUS high-quality League photos on Flickr.

6. Find Local Influencers

Local voices carry more credibility than a graphic - board members, longtime volunteers and community leaders are mighty messengers.

- Short "Why I vote in primaries" videos
- Quotes or testimonials
- Letters to the editor and op-eds

7. Repurpose Everything

One piece of content should be used in many ways to save time and extend reach. For example: In-person talk → blog post → social media post → email snippet → short video clip

8. Build Capacity for the Future

Consider hiring a visual communications intern. Younger team members can help edit videos, maintain brand consistency and turn strong messaging into compelling graphics, freeing up leaders to focus on strategy and outreach.

The Takeaway

Primaries matter and how we communicate about them does, too. By keeping things simple, visual, authentic and rooted in local issues, Leagues will help voters see why their participation counts.

— Shelby Cohen,
Communications Strategist

DIG DEEPER ONLINE

Gender & Women's Equity Work Group

The LWVSC Working Group on Gender and Women's Equity is focused on providing evidence-based research on issues that impact women and girls in South Carolina as well as communities and systems across the state. They have summarized two studies with useful information to communicate with your elected representatives and other policymakers. Research shows that informed policies can help women, girls and their families while ignoring facts and research leads to worse outcomes for everyone.

1. **The Turnaway Study** which outlines findings regarding reproductive choices and the consequences for women's

lives if they were turned away from a request for a legal abortion because of financial, gestational or other issues. The long-term impact for women's ability to access a legal abortion is examined as well. Read the full article at bit.ly/theturnawaystudy.

2. **Facts Matter: The 2025 WREN Study on Women & Girls in South Carolina.** This study reveals gaps in access to health care, fair pay, childcare, housing, food and more, both statewide and at the county level. By sharing both state and county data widely, we can spark activism and drive change. Read the full article at bit.ly/SCwomenstudy.

DIG DEEPER ONLINE

Governance Matters Series

The LWVSC Governance Matters series will be a source of information designed to help League leaders and members learn about governance and the role it plays in helping a board do its work and do it better. According to the National Council of Nonprofits, understanding good governance is like creating a great recipe. It requires the right ingredients (board members), a chef to provide leadership and accountability (presidents) and careful mixing and stirring through candid discussions, transparent practices and thoughtful governance policies. Read the first chapter of the “cookbook” on our website: bit.ly/GovernanceRecipe

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in the League

In this new year, let’s reaffirm our organization’s commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion amidst the continuing challenges being put forth by our federal government. Our first step needs to be assuring that in our local Leagues we are all on the same page with regard to these definitions:

- **DIVERSITY** includes multiple perspectives, identities and cultural groups in a given context. It is the **WHO** is in the room.
- **EQUITY** is the fair treatment, access and opportunity for people who are disadvantaged. This includes removing barriers and providing additional support and opportunities to those who need it most/are most disadvantaged to help everyone thrive. When we think about racial equity, that means fair treatment, access and opportunity for Black, indigenous and other people of color.
- **INCLUSION** is a context where differences are welcomed and different perspectives are respectfully heard. Inclusion also encompasses how disparate views and needs are incorporated into processes and activities. It is the **HOW** are participants engaged.

Read the rest of the article on our website: bit.ly/2026DEI

Reach out to LWVSC DEI Director Dave Keely for assistance in your League or to share suggestions for the state League!

BUDGET BASICS VIDEO SERIES

Budget Basics is a series of 7 short videos that explains the mechanics and timing of county budgeting. Use the videos to develop a better understanding of the budget as you attend Council meetings and let your County Council know how you feel about how your tax money is spent. 2027 budget discussions should start any time, so we are excited to provide these tools at the right time. Source materials, a glossary and transcripts in Spanish are online. As part of the mission to empower voters, advocacy advice is included in each module. LWV Greenville produced rack cards with QR codes for easy access to info sites. Check out the series at greenvillecountysc.lwv.org/budgetbasics.

The project was funded in part by the LWVSC Empowerment Grant we received for 2025 and with support from the Helga Marston Foundation. Excluding many hours of donated volunteer time, the cost of the project was about \$3,500.

Background & Process

Greenville County Council had significant turnover in 2024 when 3 members were defeated because they voted to raise taxes for the first time in 30 years. The new members came in with goals to reduce taxes and increase road spending. Several LWV members attended public budget discussions to learn more about the budget process to share with members and partner organizations. They found that it was hard to follow and info about the county’s budget was not at all clear. Where does the money come from? How is it spent? Who decides? What laws apply to the process? There wasn’t a one-stop reference to answer these questions, so we set up a team to create Budget Basics.

What is the project scope?

LWV Greenville focused on basic budgeting and property tax info to start and then added the school district, affordable housing and roads/transportation because they are hot topics for Greenville County.

What format is best?

A video series is most engaging and accessible and LWV Greenville has members with experience.

What info is accurate?

Info was vetted with the County Budget Office and other subject matter experts to ensure that everything is factually correct.

Can it be replicated?

While the entire series would be a challenge, the local research and sharing it in a presentation or on a web page is very manageable. Much of it is state law, so it applies to every county. Just check the details for each county and make a note. Many nonprofit partners have shared it on their websites and a digital toolkit is in the works. LWV Greenville is happy to share resources!

— Susan Bell, President LWV Greenville County

LWVSC AWARDS 11 NEW EMPOWERMENT GRANTS

The LWVSC supports an Empowerment Grant project to encourage innovation and provide financial assistance to local Leagues that want to undertake significant activities to advance the League's mission of Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy. Applications for the LWVSC Empowerment Grant program increased from five in 2025 to eleven this year. Here's what the five local Leagues that received Empowerment Grants and completed reports did in 2025:

- The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton League focused on increasing membership.
- The Horry and Darlington Leagues focused on expanding the outreach of the local League and encouraging more registered citizens to vote.
- The Orangeburg Member-at-Large (MAL) unit helped voters become better informed through "Mission Possible: Informed Voters."
- The Greenville League produced an extensive online project to educate voters about Greenville County's local budgeting process: [greenvillecountysc.gov/budgetbasics](https://www.greenvillecountysc.gov/budgetbasics)

The 2025-2026 Empowerment Grants committee (Paula Egelson, Christine Hait, Cherie Walker and Janelle Rivers, Chair), evaluated and approved grants totaling \$6000 to the following 11 local League projects for 2026:

- Beaufort (Voters for Democracy)
- Charleston (Tracking and Trusting Your Vote in SC)
- Columbia (Advertising and Community Education for Spanish-speaking Population of Richland and Lexington Counties)
- Florence (Delta Sigma Theta and LWV-Florence Collaboration)
- Georgetown (Vote Billboard)
- Greenville (Budget Basics)
- Hilton Head Island-Bluffton (Empower Young Voters)
- Horry (Voter Information)
- Oconee-Pickens (Upstate Votes: Enhancing 2026 Participation in Primary and General Elections)
- Orangeburg (Talking to and beyond the Hand)
- Spartanburg (Increasing Voter Turnout in Spartanburg County)

These eleven local Leagues will complete their projects in 2026 and report at the end of the current year.

— Janelle Rivers



Horry County Voter Information event



Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Area event:



Orangeburg MAL's voter registration drive

Around the State



LWV Spartanburg members register voters at Dorman High School.



L-R Pauline Harrell, Sandra Johnson, Zane Wilson, Lee Brockington, our host Cecil Williams, Alex Belser, Karen Ebbets, Barbie Jones

On Wednesday January 28, 2026, seven members of the LWV Georgetown County visited the South Carolina Civil Rights Museum in Orangeburg. The museum was founded by award winning photojournalist Cecil Williams to showcase the struggles that ended Jim Crow in South Carolina. Members were fascinated by his many original historic photographs such as from the Briggs V. Elliott Case, the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike, and the Orangeburg Massacre. Several important

South Carolina historical figures were featured including Septima P. Clark, Althea Gibson, Fred Moore and Cleve Sellers. League members were treated to a personal tour by Cecil Williams himself. Retired journalist Zane Wilson, who organized the visit, and historian Lee Brockington, especially enjoyed an in-depth discussion of people and events with Cecil Williams. It was a captivating experience enjoyed by all.

—Sandra Johnson,
LWV Georgetown County

LWV Charleston

For the LWV Charleston, the new year started with a bang! We had a full house for a special election city council forum on January 5, and six days later, gathered for our new year's Winter Member Social meeting. About 50 members came together at a tropically-vibed social club in North Charleston to hear a talk about the Constitution from civil rights lawyer and former ACLU SC legal director Susan Dunn; preview upcoming programs; mingle with 10 of our new members; and partake in a silent auction to launch the year's fundraising efforts. A week later, the LWVCA hosted Dr. Melissa Siegel, head of Migration Studies at UN University-MERIT (The Netherlands) for an excellent fact-filled presentation about US and global immigration policy challenges. Then for MLK Jr. weekend, we fielded a presence at events in two counties. On Sunday, January 18 our volunteers partnered with the Summerville NAACP, AKA Sorority, and other groups to sponsor The Dream in Action, a town hall about community education held in Dorchester County. On



MLK IAAM Day - L-R behind table, Jeri Cabot, co-president and Carolyn Lecque, member LWVCA and AKA

Monday January 19, we were one of two nonprofits with a table presence at the International African American Museum's IAAM King Day in Charleston, a special event for families to celebrate Reverend King's legacy and African American history and culture. Our volunteers from LWVCA and AKA spoke with voters about the League, civic participation, and Vote411. As a result, we made new friends, registered a couple of new residents, and signed up 14 new subscribers for our newsletter! Meantime, our adjacent LWV art



Charleston Winter Meeting



Dr Melissa Siegel speaks about immigration trends at Charleston Main.

table kept dozens of kids busy coloring pictures with MLK Day and voting themes. In fact, coloring was extremely effective in fostering 'future voter' engagement throughout the afternoon!

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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 any person who subscribes to the purposes and policy of the League. All members receive the SC Voter, email communications and news from their local League.

Prefer a digital newsletter only? Email us.

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Marching to Midterms Fundraising Campaign Help us reach \$50,000 by November 3

\$3,000, February 14
LWVUS 106th Birthday

\$30,000, June 30
End of Fiscal Year '26

\$50,000, November 3
Election Day!

★★★★★
VOTE

Donate Now



\$1,000+	Sarah E. Leverette Circle
\$500-\$999	Defender of Democracy
\$300-\$499	Suffragist
\$200-\$299	Advocate
\$100-\$199	Supporter
up to \$99	Friend

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS'
OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Please consider sharing prospective donor referrals.

Contact Rebecca Jacobson, Development Manager, LWVSCrebeccaj@gmail.com