Dear Members, Volunteers, and Friends,
As we mourn Robin Bahr, we remember her dedication to volunteerism. At her memorial service, there was a woman whose son had been incarcerated. Robin had befriended this young man through her volunteer work with the “Prison Writes” organization. Robin advocated tirelessly to help get him released from prison. Stories like this elevate all of us. We know what we do matters to so many people.

We are so grateful to all our volunteers who embody the spirit of Robin Bahr. We have accomplished so much this year. We have registered many new voters and educated countless others though our speakers bureau, “Lunch with the League” and evening events. Our committees are working on issues related to criminal justice, women’s rights, and election reform. We are a vibrant presence at the New York Philharmonic this season as they celebrate the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment with their “Project 19” programming. None of this would happen without your support.

Thank you,

Ruth S. Altman
Cartherine T. Gray

Robin Bahr – A Remembrance

By Adrienne Kivelson

As we grieve the loss of our dear friend Robin, we remember all of her many accomplishments and kindnesses. We also must acknowledge her great contribution to New York City.

Robin stepped up to lead the rescue of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York when it was on the verge of closing its doors. As improbable as it may seem, the New York City chapter of this venerable national institution was in dire straits at the start of the 21st century. While a small group of dedicated volunteers kept the office open and the telephone information service going, the New York City League was running out of money and members. At a time when women were returning to, or remaining in the workforce in greater numbers, organizations which were led solely by women volunteers were having a hard time providing services and raising money. That was when a group of ex-presidents asked Robin, a relatively new member, to take on the momentous task of revitalizing the League.

Robin had only recently moved to New York and joined the League. Her first LWV involvement was as our representative on the city’s Educational Priorities Panel. With her great intellect and boundless enthusiasm, she quickly impressed everyone she met.

While many of us feared that she would not accept the awesome challenge of leading the League — she did — and hit the ground running. Within weeks she had assembled an ad hoc governing committee to encourage old members to return to leadership positions, recruit new volunteers and identify fundraising possibilities. She sought out new opportunities for the League to provide services which could generate contributions.

One of our first new ventures was monitoring an election for a very large Chinese benevolent association. Robin, who never quite mastered the NYC transit system, had us all traveling to Chinatown for days to observe this election, for which we received a very nice contribution. With the newly reconstituted fundraising committee she reached out to major corporations for whom we would conduct on-site voter registration drives. And she led the effort to bring back our famous annual luncheons.

continued on page 2
Robin Bahr – A Remembrance  continued from page 1

where we honored renowned New Yorkers who had made significant contributions to our city. Even after she left the Presidency, Robin either chaired, co-chaired or played a significant role in every annual League fundraiser through 2019.

While fundraising is an absolute necessity to keep any organization running, most people joined the League to learn about local issues and become advocates for public service programs. Robin recruited old and new members to chair and join our issues committees — voter service, city affairs, legislative affairs, education, housing and election reform. We monitored city and state legislation, testified before City Council and State legislative committees. We studied and supported Instant-runoff or Ranked-choice Voting long before it became a ballot issue. Robin was instrumental in getting the NYC League to join coalitions advocating for health services, campaign finance reform and, most recently, she pushed for creation of a committee on criminal justice.

While many of these issues and programs had been part of the League’s portfolio for generations, our New York City League had lost its way by 2000. We needed an intelligent, indomitable, enthusiastic spirit to bring us back. We needed Robin Bahr — and she answered the call.

Thank you, Robin.

Celebrating Robin’s 80th birthday. L to R: Member and author Adrienne Kivelson; Robin Bahr; a friend; longtime LWVNYC members Phyllis Wells and Gladys Krasner

Did You Know…?

April 1: Census Day

April 3: Last day to register for Democratic Presidential Primary by mail and in person

April 18 – April 26: Early voting for Democratic Presidential Primary

April 28: New York State Democratic Presidential Primary (there is no Republican Primary)

May 29: Last day to register for June 23rd primary election by mail and in person

June 13 – June 21: Early voting for June 23rd primary election

June 23: Primary election for federal, state and city positions

October 9: Last day to register for 2020 General Election by mail and in person

October 24 – November 1: Early voting for 2020 General Election

November 3: 2020 General Election

The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution:

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

At the 2019 Gala. L to R: Robin Bahr, Stacey Cunningham, Mayor David Dinkins, Billie Jean King
As with many historic movements, Women’s Suffrage struggled to find its voice. The goal, of course, was a constitutional amendment, ultimately, the 19th amendment, to enfranchise all women. The American Equal Rights Association was founded a year after the Civil War with that mission. But the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, as important as it was, identified only African-American men as citizens and the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, granted only African-American men the right to vote.

There was a rift within the American Equal Rights Association based on serious disagreement over whether to support the Fifteenth Amendment. It split into two new separate organizations. The National Women’s Suffrage Organization (NWSO), supported by Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, and Harriet Tubman, actively opposed passage of the 15th Amendment because of the exclusion of women. They also supported “equal pay for equal work.” This was a commonly heard phrase from as far back as the 1850’s. They also advocated for a woman’s right to be “the absolute sovereign of herself” as expressed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, another supporter of the NWSO.

The other new organization, the American Women’s Suffrage Association (AWSA), co-founded by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Julia Ward Howe, Henry Blackwell, and Lucy Stone, supported ratification of the 15th Amendment. They believed it offered a foothold to enable future voting rights for all women. They also advocated for better working conditions for women.

After ratification of the 15th amendment, the women in both organizations turned their attention to women’s suffrage and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment but they continued to struggle with the message of their mission. In the South, women’s suffrage groups remained segregated and worked for white women’s suffrage only. The racist rationalization was that enfranchising white women would help maintain white supremacy at the ballot boxes in the South. Many of these suffrage groups were also extremely xenophobic, arguing the white supremacy trope that if white women could vote, they would outnumber immigrants as well as black women.

Racism infused the suffrage movement in the North also. Many leaders of the movement believed southern states were essential to the passing of the 19th Amendment, since two-thirds of the state legislatures needed to vote for women’s suffrage after two-thirds of the House and Senate voted for it. They marginalized black women as a strategy to coax these states to vote for ratification.

In 1889, however, understanding the urgency of women’s suffrage, the two organizations reunited. They called themselves the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Yet, racism and racist strategies remained pervasive. W.E.B DeBois argued vehemently against these strategies. In 1912, he attacked NAWSA for failing to support a resolution at their own convention that would have promoted southern black women’s enfranchisement.

The following year, the leaders of the Women’s Suffrage March in Washington, DC requested that African-American women march at the rear of the parade. They believed that if black women marched with white women, the southern states would not support suffrage. Many black suffrage leaders were furious and refused to march at all. Others, like Mary Terrell, took their position at the back of the march in hopes of changing minds later. Still others, like Ida Wells-Barnett, openly rebelled against this order; she boldly stepped out into the parade between white delegates from her home state of Illinois.

By the time the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, NAWSA had become the League of Women Voters. By 1922, The League successfully advocated for the Cable Act for Independent Citizenship for married women. By 1924, the League was a presence in 346 of the 433 congressional districts, working to get out the vote and fighting for important legislation. Racism and voter suppression existed side-by-side in many of these congressional districts but by the 1960’s, the resonating message of the Civil Rights Movement rallied the League of Women Voters to focus on equal access to education and employment. From that point on, the League marched forward with a strong message to fight voter suppression, xenophobia, and racism in all corners of the US.

For further information, check out these links:
Nyheritage.org
Biography.com
League of Women Voters: Home
The League and The New York Philharmonic: A “Project 19” Partnership

By Ruth S. Altman, LWVNYC Co-President and Diane Burrows, LWVNYC Vice President

LWVNYC is a vital presence at the New York Philharmonic celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, “Project 19.” This is a multi-season initiative to commission and premiere 19 new works by 19 women composers — the largest women-only commissioning initiative in history.

Throughout February, League volunteers interacted with more than 3,000 patrons at New York Philharmonic concerts to draw attention to new election laws, voter registration, and the 2020 Census. We distributed bookmarks containing key election dates and the wording of the Nineteenth Amendment. In addition, the Philharmonic exhibited a collection of photos, buttons, original art and newspaper clippings from our archives showcasing the history of suffrage and LWVNYC.

The League will continue its partnership with Project 19 through next year. Watch for more details coming this Spring. We are happy to now be considered part of the New York Philharmonic family!

Engage with Our League

Well Behaved Women, a Comedy Show Fundraiser

Our office administrator, Natalie Silverman, has a second life as a comedian and writer. She’s produced dozens of live comedy shows, and the next project on her plate is Well Behaved Women, a fundraiser for the LWVNYC! She sat down with us to answer a few questions about the show:

LWVNYC: What kind of comedy show is it?

NS: It’s going to be a character show, which is kind of a mix between stand-up and sketch (like what you might see on SNL). With a character show, comedians take the mic with a solo performance, but unlike most standup, they’ll play a character they’ve written. In this case, our lineup will portray famous (or infamous) figures throughout history, in commemoration of the anniversary of the 19th amendment.

LWVNYC: Who will be performing?

NS: The best up-and-coming female comedians who were also free on a Thursday night! Genuinely, I’m thrilled about the lineup. Our cast’s credits include Comedy Central, Netflix, McSweeney’s, Reductress, The Truth Podcast, Collegehumor, and many more. They’re seriously funny ladies.

LWVNYC: Is it appropriate for kids?

NS: The suggested audience is teens and up! Expect some crude language and mature themes.

LWVNYC: How do we sign up?

NS: The show will be Thursday, April 30th, at 7pm at the Magnet Theater in midtown Manhattan. Tickets can be purchased ahead of time at the Magnet Theater website https://magnettheater.com or at the box office on the night of the show. Tickets are $20, half of which will go to the LWVNYC!
Something Civic This Way Comes
By Kyle Fallon, Event Organizer, Youth Civics Fair

When I was first introduced to the idea of the Youth Civics Fair, I could not have imagined what it would grow into. It all started while working at my local State Senator’s office. My friend Jason, the newest intern, asked me to help him realize a grand idea. He wanted to create an event which would introduce tomorrow’s voters to the people who advocated for the causes they had an interest in. The idea was, if students were able to connect to politics through their own passions, they would be more likely to participate in our political system. And with sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds newly allowed to pre-register to vote, 2020 was the perfect time to bring this event to life.

Over the summer, the idea morphed from a town hall using the connections made at our internship, to a separate event where we adjusted the scope to the desired level of outreach. Puzzle pieces slowly slid into place. The League of Women Voters (LWVNYC) enthusiastically agreed to be our sponsor. Since then, they have been our closest and most helpful ally. Eventually more groups agreed to participate and the Beacon School agreed to host.

Thanks to Jason, LWVNYC, Columbia University’s Teachers College, and other collaborators, the event will be held on April 4th, 2020. If you want to meet elected officials, participate in fun activities held by the foremost activist organizations, and learn about how you can make a difference, please join us this upcoming April! Please email education@lwvnyc.org for more information.

Welcome to the 2020 Census!
By Laura Quigg, Census / Redistricting Committee Co-Chair

Census 2020 is kicking into high gear this spring. Are you ready? It really should not be so complicated, but with government forms and our city’s great diversity, nothing is ever easy.

How will it work? In the first mailings, the Census Bureau will instruct each household how to fill out the short survey composed of about a dozen questions. Most households will not get a paper questionnaire at that point. They will be asked to fill out the form on the Census Bureau website or by telephone. Some households, however, will get the traditional paper copy. More mailings will ensue, anyone who has not filled out their form by mid-April will get a paper version and for those who still have not responded by later in the spring, a human census taker will show up at their door.

Oh wow, that sounds exhausting, but it is so critical for our city that everyone participates in the 2020 Census. The League’s Census Committee’s mission is to help people understand and complete the census.

Why is it so important? The census count determines our voice — how many representatives we get in Congress, the Electoral College and certain state offices. It also determines many of the rules for allocating Federal dollars for a lot of super important programs — schools, healthcare, housing, jobs, highways, emergency preparedness, and justice, to name a few. Children historically have been greatly undercounted, and they often need these services the most.

The census is confidential under well-tested Federal Law. No individual information may be shared — only data, which is used to plan for schools, hospitals and fire departments. It will inform business decisions, policy, community initiatives and consumer advocacy. Personal information cannot be used against respondents by any government agency or court.

The census has been around as long as the USA has existed. In fact, it first appeared in the Constitution in 1790! This short form is an every-ten-year event, and is supposed to count every U.S. resident — aged zero to over 100, citizens and non-citizens, the documented and undocumented.

New York should get every dollar and as loud a voice as it deserves. When the census arrives, encourage everyone you know to respond promptly.
Lunch with the League
Brings in Record Numbers
By Joanna R. Leefer, Program Committee Chair

A record breaking 69 attendees packed the Society for Ethical Culture’s Ceremonial Hall for the Tuesday, February 11th Lunch with the League. Dr. Barbara Kairson, President of the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women, captivated the audience. This 50-year-old organization works to improve the lives of young black women. The Coalition offers mentoring programs that help young women gain a realistic understanding of various professions and teaches them practical workplace skills. It also offers workshops on social and professional etiquette, dressing for success, social networking, financial literacy, life skills, leadership, personal growth, and presentation skills.

Jumaane Williams, New York City Public Advocate, was scheduled to speak at the program but was called away to attend an emergency NYC Council meeting. The Deputy Public Advocate for Strategic Initiatives, Veronica Aveis, gave an overview of the office’s actions and answered questions.

The next two months offer noteworthy programs that impact New Yorkers. On the evening of March 10th, Dorchen Leidholdt, Director of the Center for Battered Women’s Legal Services at the Sanctuary for Families, will speak on the victims of family abuse and the laws the city and state are proposing to protect them.

The April 14th evening program will concentrate on the issue of criminal justice. Ronald F. Day, PhD, Vice President of Programs at the Fortune Society, and Brittany Smith, Senior Director of Education at the Fortune Society, will discuss the importance of education for incarcerated people.

Women’s Rights Committee
in Conversation with Helen Rosenthal
By Ali Feldhausen

As Chair of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity of the New York City Council, Helen Rosenthal (District 6), has a lot to say about equal representation and the status of women in New York City.

Rosenthal met with LWVNYC’s Women’s Rights Committee in November. She told of her dedication to curbing maternal mortality, creating more transparency within the NYPD, and ending sexual harassment in the workplace. The discussion included upcoming projects such as a bill calling for greater Department of Education accountability on Title IX reporting and her work educating teachers and health professionals on female genital mutilation (FGM).

Rosenthal also stressed the importance of women’s representation in city government. As it stands, the city speaker, mayor, and comptroller are all men, and only 11 out of 51 council member positions are held by women. This not only makes New York City embarrassingly below the national average on gender representation but also means that women’s unique experiences are often not represented on a number of city committees. Rosenthal pointed out that women in the League can change this dynamic by attending public meetings and testifying about their experiences.
Engage with Our League

They Represent Us!
Carol Van Deusen Goes Lobbying
Edited by Dianne Burrows, LWVNYC Vice President

One of the great perks of membership in the League is that we can meet with our elected officials and represent the LWVNYC. Here is Carol Van Deusen’s account of her great lobbying adventure.

Ever since I retired, I find I’m busier than ever. I had no intention of joining another committee at LWVNYC. But one thing led to another and I found myself, as a member of the Election Reform Committee, arranging time for lobbying visits with my Assemblyperson, Danny O’Donnell and my State Senator, Brian Benjamin.

During the process, I learned how to set up a lobbying visit, what issues to stress, the importance of taking notes and how to follow up with the representatives. I was very lucky that two other LWVNYC members, Tiana Leonard and Cathy Abbott, agreed to lobby with me. We met ahead of time to plan our visits and both women were wonderful partners.

The two visits were very positive experiences; both Senator Benjamin’s chief of staff and Assemblyman O’Donnell agreed that election reform is important, and they will support the agenda we discussed.

If you have never met your state representatives or visited their offices, I recommend the experience. You will get a sense of who they are, and they will remember you because they are representing YOU!
Intern Reflection

By Alyssa Micalizzi

I found out about the League of Women Voters through a class I was taking my senior year at York College. The class was called Women in U.S. History. We discussed the women’s suffrage movement. My professor shared the many women’s groups that started popping up during this time period such as the League of Women Voters and mentioned that it was still running.

The League of Women Voters is now making strides in not only women’s rights but social justice. I was immediately interested. I am an English major and Creative Writing minor so I thought that my chances of getting involved might be slim. When looking at the internship options, I saw that they were looking for an archival intern. I was ecstatic. I have a lot of interest in archival work and it aligns well with my major. I applied and was so excited to receive an email asking for a phone interview and soon I got the job!

I loved my experience working with the League. Every day, walking into the office, I knew what needed to be done, but I didn’t know what might get thrown at me. I liked the very open workspace and being given opportunities to work on different projects, though my main role was as archival intern. Being able to make decisions for the archives and hold all this history in my hands was an incredible experience. An additional bonus was that during my unfortunately short time with the League, they were planning a collaboration with the New York Philharmonic. Witnessing the use of archival materials for such a prestigious and historical collaboration was so inspiring. I was also lucky enough and ambitious enough to suggest some archival materials that I thought would be perfect for the displays at the NYPHIL, which the Philharmonic archivist loved. Having that opportunity and having my voice heard felt incredible. I truly loved my time at the League and wouldn’t trade it for the world.

Looking Back: All Hail the Voting Machine

By Suzanne Surbeck

There is no piece of equipment more crucial to the success of the electoral process than the voting machine. The League’s involvement dates back to the 1920s, when the gear-and-lever voting machine was introduced. Voters learned to follow a three-step process: pulling a lever to close the booth’s curtain, selecting their candidate with another lever, then re-opening the curtain.

The minutes from a January 1921 League meeting cited an article on voting machines in the November 1920 issue of Popular Science. Miss Potter, presumably a member of the LWVNYC, warned those present to be careful as to what kind of voting machines they championed. The article strongly supported the gear and lever voting machines. Apparently, people were concerned that paper ballot boxes were sometimes thrown into the East River.

The voting machines we now use employ an optical scanner to read marked paper ballots and LWVNC continues to lead the fight to ensure the dependability of New York’s voting machines.
CENSUS COMMITTEE
census@lwvnyc.org

The Census Committee has been working to get the word out, “Fill out your census form and encourage everyone around you to do the same!” We talk about the census and distribute our palm card at many LWVNYC events. We inform on a deeper level with a formal presentation using our Census Guide, which can be accessed on our website. We have met with numerous organizations, including Hour Children, The Grace Institute, Park Slope Center for Successful Aging, and the YMCA, to share our knowledge and develop strategies to get NYC counted. Starting this month, our goal is to help people fill out their Census forms!

COMMITTEE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM
criminaljustice@lwvnyc.org

“Turn on the TAP” is the focus of the CCJR. After much research, we have begun to lobby New York legislators to encourage them to support renewed funding of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to support college education for incarcerated people. All the research shows that education is a key to a healthy return home after prison. We are collaborating with the Program Committee to host the April 14th Evening with the League, featuring two leaders of the Fortune Society who will speak about education and incarceration.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
education@lwvnyc.org

Members of the Education Committee will participate in Civics Week, sponsored by the Department of Education and the Mayor’s Office. We are coordinating with the Election Reform Committee to advocate for more education funding with our state legislators. We are also giving input for state legislation to require media literacy instruction across the curriculum. We hope to sponsor another scholarship for the Harvard Civics Program this summer. Please contact the Education Committee to recommend a high school social studies teacher for this valuable opportunity. Lastly, don’t forget to check out our feature, on page 5 of this newsletter, about the exciting Youth Civics Fair we are sponsoring on April 4th.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE
programs@lwvnyc.org

Every month between September and May, the League of Women Voters’ Program Committee schedules prominent speakers who inform League members and the community about important political or social issues impacting New Yorkers. All programs are held at the New York Society for Ethical Culture located at 2 West 64th Street off Central Park West. For upcoming events, check the calendar on the last page of this newsletter.

VOTING REFORM COMMITTEE
voting.reform@lwvnyc.org

This spring, the Voting Reform Committee has been organizing and conducting meetings with state legislators to advocate for issues related to redistricting and voting, including funding for early voting and for the upcoming redistricting commission. We also had the pleasure of hosting Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul at one of our meetings. She spoke about voting reform developments from 2019, the census, and early voting expansion in 2020.

VOTER SERVICES COMMITTEE
voter.services@lwvnyc.org for voter registration inquiries
lwvtrainings@lwvnyc.org for info on trainings
speakers@lwvnyc.org for info on speaking events

The Voter and Information Services Committee had a very busy end to 2019 and an even busier start to 2020! We are working with many organizations around the city to support, train and educate communities on democratic engagement. We tackled Women’s Suffrage and the ERA, Voting 101, and How to Get Involved in 2020. We hosted voter registration training “bootcamps” for new and existing volunteers, plus numerous trainings across all five boroughs for community groups who can now conduct their own voter registration events. We are working with hospitals and health centers, movie houses, community groups, colleges and high schools to organize voter registration events in expectation of a very productive 2020!

WOMEN’S RIGHTS COMMITTEE
womensrights@lwvnyc.org

The Women’s Rights Committee’s focus has been on domestic violence. In November, we met with City Council Member Helen Rosenthal to explore ways in which we can work with the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. Several committee members visited the Bronx Family Justice Center to discuss how we can help further the work of both the FJC’s, which provide assistance to domestic violence victims, and the Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence. In March, we will co-host Dorchen Leidholdt of Sanctuary for Families with the Program Committee. We continue to follow legislation on the city and state levels dealing with women’s issues.
Upcoming Events

All trainings and meetings are held at the LWVNYC office unless otherwise specified. For more information, please visit our website, www.lwvnyc.org, or call the office at 212-725-3541.

Voter Registration Training Sessions:

@ LWVNYC Office
March 9, 19, April 1: 6:00 – 8:00pm
March 21, April 11: time TBD

Check our website calendar and contact office@lwvnyc.org to confirm training dates and times!

Committee Meetings:

• Census Committee: 6:30pm, every 4th Wed of the month
• Committee for Criminal Justice Reform: Please check our calendar for dates!
• Education Committee: 5:30pm, every 2nd Wed of the month
• Voting Reform Initiative Committee: 6:30pm; Please check our calendar for dates!
• Voter Services Committee Meetings: 6:00pm, every 3rd Wed of the month
• Women’s Rights Committee: 6:30pm, every 2nd Thursday of the month

Please contact office@lwvnyc.org to confirm meeting dates!

Programs:

March 10, April 14 – An Evening with the League
@ NY Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64th St, 6:00 – 8:00pm

April 4 – Youth Civics Fair
@ The Beacon School, 522 W 44th Street, 1:00 – 4:00pm

April 30 – Comedy Fundraiser: Well Behaved Women
@ Magnet Theater, 254 W 29th St, 7:00pm

June 18 – LWVNYC Annual Meeting
@ NY Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64th St, 4:00 – 8:00pm

Newsletter Staff
Ruth S. Altman
Diane Burrows
Susan B. Glattstein
Beth Kelley
Neil Parker
Natalie Silverman
May Takahashi
Andrea Zuckerman

Thank you to all of our newsletter contributors!