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INSIDE THE LEAGUE

From the Co-Presidents “Why Should I Vote?”

We have all had the experience of finding ourselves trying to answer the question, “Why should I vote?” Sometimes it is asked simply and sometimes it is asked in anger, confusion, or frustration. We might say, “Just go vote,” or we might give long, passionate explanations about why voting is so important. But far too often, nothing we **SAY** changes people’s minds. So, we need to **DO** something to change their minds.

We believe it is what we **DO**—the actions of League members and our partners—that can change the minds of non-voters and increase civic participation here in New York City. So, what do we need to do? Let’s think about three hypothetical types of non-voters and what we can do to activate them.

First, let’s focus on the cynical non-voter. To that person, we can emphasize that voting locally impacts very specific quality of life issues, such as how we are policed and how sanitation works. All of these issues are decided right here by those we elect to serve on the City Council and other citywide offices. These elected officials appoint the Community Boards that provide them with guidance and advice. We elect the mayor who appoints the Police Commissioner and the Sanitation Commissioner and many other appointed officials who then govern the city. When we lobby the City Council and make our voices heard, we can make change. To show our commitment to local issues, LWWNYC has added a City Affairs Committee to join our other strong committees that monitor and lobby for election reform, criminal justice reform, and gender justice.

The next group of non-voters are, surprisingly, issues activists. These people participate in specific movements they care passionately about, but they do not always vote.



Women’s Academy Civics planning session, March 7. Left to right: Barbara Kairson, President, One Hundred Black Women; Arnette Crocker, Principal of Women’s Academy; Sherletta McCaskill, LWWNYC Board Member; and LWWNYC Co-President Diane Burrows



LWWNYC Board Member Laura Quigg and Co-President Diane Burrows at The Today Show for International Women’s Day

Maybe they are angry at those in power or are frustrated by the slow speed at which things seem to change. To those who actively participate in movements such as Black Lives Matter and environmental movements, and yet often do not vote, our partnerships with civic organizations working on these issues allows us to provide programming and training for these advocacy groups to activate their membership to get out the vote.

And lastly, for those who are intimidated by the mechanics of voting, we have created our Adult Civics programming to teach voters how to navigate the entire process of voting—from registration

to ballot box. These civics programs are already being shared with organizations and corporations to inform and encourage voting and civic engagement locally.

Now is the time. Every vote matters. Our programming and events are focused on our mission: to educate and activate voters here in New York City. We must close the gap between registered voters and *voting* voters!

Respectfully,

Diane Burrows
president@lwwnyc.org

Lesley Sigall
co-president@lwwnyc.org

Black Economic Alliance Honored at 2022 Awards Breakfast

By Barb Ettington, LWVNYC Development Committee Chair

On March 30, 2022, the League of Women Voters of the City of New York honored the Black Economic Alliance at an Awards Breakfast. Almost 200 people attended this hybrid event. Co-presidents Diane Burrows and Lesley Sigall thanked the fifteen corporate sponsors who generously provided their support and recognized the League’s Advisory Board for its continued leadership.

Shirleen Allicot, Co-Ancor of WABC-TV’s Eyewitness News, welcomed guests to the beautiful venue SECOND in Manhattan, and introduced David Clunie, Executive Director of the Black Economic Alliance (BEA). Clunie received the League’s “Distinguished Service Award,” recognizing the BEA’s many initiatives to improve outcomes for Black Americans in three core areas: work, wages, and wealth.



Shirleen Allicot, WABC-TV Co-Ancor; David Clunie, Executive Director, BEA; and Jeanine Liburd of BET at the LWVNYC Awards Breakfast

this post-George Floyd time, they are recognizing how Black employees are experiencing this voter suppression differently.” He recommended actions corporations can take, including providing time off of work to vote, placing notices in their workplaces or stores, and using their messaging platforms in a nonpartisan way to ensure integrity in voting information.

Susie Gomes, Vice President of Development with the LWVNYC, urged the audience to support the League’s work to close the gap between those who vote and those who do not, despite being registered. She outlined the League’s Adult Civics Learning Initiative, designed to empower each voter to become a citizen advocate. Also featured was the research project being



Jeanine Liburd of BET with David Clunie of BEA discuss voting rights at March Awards Breakfast

Special guest Jeanine Liburd, of Black Entertainment Television (BET), led a robust conversation with David Clunie about voting rights. BEA launched a nationwide non-partisan campaign to lift the voices of Corporate America to publicly oppose discriminatory voting legislation introduced across the country, especially in communities of color.

Clunie called on businesses to take ownership of the impact and influence they have on their communities—whether environmentally, fiscally, or civically. “Voting is a fundamental right and should be treated like a civic duty. We want to take the ‘partisan’ out of voting rights,” he stated. “Companies can step up and help all of their employees vote. And in



done in conjunction with NYU Wagner School. Under the League’s guidance, graduate students are developing an evidence-based, data-driven study to describe

disparities of voting access that exist across underserved communities in all five boroughs. The study’s outcome could be the cornerstone for future discussions and testimony about voter equity in NYC.



LWVNYC Board Members at the Awards Breakfast in March

The Inextricable Link Between Our Democracy and Economy



By David Clunie, Executive Director of the Black Economic Alliance (BEA)

The Black Economic Alliance is dedicated to driving Black wealth building at scale by improving work, wages, and wealth. Advocating for free and fair elections for every eligible voter—which are under attack right

now—is integral to driving sustainable Black economic mobility at scale and achieving full participation in a stable, inclusive economy. Unfortunately, Black people have never enjoyed full participation in America’s democracy or economy.

Throughout American history, Black Americans have consistently faced hurdles trying to exercise our right to vote. Allowing targeted, state-sponsored election subversion to go unchecked not only perpetuates the exclusion of Black Americans from



BEA President David Clunie speaking at the March on Washington on August 28th, 2020

electing political leaders who will protect their interests, it also hurts our entire democracy and economy.

Fortunately, many in the business community understand the gravity of the current risks to our democracy and economy. A recent poll showed **72% of U.S. business leaders** understand the fundamental connection between a fair, functioning democracy and a reliable, thriving economy. With the support of people of goodwill, including business leaders using their platforms to speak up for disenfranchised American voters—most of whom are people of color—we can expand access to the ballot box and maintain America’s competitive posture on the global stage by setting an example for the rest of the world.

We thank the League of Women Voters of the City of New York for honoring and championing voting rights and we look forward to supporting each other in our efforts to strengthen our democracy by opening access to all eligible voters.

Participatory Budgeting: How to Acquire Funding for Your Community Project Idea

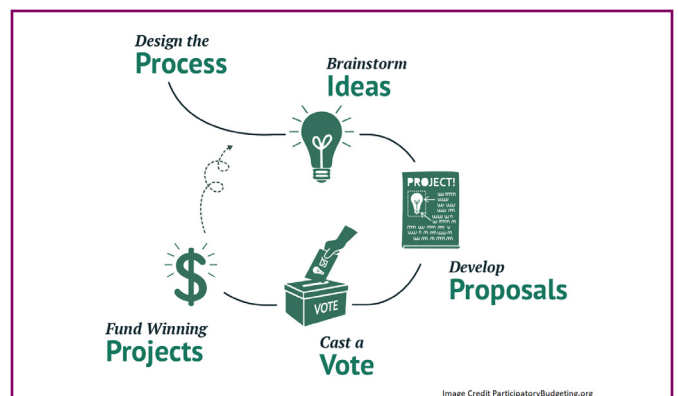
By Patricia Manning, LWVNYC Board Member

Participatory Budgeting in New York City (known as PBNYC or “the People’s Budget”) is a democratic process that affords citizens a direct hand in the funding decisions for their communities by sharing ideas, developing proposals, and voting on suggestions for projects. PBNYC funds physical infrastructure projects that benefit the public, cost at least \$50,000, and have a lifespan of at least five years. Improvements to schools, parks, libraries, public housing, streets, and other public spaces are examples of projects that meet funding criteria.

PBNYC Phases Timeline:

- Idea Collection and Volunteer Recruitment: August – October**
 Through community meetings, residents brainstorm ideas and recruit Budget Delegates for the current cycle.
- Proposal Development: October – January**
 Budget Delegates transform ideas into full proposals, with support from city agencies and staff. Delegates narrow down proposals and select projects that meet the needs of the community.
- GOTV and Vote Week: March – April**
 Once proposals have been determined, Budget Delegates and residents get out the vote and prepare for a nine-day community vote.
- Evaluation and Planning: May – June**
 Winning projects are included in New York City’s upcoming fiscal year budget. City Council staff and stakeholders evaluate the process and oversee the implementation of winning projects by agencies.

Good luck to all who participated and submitted ideas for “the People’s Budget” this year!



“Where Are the Lawyers?”



By Maria Cilenti, Senior Policy Counsel
at the New York City Bar Association

When it comes to voting rights, this is the question the New York City Bar Association has set out to answer. In a comprehensive **report** identifying the urgent need for the legal profession to speak up in support of voting rights

and in opposition to voter suppression efforts, as well as efforts to undermine nonpartisan election officials across the country, the City Bar has issued a pledge titled “**America’s Lawyers on Voting and the Rule of Law: Nine Principles**” and is urging all lawyers and law students to sign it.

On February 14, City Bar President Sheila S. Boston delivered an inspirational **call to action** at the American Bar Association House of Delegates meeting.

To our League members who are lawyers and law students: **Please sign the pledge now.** To those who are not in the legal profession: Please forward this to friends and colleagues who are. Let’s join the City Bar in raising our voices in defense of the right to vote in free and fair elections and to have elections administered in a nonpartisan manner without interference or harassment.



Sheila Boston, President of the
New York City Bar Association

The Voting Rights Act: 1965 and Today

By Suzanne Surbeck

The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 was one of the pivotal moments in American history. Its aim was to protect the voting rights of all citizens, particularly those of African Americans in the south, who encountered systemic barriers to civic participation. Since then, however, the Act’s history has mirrored the bitter American political divide over voting rights and voter suppression in the United States.

In 2013, the United States Supreme Court ruled that crucial provisions of the Voting Rights Act were outmoded. Since this decision, a number of states have passed laws again limiting voter access, such as laws restricting the ease of registration, purging voter rolls, and instituting voter ID laws.

Today, two bills aim to re-establish essential voting rights. The Freedom to Vote Act would expand early voting along with same-day and online registration. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would safeguard voters from discrimination and restore critical sections of the original Voting Rights Act. Both bills face an uphill battle in Congress however, due to intense political partisanship.

As this battle continues, the League of Women Voters leads the fight for that most basic American right: the right to vote.



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965, with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and other civil rights advocates looking on

NEW YORK
CITY BAR

NYC Council Expands Voting Rights to Non-Citizen New Yorkers

By Alex Yellin, former Co-Chair LWWNYC Committee on Non-Citizen Voting

In December, the New York City Council passed a **bill** allowing lawful permanent residents—including green card holders, individuals with work permits, and DACA recipients—to vote in city elections. The law does not apply to state or federal elections.

NYC joins more than a dozen communities across the U.S. that allow non-citizens to vote in local elections, including eleven towns in Maryland, two in Vermont, and the city of San Francisco for school board elections.

The bill was co-sponsored by a supermajority of City Council members who celebrated the legislation as an expansion of voting rights for legal non-citizens who live, work, go to school, pay taxes, and raise families in New York City. It was endorsed by Our City Our Vote, a campaign of 62 member organizations led by the New York Immigration Coalition, which represents over 200 immigrant and refugee rights groups throughout New York.

Opponents of the bill argued that it could discourage

immigrants from seeking citizenship and might not be constitutional. In January, the Republican National Committee filed a suit together with the New York GOP and some state and local officials to block the law from being implemented.

This law would apply to municipal elections held on or after January 9, 2023. Prior to implementation, the New York City Board of Elections must produce, by July 2022, an implementation plan outlining how the Board will educate and register New Yorkers impacted by this law, create special voter registration forms and ballots for non-citizens, and provide updated training to NYC poll workers.



City Councilman & Primary Bill Sponsor Ydanis Rodriguez spoke at a news conference just before the bill's passage.

Credit: Mary Altaffer/Associated Press

Ask an Intern



Why does voting matter to you?

Renuka Balakrishnan, Barnard College, class of 2024

As young people, it is essential that we exercise our right to vote since the policies passed by the candidates we elect have a direct impact on our future. Many teenagers and young adults I know who are eligible to vote often don't do so, yet they frequently complain about their elected officials. I often feel like my voice isn't being heard in huge national elections, so I make sure to also vote in local elections, which are a great way to see tangible change being made, beginning in your own neighborhood.

Youth Engagement

Inside “Students Inside Albany 2022”

By Crystal Joseph, LWVNYC Board Member

The New York State League of Women Voters is extremely excited about hosting **Students Inside Albany (SIA) 2022**. We welcome our New York City students for an amazing experience in policy, advocacy, and an opportunity to tour the capital region. It is our pleasure to introduce this year’s SIA participants.

Giovana Maldonado

Senior at Grover Cleveland High School

By participating in the 2022 SIA conference, I’d like to learn more about New York State’s government. I look forward to meeting local representatives and being in their field for a day. I would like to have hands-on experience talking to other students who are interested in the same areas as me and be able to bounce ideas off of them. The Students Inside Albany experience would be a great way for me to become aware of my responsibilities as a soon-to-be voter—learning how policies are made, and getting to see how legislators work in real time. My interest is also to learn about my future responsibilities as a citizen in the democracy of New York State, and learn about upcoming policies, as one day I will have to live with them.

Sharona Nagamuthu

Senior at the Scholars Academy

From attending the 2022 SIA conference, I hope to be able to expand my knowledge of our legal and legislative process. My participation in various programs dedicated to youth expanding civic knowledge, such as YVote, Next Generation Politics, Intergenerational Change Initiative, and In Our Hands have allowed me to witness firsthand what it takes to get elected representatives to hear the desires of the individuals within their communities. By attending the Students Inside Albany conference, I will be able to observe the other side of this by obtaining eyewitness accounts of how elected officials implement policies and legislation that are reflective of the needs of the community. Being able to work one-on-one with legislators will allow me to gain more insight into their mindset when it comes to enacting policies that could impact the security of various communities.

I will use this opportunity to expand my knowledge of the legislative process and in turn apply this knowledge within my own community and activism initiatives in hopes of inspiring change for the betterment of my environment. Overall, I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, and I am eagerly awaiting the start of the conference this spring!

Mia Williams Payne

Talent Unlimited High School, NYC

As a Bronx resident, I center my advocacy on criminal and environmental justice, as these are the most prevalent issues in my community. Digging deeper into the root of these systems, the interconnectivity became clear to me, and I was able to follow how one variable can easily branch into a multitude of injustices. This is why participating in SIA is particularly important to me. I found that I can address environmental racism, mass incarceration, housing inequality, and even educational disparities all within navigating the conversation around civics. As a participant of SIA, my intention is dually understanding legislation but also leaving this experience knowing I impacted the future of legislation—whether that be through a conversation with an elected official or sparking the engagement of my representatives on how to move forward with the civic education that I’ve had the honor of being exposed to, and simultaneously utilizing the power of extending that education.

The HEAF Winter Conference

By Crystal Joseph, LWVNYC Board Member

At the beginning of 2022, the League was invited to join a conference presented by the Harlem Educational Activities Fund (HEAF). The theme for the attendees, high school and college students, was the importance of voting and being a voice for change. While the students were exploring career possibilities, my co-panelist, **Marti G. Cummings**, and I discussed the many ways young people can maintain their advocacy. Marti shared a fantastic journey, starting with a question about how to become more involved in activism through the arts, and ways in which self-expression can be a pathway for political awareness. As the conversation evolved, we both shared the ways young people can stay “in the know” about issues in their community and reminded them not to get polarized by the democratic process.

LWVNYC Committee Updates

Please feel free to email the Committees if you're interested in learning more and/or would like to get involved.

CENSUS AND REDISTRICTING COMMITTEE

By Laura Quigg, Chair

census@lwnyc.org

At both the New York State and Federal level, the redistricting process concluded with the failure of the bipartisan New York Independent Redistricting Commission to agree on any single set of maps. As a result, the legislature submitted their own maps, which the Governor signed into law. The Census and Redistricting Committee informed and educated our committee members and the public at large about this process and continues to advocate on behalf of fair maps.

At this point we are working with the Voter Services Committee to educate prospective voters about the new district lines and what it means to them as constituents. We will also develop materials to explain how redistricting works at the city level, a process that begins later this year.

COMMITTEE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

By Vivione Marshall, Akyla Tomlinson, and Michele Figueroa, Co-Chairs

criminaljustice@lwnyc.org

The LWVNYC's CCJR successfully advocated for **Turn on the TAP** (S4464/A2322), which restored funding for post-secondary education for incarcerated people. We are currently advocating for **Elder Parole** (S15A/A8855) and **Fair and Timely Parole** (S1415/A4231). These bills would ensure fair and just opportunities for parole release review.

In addition, we are focusing on the closure of Rikers Island Jail and the Rose M. Singer Center (a campaign called **Beyond Rosie's**) and banning the use of solitary confinement in New York City detention facilities. We participated in Advocacy Day events with partner organizations such as the Women's Community Justice Association, Release Aging People in Prison, and College and Community Fellowship, and we promoted these advocacy events with NYC and NYS League members.

In March, we co-hosted the *At-Home with the League* program, "The Importance of Criminal Justice Reform in NYC." Guest speakers at this program were Darren Mack of Urban Justice and Reverend Sharon White Harrigan of Women's Community Justice Association.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

By Jane Hatterer, Chair

education@lwnyc.org

The Education Committee has focused on learning about the new administrations' education policies and priorities, and the City Council Education Committee's proposed legislation. We will regularly attend council meetings and reach out to council Education Committee members to establish relationships in order to become more effective advocates. I also continue to represent the Education Committee on the New York State League Youth Chair Committee, and the National League's Advisory Committee on the Harvard Case Method Project.

We continue our advocacy work as members of the Media Literacy, Youth Engagement, and Equity and Access committees of the **DemocracyReady NY** Coalition. As a member of the Media Literacy Committee, I am working on a subcommittee promoting the Coalition's media literacy education proposals to the New York State Board of Regents. As a member of the Youth Engagement Committee of DRNY, I am organizing the Coalition's youth members' participation in an advocacy initiative for the passage of a State bill that protects the First Amendment rights of student journalists. I have recruited youth members of both DRNY and the Youth Civics Initiative to join in the work. The Education Committee is currently reviewing the proposed bill and considering how we may support the advocacy work locally. We also hope to help on the rollout of "Students Inside City Hall."

Our committee continues to serve as adult allies to **YCI**. We have added eight new writers and journalist mentors, as well as outreach staff, and are in the process of revising our website. We recently produced an event with five youth activists for the Boys Club of NY, and plan to collaborate with them on other projects.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE UPDATE

By Joanna R. Leefer, Chair

programs@lwnyc.org

New infrastructure funding, a new mayor, and changing controversies over our criminal justice system and education are just some of the developments facing New York City in 2022. The LWVNYC's Program Committee is inviting speakers to discuss some of them.

LWVNYC Committee Updates

PROGRAM COMMITTEE UPDATE *continued*

In **January**, Brian Fritsch of the Regional Plan Association discussed how NYC will allocate \$25 billion in national funding towards improving our bridges, tunnels, and public transportation. In **February**, Deborah Archer, a professor at the NYU School of Law and the President of the ACLU Board of Directors, discussed Critical Race Theory, the controversial issue being challenged by many state education systems. In addition, Regina Tillman of the State LWV discussed the League's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program developed to ensure the League's programs remain both diverse and inclusive.

For **March**, the League's Criminal Justice Committee invited expert speakers to discuss Mayor Eric Adams' new proposals for closing Rikers Island and in **April** we invited Adrienne Adams, the first black woman elected to become Speaker of the City Council, to speak about how she achieved this prestigious position in New York City government.

The Program Committee continues to offer monthly League programs via Zoom, on the second or third Tuesday of every month. We hope to begin offering live events as the COVID pandemic wanes.

VOTING REFORM COMMITTEE

By Bella Wang, Chair

voting.reform@lwvnyc.org

The Voting Reform Committee has begun its annual outreach to meet with legislators to advocate for issues important to the League. This year, we will be focusing on priorities such as restoration of voting rights, the New York Voting Rights Act, same-day registration, no-excuse absentee voting, and Board

of Elections reform. We are aiming for 15 to 20 meetings with legislators this spring.

VOTER SERVICES COMMITTEE

By Gerry Russo and Laura Quigg, Co-Chairs

voter.services@lwvnyc.org

The Voter Services Committee is preparing for the June primaries: developing materials for the elected offices that will be on the ballot and identifying important election dates and deadlines. In addition, we are setting up voter registration and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) events. Historically, these elections have pretty low turnout, so we have our work cut out for us.

We are also working to address the abysmally low voter turnout for special elections. For instance, at a Voter Services Committee meeting a member questioned why there had been no publicity about a special election in East Harlem. We forwarded a letter to the Board of Elections asking about this, and they responded that they only have a responsibility to publicize one election a year. We plan to follow up on that and encourage more transparency from the BOE in the future.

We were recently approached by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to train League members to work as observers in NYCHA elections for their Boards of Directors. We are excited about serving in this capacity, as we believe that people who get used to voting in these elections will be more likely to vote in other elections. We welcome expanding our partnership with NYCHA and are looking for new volunteers to work with us on that project.

Together with the Committee for Criminal Justice Reform, we have applied for a grant from LWVUS to continue our work with formerly incarcerated people, to spread information on their new voting rights.

Suffs at The Public Theater

The Public Theater reached out to the League with an offer of 50 free tickets to the March 23 preview performance of **Suffs**. Because the show is about the seven years leading up to the passage of the 19th Amendment, The Public wanted the League there. The story, with book, music, and lyrics by Shaina Taub, features leaders in the suffrage movement including Carrie Chapman Catt, Alice Paul, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell working with and against each other and clashing with the public and the president in their fight for equality.



The company of Suffrs in rehearsal. Photo credit: Joan Marcus

Upcoming Events

All trainings and meetings held over Zoom.
Please contact admin@lwnyc.org to confirm meeting dates!
For more information on Committees and Events,
please visit www.lwnyc.org

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- Census and Redistricting Committee: On hiatus
- **New!** City Affairs Committee: check the website calendar for upcoming meetings
- Committee for Criminal Justice Reform: check the website calendar for upcoming meetings and subcommittee meetings
- Education Committee: 2nd Wed. of the month; 5:30–7:00pm
- Voting Reform Initiative Committee: check the website calendar for upcoming meetings
- Voter Services Committee: 3rd Wed. of the month; 6:00–7:30pm

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