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For Immediate Release

LWWW 2023 STATEMENT ON
THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY STATE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE

The League of Women Voters of Westchester annually studies, discusses, and provides League consensus statements to the Westchester Board of Legislators and County Executive addressing the proposed County Operating and Capital Budgets.

In December 2022, we commended the County Executive and Budget Director for their clarity and transparency, and for listening to residents while taking a pragmatic and conservative, yet compassionate, approach in making their decisions. The County Budget Department has shown great foresight as it addressed the continued economic challenges the County faced during 2022 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We applaud the efforts to seek numerous avenues of continuous revenue-generating programs, rather than resorting to borrowing or one-off transactions, and for the ability to generate a healthy Reserve Fund.

With the introduction of the 2023 Westchester County State Joint Legislative Package, the LWV of Westchester shares the concern of the County Executive and Legislation Committee regarding unplanned expenditures of a total of \$40 million to fund two specific issues:

1. Legislation to support \$11 million to fund a compensation increase for 18-B Assigned Counsel Attorneys. While an increase may be long overdue and well deserved, Westchester County cannot afford a full rate increase at this time and requests that New York State fund this pay raise, or at the very least, continue strategic negotiations. The LWV of Westchester supports this request.
2. The New York State Division of the Budget decision to not pass along E-FMAP payments resulting in a \$29 million negative impact to the Westchester County Budget.

The total of these two unplanned expenditures is \$40 million to the Westchester County Budget, of which, payments will be required to be paid through the County Reserve Fund. This significant financial action will result in a 25% reduction of the Fund. The County Budget team has diligently worked to improve financial health over the last several years, resulting in increased ratings by financial ratings agencies. This unplanned 25% reduction of the Fund will now result in potentially reduced ratings, resulting in increased costs of borrowing for the County and reducing the County's good standing.

The LWV of Westchester requests the Governor and the Legislators to critically review the significant financial impact these two issues alone will have on Westchester County's financial

health, and request that strategic bipartisan negotiations continue between all parties to achieve a compromise that will satisfy all.

The League of Women Voters of Westchester County supports the vigorous efforts of the current Westchester County administration to resolve the County's extensive economic challenges. We look forward to continued innovative solutions through bipartisan negotiations with the New York State Division of the Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Meany, President
League of Women Voters of Westchester

County Government Committee
League of Women Voters of Westchester

CC:

Hon. Kathy Hochul, NYS Governor

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Senate Majority Leader

Hon. Carl Heastie, NYS Assembly Speaker

Honorable Senators and Assembly Members, Westchester Delegation

Hon. George Latimer, Westchester County Executive

Honorable Legislators of Westchester County