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LWV-PA Intern Aleena Rios Heads LCHS's LWV Club

Growing up, I was always drawn toward the history of the woman suffrage movement. In fourth grade, we had a wax museum project, and my teacher told me I could be anybody in the world. While many of my classmates chose to dress up as famous celebrities and athletes, I chose to be Susan B. Anthony. So there I stood at ten years old, dressed up in a long and proper black dress with white puff sleeves and round glasses. And while looking like her was fun, feeling like her was even better. I felt like I could inspire change the way she did, with courage and ambition. I hoped that one day I would be able to carry on a part of her legacy.

This year at my high school, I started a new club called the League of Women Voters Club. In our club we help protect our right to vote as she once did. I have always felt strongly about being able to express ourselves, and the League of Women Voters is all about that. When the Pasadena Area League visited my school, I attended the meeting, eager to learn more about the organization. To my surprise, I was the only one who came, which I saw as an opportunity for change! After talking to Joan Riback (the head of Voter Services), I decided to start a club at school to get more students involved. On our school's Club Rush Day, we got more than 30 amazing students to sign up as members of our LWV club!

Now we have grown—not just as students but as a community. At each club meeting, we play games that reinforce the League's values. At our first meeting, the students split into groups, and each team made congressional buildings out of random materials such as paperclips, cardstock, and tape. Additionally, each team had to make a law for their building and present it to the club. In this activity, they learned the importance of teamwork, innovation, and creativity when forming an organization. In our second meeting we played a trivia game in teams. They were quizzed on their knowledge of history and relevant political subjects. This activity not only made learning fun but also helped make sure that we, the youth, are becoming informed voters. Our third meeting is tomorrow [October 28], we will debate and vote on topics ranging from voting beliefs to whether a hotdog is a sandwich. I believe that this will help teach our students the importance of speaking one's voice and using our right to vote.

While the way I lead club meetings is not conventional, I believe that leadership doesn't have to look one way. I love leading my club and having students come up to me asking when the next club meeting is because they're so excited. I have always known that if I were to start a club it would be more than a club—it would be a community.

In our community, students have opportunities to reach out and create a positive impact. Recently, I and two other volunteers from our club helped at the League's Ice Cream Social. At the event we met mayors and city councilmembers, which was very inspiring. Additionally, I got to speak in front of them and all the wonderful people at the event about the club at our school and what inspired me to create it. In the future, our club looks forward to expanding our impact by running a voter registration drive at LCHS.

I am thrilled to continue working with the League of Women Voters and inspire advocacy in my school and community. As Susan B. Anthony said, "There is so much yet to be done, I see so many things I would like to do and say, but I must leave it for the younger generation. . . . The young blood, fresh with enthusiasm and with all the enlightenment of the twentieth century, must carry on the work." Her words remind me both of how much we've accomplished and all that still can be done. As the younger generation, we must honor her legacy by advocating for change, fighting for justice, and standing united when challenged. I am excited to be a part of that and to inspire my peers to do the same.

—With gratitude, Aleena Rios

Editor's note: Aleena Rios is one of LWV-PA's youth interns. She attends La Cañada High School and, along with LWV-PA's other interns, has been doing amazing work raising her fellow students' civic awareness. Keep up the great work, Aleena—so look forward to hearing more about the club's civics activities and projects—especially that meeting on debate skills at the end of October