

League of Women Voters of Virginia Positions-In-Brief

Updated Spring 2017

*(Re-ordered Social Policy Positions Category, December 2016, by Sherry Zachry
Second Update April 2017 by Frances Schutz to include new Fracking Position)*

GOVERNMENT

Delegation of Power

Support for a balanced partnership between state and local government, including:

- Policies and incentives that promote regional coordination and local action.
- Establishment of uniform powers and responsibilities of local governments by changing the distinctions between cities, counties, and towns.
- Coordination of activities and programs of local jurisdictions. (1972 & 1991)

Election Laws

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens; that voting is a right and responsibility; and that election laws, regulations and administrative procedures should be uniformly designed and applied, and adequately funded to facilitate and increase voter participation throughout Virginia.

Specifically, the League supports measures to ensure the availability of voter registration and to encourage and facilitate increased voter participation in elections, including: absentee voting by mail and in-person without a reason; an adequate number of voting machines and trained election officers; the use of satellite voting; split shifts for election officers when needed; and measures that take advantage of technological advances such as online voter registration and the use of electronic poll books. The League also supports the shared funding of statewide registration and voting systems by the localities and the Commonwealth; providing adequate authority and resources to the Department of Elections (ELECT) and the State Board of Elections (SBE) for oversight and enforcement of laws and standards for registration and elections uniformly throughout the Commonwealth; and the use of secure electronic means to facilitate voter registration and absentee voting for Virginia's military and overseas voters. (2011, 2015)

Fiscal Policy

Support for a responsible state fiscal policy that includes:

- A flexible and diverse tax structure that is based on a progressive income tax.
- Continuous evaluation of all programs for need, effectiveness, efficiency, and economy.
- Flexibility in developing local sources of revenue.
- Increased state commitment to funding of state-mandated programs.
- Opposition to constitutional or statutory limits on state/local government spending or revenue sources. (1964, 1977 & 1979)

Reapportionment & Redistricting

Support for the establishment, in law, of a politically balanced and independent Reapportionment Commission for each decennial redistricting to prepare, with the Virginia Department of Legislative Services, a plan for submission to the legislature as specified by the Virginia Constitution. The Commission should be bi-partisan and be composed of individuals who are not elected officials; they should represent the geographical distribution and demographic diversity of the state, and consist of an uneven number of members.

In addition to the Virginia constitutional requirement of equal population, contiguous and compact districts and the need for protecting the voting strength of minority groups, the League supports the following considerations in redistricting:

- Natural geographic boundaries;
- Jurisdictional boundaries;
- Communities of interest; and
- Competitiveness

The Virginia constitution should be amended to provide that redistricting will occur on a decennial basis only. (1985, 2007)

Transportation

Support for regionally balanced transportation systems which efficiently and economically meet regional needs without adversely affecting planned growth or the environment.

- Regional organizations that set policy for a multi-modal public transportation program, that plan, co-ordinate, and are the designated recipients of federal and state funds, that operate or contract for services, and that could have taxing power.
- A mixture of public (federal, state, and local) and private funding for public transportation.
- Increased local participation with some public funds utilized to encourage private support and the use of innovative financing methods, such as tax incentives to encourage private sector participation.
- Provide a variety of incentives to increase the use of public transportation.(1996)

Women's Rights and Virginia Law

Support for the legal recognition of marriage as an equal partnership, including:

- Policies that recognize non-monetary as well as monetary contributions to a marriage by each partner.
- Surviving spouse policies that specify that if one spouse dies without a will, the surviving spouse should inherit all property.
- Divorce policies that recognize separately acquired property before marriage and during marriage through gifts or inheritance.
- Elimination of the concept of "fault" in the court's division of marital property.
- Legal recognition of valid pre-nuptial contracts. (1980 & 1983)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Air Quality

Support for achieving and maintaining acceptable air quality through:

- Adoption of strict vehicle emission standards.
- Development of less polluting alternative fuels.
- Programs and regulations that foster efficient transportation modes. (1993)

Extractive Industries: Hydraulic Fracturing

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the Commonwealth of Virginia until there is sufficient evidence from robust studies to show that hydraulic fracturing will not have a negative impact on the health, safety, and well-being of citizens, local jurisdictions, or the natural environment.

Absent a moratorium, the League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the Commonwealth of Virginia, including all relevant state departments and state agencies, and local governments, have a responsibility to safeguard Virginia's critical features and to ensure the public's safety, health, and welfare by 1) adopting strict systems for monitoring, regulation, and oversight of the hydraulic fracturing, including all related facilities, and fracking impacts on critical features (e.g. ground and surface water resources and recharge areas; geologic resources and seismic zones; historic sites and districts), public facilities (e.g. recreation areas, schools, wildlife preserves), local and regional infrastructure, and local and regional economies; 2) developing and implementing systems of financial assurance so all fracking-related expenses incurred by the Commonwealth and the local jurisdictions are borne by the industry; 3) granting localities authority to regulate hydraulic fracturing operations; 4) providing state funding to local governments to offset the costs incurred by local governments; 5) developing a state-level system for long-term monitoring of local impacts and enforcement of regulation throughout the full life cycle of the hydraulic fracturing operation; and 6) creating programs and policies designed to help local jurisdictions address the long-term economic and social impacts of hydraulic fracturing and its expected "boom and bust" cycles.

Land Use

Support for state policies that include:

- Creation of a state long-range comprehensive land use plan coordinated with local and regional plans.
- State protection of critical environmental areas (i.e. wetlands, agricultural lands, unique wildlife habitats) through some land use controls.
- Assistance to and increased flexibility for localities in land use planning and control. (1975)

Water Supply and Distribution

Support for a comprehensive state effort to protect the water supplies, including:

- Recognition of the connection between ground and surface water.
- Decision-making based on the concept of sharing in the use of ground water.
- State responsibility for the collection of information on water resources and planning for future use.
- Land use policies that guarantee protection of water resources.
- Moratorium on uranium mining until modern, enforceable and effective best practices are approved by an independent assessment team. (1983, 2014)

SOCIAL POLICY

Adult Domestic Violence

Support for addressing the crime of adult domestic violence through:

- Uniform law enforcement including mandatory arrest, reporting.
- Educational and training programs for medical, clerical, law enforcement personnel, and the public on the problem of adult domestic violence as well as conflict resolution.
- Assistance and job training programs for victims. (1992)

Adult Justice (*formerly Justice*)

Support for an adequately funded judicial and corrections system that serves all people without discrimination, and incorporates restorative justice practices. Such a system includes:

- Judicial selection by the General Assembly with use of a nominating commission of laypersons and lawyers.
- Sentencing by judges, not juries, with the availability of a pre-sentencing report.

- Corrections system that is adequately funded, efficiently administered, and humane.
- Corrections system that protects society and rehabilitates offenders, while offering deterrence, diversion, protection, and restitution programs.
- Local jails and community-based corrections facilities that are professionally administered and use of alternatives to incarceration and community resources in the rehabilitation and treatment of prisoners. (2013)

Child Care

Support for state policies that promote quality childcare that is affordable, accessible, and available, including:

- Minimum comprehensive state license standards for child care facilities.
- Incentives for development of child care programs.
- Financial assistance for low-income families.
- Coordinated resource and referral systems.
- Training for caregivers and parents.

Also, support a requirement that professional childcare givers report child abuse /neglect. (1988, 2013)

Children at Risk

Support for state and local policies that recognize the basic needs of all children including shelter, family, and community support, health care, food, education, and personal safety, including:

- Fund preventive services, rehabilitative programs, family support programs, crises services, court costs, and detention.
- Evaluations of programs and services.
- State mandated case planning and case management systems to assure timely access to services.
- Internal and judicial grievance procedures. (1989, 2013)

Education

Support for state funding for public schools that insures a high quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children, including:

- Full funding for the Standards of Quality and state mandates
- Increasing the state's share of education costs;
- Funding for half-day pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children, and full-day kindergarten programs;
- Funding some portion of capital costs; and
- Improving the funding formula for determining local ability to pay, using it as a basis for distribution of state education funds. (1993)

Support a challenging curriculum, high expectations of students and teachers in mastering that curriculum, and appropriate assessments of student achievement for a quality education in the public school system K-12.

Essential curriculum elements include:

- Core disciplines (English, Math, Science, History and Social Studies);
- Art, Music, Physical Education, Health, and Foreign Languages;
- Analytical skills;
- Integrated technology; strong remedial programs;
- Programs for at-risk, gifted and special needs students;

- Education for students with limited English proficiency, in which emphasis is placed on teaching English; and
- Career and technical education.

Support professional education for principals and teachers and on-going staff development; class size appropriate to instructional goals; a safe environment for students and staff; and discipline, preventative programs and a consistently enforced, well-defined system of rules; guidance counseling for academics and support services; and parental and community support and involvement. Support opportunities to select a specific program or school. These opportunities should be based on a system of equity so that all qualified students have equal access. (2003)

Elements of a quality education also include: school- based teamwork, goal setting and decision-making, application of learning to life experiences, and incentives, recognition, and awards for both students and teachers (1999)

Juvenile Justice

Support for an adequately funded and separate Department of Juvenile Justice that emphasizes prevention and rehabilitation, to include:

- Prevention programs should be provided for children identified with certain risk factors (i.e. parental incarceration, household history of drug/sexual abuse)
- Rehabilitation programs that provide treatment and training to meet the needs of each child and include counseling, vocational training and accredited academic programs.
- Alternative education programs or community service for juveniles who have been expelled or suspended from school or paroled from correctional facilities.
- In- and out- patient mental health and substance abuse programs oriented to the needs of juveniles.
- Pre- and post-dispositional community-based services.
- Establishment of small therapeutic group or foster homes.
- Removal of juveniles from adult jails.
- Development of activities/programs/training consistent with the principles of restorative justice. (2013)

Mental Health

Support for a comprehensive state public mental health care system of quality, statewide and community based services that meets the mental health needs of all Virginians, including:

- Long-range planning, coordination among agencies, and the use of established criteria for allocation of funds.
- Assistance in providing adequate and appropriate housing for the mentally ill.
- Comprehensive and consistent service delivery in all local communities.
- Advocacy programs that ensure patients' rights at all levels. (1987, 1988, 1989)

Offender Re-Entry - Removing Barriers to Employment

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports the removal of barriers to employment for persons with criminal records. This includes support of what are known colloquially as “Ban the Box” efforts. (2015)

Restoration of Civil Rights for Virginia Felons

Support for the automatic restoration of the civil rights of felons, regardless of the nature of their crime, upon their release from incarceration or upon completion of probation or parole. The process should be easy to understand, accessible, transparent and fair with information about the process made available to all. (2009)