

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 2021

South Carolina, like the rest of the world, has been in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has killed thousands in our state and has left many others with health challenges that may be permanent. The stresses produced by the pandemic have raised questions about the state’s ability to respond to immediate crises and to serve as an adequate long-term safety net for those whose lives are likely to be permanently altered by the ravages of COVID-19.

But, in the midst of this, the General Assembly has found time to address their priorities – abortion restrictions

We are concerned that there is already a serious disconnect between authority and responsibility in election administration in South Carolina.

and the public display of guns. Shifts in the composition of the General Assembly following the 2020 elections have made the legislature more friendly to bills on the extreme right wing of the political spectrum.

S.1, the first bill filed in the Senate for 2021, is an extreme bill, effectively preventing abortion after six weeks. It became Act No. 1 on 18 Feb 2021. It was prevented from going into effect by a federal court injunction on the next day because it is unconstitutional, as everyone knew all along. The General Assembly also moved quickly to favorably review

H. 3094, which would allow permit holders in South Carolina to display handguns openly on their persons or in their vehicles.

However, there is also important movement in elections and voting, which are central to the work of the League of Women Voters. The election-related bill that has made progress by the end of February is H.3444, which goes to the heart of how our elections are administered by addressing the composition and powers of the State Election Commission (SEC). This deserves our full attention.

The goal of election administration reform should be a system in which:

- The composition of the SEC is one that ALL voters in South Carolina can have confidence in, whether they are Republicans, Democrats, independents, or members of a smaller party.
- Whatever their number, SEC members are appointed by the Governor. Administering the SEC is not a legislative function.
- Authority and responsibility are in balance and the structure at both state and county levels ensures clear and appropriate allocation of operational and fiscal authority and responsibility.

We are therefore concerned that this bill at present combines increased state power over county election offices with the potential for partisan decision-making. Supporters claim that the 2:1 dominance of the Governor’s party in the current bill is an improvement over the existing 4:1 ratio, but we do not find this reassuring

in light of the greater powers given the agency in this bill and the increased partisanship we have seen recently around election administration.

More broadly, we are concerned that there is already a serious disconnect between authority and responsibility in election administration in South Carolina. SEC oversight power over counties was expanded a few years ago, but the state has done nothing to accept either operational or fiscal responsibility that is consistent with its growing power over

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Co-president's Message

This will be my last message to you as Co-president, one year with Julie Hussey as my partner and three years with Christe McCoy-Lawrence. Over those four years we have focused laser-like on making democracy work through seeking better voting equipment, easier voter access, massive voter registration, lots of voter information, supporting our state and local election commissions, extensive use of VOTE411, and action on a broad range of issues. We have learned to have virtual meetings and even virtual council and convention. We put an enormous effort into the fight for redistricting. We saw our membership grow by leaps and bounds, including a new full-fledged League in York County just recognized in January 2021. Our board has become more sophisticated about communications thanks to good leadership from Christe with Mailchimp and Facebook, Lynn the Twitter Queen, Jean Wood our webmistress, Linda Powers and the VOTER team, and countless others. We have had great speakers at the state level for LEAD, council and convention. We have worked hard to empower and support our local Leagues with monthly gatherings of presidents. We saw membership jump

dramatically as more people realized that democracy needs defending and that is what the League is all about.

In addition to all that, we celebrated the 100th birthday of LWVUS and LWVSC as best we could during a lockdown and produced a book about that history that many of you have read. Successful fund-raising has enabled us to secure our indispensable administrative assistant and has helped us to underwrite the cost of VOTE411. We cleaned up the Program and Action Agenda and streamlined (we hope!) the planning process for revising and updating state program positions. Christe McCoy-Lawrence and Nancy Williams led us with only mild protests through the essential tasks of strategic planning and updating our policies. We became a two-part organization with a tax-exempt arm for education and voter service and a separate arm for lobbying. We have committed ourselves to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the League as well as to racial and gender justice in state policy. We have strengthened our ties to LWVUS under the capable leadership of Janie Shipley as national issues director, a position created as part of a larger reorganization of the board in 2018.



I have had the privilege of working with a great team on the board — people who brought a diversity of skills, perspectives and passions to their work. Thank you for the honor of serving as Co-president for four years. As I (sort of!) look forward to my 80th birthday just as my term ends in June, I remain committed to the work of the League that has been such an important and meaningful part of my life for 53 years.

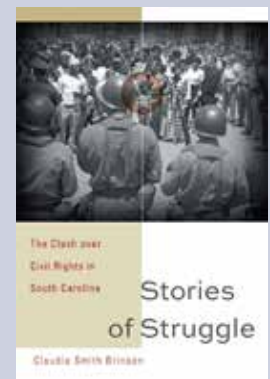
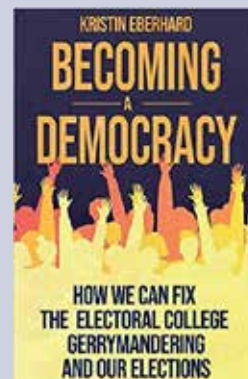
— Holley Ulbrich, LWVSC Co-president

2021 League Book Clubs—Two Good Reads!

Good old-fashioned (except for the ZOOM element) book clubs are springing up in local Leagues around the state. I would like to encourage these efforts by recommending two good reads — one on racial justice and one on protecting, defending and improving our electoral democracy.

Kristin Eberhard's *Becoming a Democracy: How We Can Fix the Electoral College, Gerrymandering, and our Elections* covers everything you need and want to know about ranked voting, winner-take-all, gerrymandering, National Popular Vote Compact, and how things are done differently in various states. Eberhard writes clear prose that helps in understanding the important positions and concepts that she describes—concepts that are important for League members to understand.

Claudia Smith Brinson is a former journalist and author of *Stories of Struggle: The Clash Over Civil Rights in South Carolina* based on public records and 150 interviews. Here are the stories of the heroes and villains of sit-ins, picketing, cross-burnings, White Citizens Councils, lynchings, protests, school desegregation (*Briggs v. Elliott*), and the Charleston Hospital Strike. Whether you are a native South Carolinian or a transplant, these are stories that we all need to know about the state we love and would like to make better, kinder, fairer and more just.



— Holley Ulbrich, LWVSC Co-president

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LEAD 2021

More than 130 participants attended the LWVSC League Education and Advocacy Day (LEAD) on January 23rd, 2021 via ZOOM.

Lynn Teague, Vice President for Issues and Action and volunteer lobbyist, provided an update on legislative bills of interest to the League — elections and voting, redistricting, Constitutional Convention, the ERA, hate crimes, racial justice, criminal justice reform, ethics, health care, women’s reproductive health, utilities, and regulatory accountability.

Matt Saltzman and Shayna Howell spoke on plans to impact redistricting reform in the General Assembly. To follow news related to redistricting, they suggested signing up for the redistricting blog — votersrule2020.blog.

Suzanne Rhodes presented information on the production of plutonium pits at the Savannah River Site and suggested contacting Ted Volskay, Natural Resources Chair, if you have an interest in recycling (tvolskay@gmail.com).

In “Crossing the Digital Divide,” Jim Stritzinger, Revolution D, Inc., shared

analysis of the crisis regarding broadband access for students in South Carolina. J.R. Green, Fairfield County School Superintendent, shared his experience with the COVID-19 adaptations and the difficult circumstances faced by teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

Sarah Schumacher Gams, South Carolina Teacher of the Year, presented a passionate description of the struggles

as good as their bandwidth.” Ms. Gams was emphatic that more needs to be done to help students acquire equal access to virtual education in the COVID-19 environment.

Hannah Parker, LWVSC Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, reported that DEI information has been added to the website; and we have had social media outreach, book discussions, a film series,

Schumacher Gams made it clear that the lack of broadband internet access in parts of South Carolina greatly limits the ability of students to learn.

that students and teachers encounter as they adapt to virtual education. She made it clear that the lack of broadband internet access in parts of South Carolina greatly limits the ability of students to learn. She quoted Dani Stroud, 2021 District Teacher of the Year for Lexington School District One, as saying, “Students can only be

and online lectures. She recommended that LWVSC adopt a Supplier and Vendor Diversity Policy as we address DEI statewide.

— Anita T. Baker, LWVSC Administrative Assistant



Welcome Aboard, Hannah!

The LWVSC Board welcomes its newest member, Hannah E. Parker. Hannah joins the Board as the Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In that role, she will be leading the state DEI efforts and will work closely with local DEI chairs, promoting understanding of and training on diversity, equity and inclusion issues. She will coordinate with LWVUS through

the Shur Fellow assigned to South Carolina.

Hannah is a member of the Florence League where she serves as Co-VP; she first joined the Greenville League in 2008 where she was involved in voter education. She was drawn to the League by her commitment to nonpartisanship, voter registration and voter education.

With 20 years Global Human Resources experience, Hannah owns a human resources consulting company, HE Consulting, LLC. In her work, she highlights people skills, including employee relations and project management with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Her education includes a bachelor’s degree from Clemson University, a master’s from Clemson and the University of South Carolina, and additional studies at Harvard University. She and her husband, a US Navy Veteran, live in Florence and during non-pandemic times, enjoy traveling and exploring different cultures and cuisines. Look for Hannah at the state convention where she will be updating us on DEI issues.

— Janie Shipley, LWVSC National Issues and Action Director

Legislation Update

Continued from page 1

county offices. This bill would make this situation worse. Rather than pile more problems onto an already unbalanced system, there should be a study committee to thoroughly review the current status of state and county election commission responsibilities and authorities.

We hope that our members will keep up with progress on this and other important issues. For the most up-to-date information on our work at the State House, check our website under Legislative Advocacy (my.lwv.org/south-carolina/legislative-advocacy). Readers will find a list of bills that we are following, Making Democracy Work (MDW) Updates, and links to testimony given before House and Senate subcommittees.

— Lynn Teague, LWVSC Vice President for Issues and Action

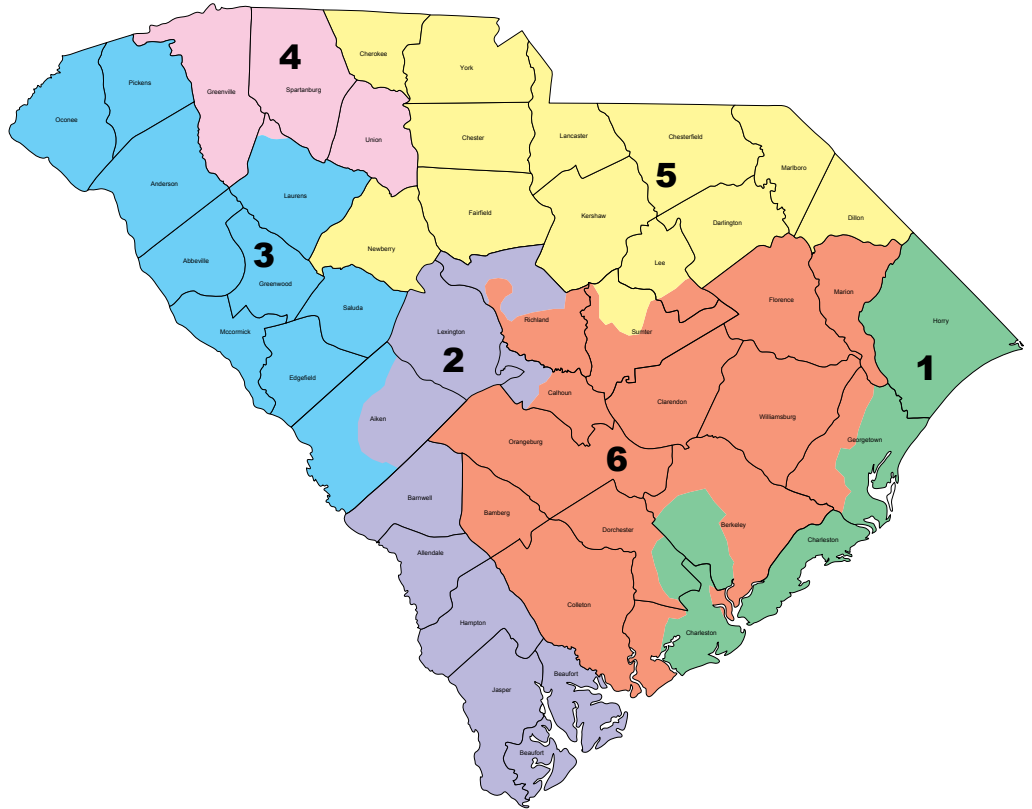
REDISTRICTING UPDATE

In 2021, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina will be drawing and submitting legislative district maps to the public and to the SC Legislature for consideration. We hope to influence thinking in the General Assembly, and to encourage the public to understand the uses and abuses of the process and become engaged in speaking up on behalf of their right to a meaningful vote.

In order to inform our process, the LWVSC is following the same advice we've given to the legislature for years and creating a Redistricting Advisory Committee (RAC) with the intention of having our process be a transparent, nonpartisan one that considers diverse perspectives. The committee will consist of between 9 and 13 members, who will collectively offer varying geographical and political viewpoints and represent a variety of communities of interest.

Although census delays mean the states will not receive the census data until the end of September, our RAC will be in place long before then in order to begin identifying communities of interest, suggesting ways to prioritize map-drawing criteria to create a series of acceptable maps, and discussing potential impacts to voting districts. There is no doubt that legislators will also unofficially begin their process long before census data is released; our hope is that their process is transparent and seeks public input from the very start.

The composition of the committee will be announced the week of the LWVSC Convention, which also coincides with the national People Powered Fair Maps (PPFM) Day of Action on April 29th. This Day of Action is an opportunity to shine a spotlight on broad support for redistricting reform around the nation. **A recent nationwide poll of likely voters showed that 74% of them support nonpartisan redistricting,**



The current South Carolina U.S Congressional Districts.

and it's easy to see why: partisan and incumbent gerrymandering drive down competition while fueling political polarization. (Poll source: *Data for Progress, February 2021*)

In South Carolina, that dynamic is particularly worrisome. In 2020, our state had the **least competitive State House races in the entire country**. Only a handful of the 124 seats in the SC House of Representatives was within a 10% margin of victory, and many didn't even have a major-party challenger!

As plans for community engagement in the 2021 redistricting process continue to develop, we have acquired Maptitude (the software that the legislature will use for drawing maps). We have also obtained the 2020 precinct shape files, another necessary component. The ability to

analyze census estimates by block group is now deepening our understanding of population changes; in general, the coast continues to experience rapid growth (Horry County has grown by over 30% in the past 10 years!) while population along the I-95 corridor has declined.

Elections should be decided in the voting booth, not the map room. Learn more about our efforts to bring People Powered Fair Maps to South Carolina at www.lwvsc.org and on our redistricting blog: votersrule2020.blog. If you'd like to nominate someone to serve on our Redistricting Advisory Committee, please submit their name and qualifications to Shayna Howell (shaynahowell@gmail.com) by March 31.

— Shayna Howell, Co-chair,
LWVSC Redistricting Workgroup



Good Governance Symposium Series

VOTING RIGHTS • REDISTRICTING • DARK MONEY



ELECTORAL COLLEGE REFORM • ELECTION SYSTEMS

MARCH - JUNE 2021

The League of Women Voters of the Charleston Area invites you to attend the second session of their **Good Governance Symposium, Redistricting Reform** on Monday, March 22, at 6 pm. The Charleston League, Leagues across the state, and other statewide and national organizations, are sponsoring this virtual symposium which focuses on five topics: **Voting Rights** (March 1), **Redistricting Reform** (Monday, March 22), **Electoral College and Institutional Reforms** (Monday, April 12 at 6 pm-tentative), **Dark Money and Campaign Finance** (Monday, May 19 at 6 pm – tentative), and **Election & Voting Systems and Approaches** (Monday, June 10 at 6 pm – tentative). To register and learn more about the events, visit www.lwvcharleston.org. League members, friends and colleagues are all welcome!

As the US struggles with political polarization, attacks on our voting processes, and high levels of election disinformation, the LWV's commitment to education, advocacy and non-partisan policies that allow

for meaningful civic engagement and voter participation is the perfect counterbalance.

Each session features accompanying pre-reads to supplement the information in the event. Each event also features a "Call to Action" that directs people to advocate for corresponding state and federal legislation to help address each critical issue.

The first event, **Voting Rights**, held on March 1, featured Leah Aden from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund as the keynote speaker, and a panel discussion with Susan Dunn of the ACLU of SC and the LWVSC's own Lynn Teague.

Session II: **Redistricting Reform** (Monday, March 22 at 6pm) acknowledges that fair maps are critical to our democracy. This session will offer a redistricting "101" by Ruth Greenwood of the Campaign Legal Center to introduce attendees to the importance of this topic. Redistricting experts in South Carolina will explore implications of redistricting in our state. Registration for this event is now open at www.lwvcharleston.org.

Session III: **Electoral College and Institutional Reforms** (Monday, April 12 at 6pm, tentative) will explore institutional options to reform the Electoral College and U.S. Senate, including the "Popular Vote Pact" and filibuster reform. We'll discuss the League's position on a Constitutional Convention and share ideas for future reforms.

Session IV: **Dark Money and Campaign Finance** (Monday, May 10 at 6pm, tentative) will discuss the history of money in politics and solutions to prioritize transparency in our elections.

Session V: **Election & Voting Systems and Approaches** (Monday, June 7 at 6pm, tentative). This final session will explore "out-of-the-box" approaches to increase representation in our elections. We'll look at changes to how we vote including: Rank Choice Voting, Top-Two Primaries, Straight-ticket Voting, Single Member vs. At-Large Districts and Citizen-led Ballot Initiatives in South Carolina.

— *Leslie Skardon, Director of Good Government and Ethics*

OUR VIRTUAL CONVENTION 2021: MAY 1 AND MAY 2

The theme for the LWVSC 2021 Convention, “Defending Democracy,” is a direct one, encapsulating our central and unswerving mission. At our biennial convention we will replenish our energy for this mission and the hard work that it entails.

The convention will be all-virtual, but will provide opportunities for interaction and participation. The plenary sessions, on Saturday morning, May 1, and Sunday morning, May 2, will feature two presentations as well as time to conduct our essential business: electing board members, approving our budget, making revisions to our bylaws, and endorsing our proposed Program for 2021-23.

On Saturday, May 1, renowned historian and LWVSC member Marjorie Spruill will speak on her new book, *One Woman, One Vote: The South and the Nineteenth Amendment*, which is about the history of the woman suffrage movement in the US generally, with special attention to the role of the South. It includes South Carolinians who played prominent roles, such as the Grimké sisters, born in

Charleston; the Rollin sisters, who started a woman suffrage organization in SC during Reconstruction; and the Pollitzer sisters, including Anita Pollitzer, who was important at the national level. Marjorie’s talk promises to be fascinating!

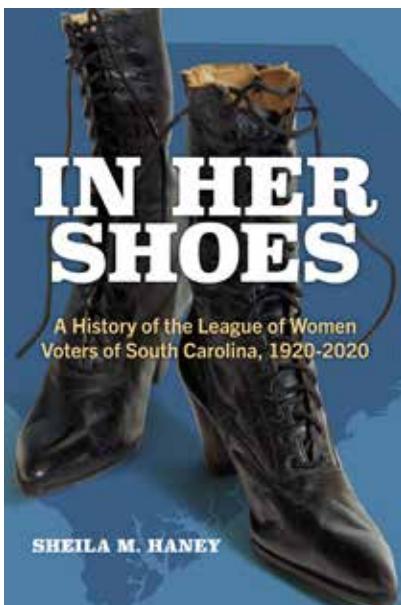
On Sunday, May 2, we will hear from Susan Dunn, who is retiring this year as Legal Director for the ACLU of South Carolina, a position she has held since 2009. Prior to that, Susan practiced law in both family court and the court of common pleas. In 2001, she litigated *Ferguson v. City of Charleston*, a groundbreaking Fourth Amendment case that was argued successfully before the U.S. Supreme Court and the Fourth Circuit. The decision found that the Medical University of South Carolina’s policy regarding involuntary drug testing of pregnant women was unreasonable, violating the Fourth Amendment. We have worked closely with Susan over the years, recently as part of the team in our effort to block both the witness signature requirement for absentee mail-in voters and the use of “uncured” signature mismatches to

disqualify mailed-in absentee ballots. We are delighted that she will address us at convention.

Prior to convention, on Monday, April 26, JoAnne Day will conduct an online session on “The Role of the Delegate at Convention,” especially intended for first-time attendees. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, there will be Zoom workshops on nonpartisanship; diversity, equity and inclusion; civics education; ranked choice voting; redistricting; and proposed state program changes. On Thursday evening, Janelle Rivers and the Budget Committee will present a Q&A session to answer questions about the proposed budget for 2021-23.

It will be an exciting and informative week for LWVSC and, as one of the benefits of online meetings, many members will be able to participate this year. Registration information and links will be communicated by email and on our website. See you at convention!

— *Christe McCoy-Lawrence,*
LWVSC Co-president



Show Off League Pride!

[my.lwv.org/
south-carolina/
league-resources](http://my.lwv.org/south-carolina/league-resources)

You’ll find League grilling aprons, coffee mugs, ink pens, T-Shirts sizes Med, Large, X-large, and 2X, notecards, and reversible business cards. Support LWVSC!

THANK YOU DR. BUELL

Dr. Duncan Buell who has been a critical voice of authority in the battle over voting technology announced his resignation from the Richland County Board of Voter Registration and Elections and LWVSC recently. He will be leaving South Carolina. Lynn Teague, LWVSC lobbyist, says, “For a decade, Dr. Buell has put his nationally respected knowledge of computer technology and voting systems to work for the people of South Carolina. He audited our general elections, identified significant problems in need of correction and worked with the League to advocate for a better voting system. His work for the Richland County Board of Voter Registration and Elections has been instrumental in correcting the problems of a troubled elections office. It is an understatement to say that Duncan will be missed personally and professionally. We are grateful that he will still be available to answer our questions!”



Find Us Online

Emails from: LWV of South Carolina

If you do not receive these, please let us know by emailing lwvsc.cml@gmail.com.

Facebook: League of Women Voters of South Carolina

Website: lwvsc.org

EDUCATION ASSESSMENT UPDATE

The 124th General Assembly is hard at work on education assessment. The House Education and Public Works Committee is reviewing a joint resolution that revises the administration of particular core subject-area state assessments and proposes to continue the publication of school and district report cards but without performance ratings for the 2020-2021 School Year (H3618). A Senate Joint Resolution seeks to ensure that academic standards, cut scores, and ratings are not altered from July 2021 to June 2026 (SB320). The legislature is weighing proposals that attempt an interdisciplinary approach to the assessment of core subject areas currently proposed to be eliminated (HB3592) and to establish an Academic Standards and Assessment Committee (HB3250). One of the broader propositions is the Standardized Testing Overburdens Pupils (STOP) Act, referred to the Committee on Education (SB315). This bill seeks to address the frequency of assessments and how the data is used. The policy would eliminate state funding for certain assessments, including kindergarten readiness, accountability testing for Grades K-2, and civics/social studies assessments, while pushing a reduction in the assessment of science. Formative assessments for English Language Arts and Mathematics, previously determined by the Education Oversight Committee and the State Board of Education, are also proposed to be eliminated (see Section 59-18-310). In contrast, a summative assessment, administered at least once in 9th-12th grade, is proposed to be added to the previously adopted 3rd-8th grade annual assessment to meet federal requirements. Although the STOP Act proposes to move the state's average teacher salary to the national average by 2029, it also seeks to eliminate the use of assessments for determining teacher salary increases. The policy would also permit parents to opt students out of the college entrance assessment or the career readiness assessment (other attempts to prepare students for college and career readiness are proposed in HB3080).

— *Dr. Sharda Jackson Smith,*
LWVSC Education Working Group

Spreading our League throughout South Carolina

Did you know that membership in all thirteen of our local Leagues represents considerably fewer than half of the forty-six counties in South Carolina? Our potential impact is greatly reduced by this fact, and LWVSC has launched a project to address the situation.

The Geographical Diversity Project aims to expand our representation throughout the state in both traditional and innovative ways. One initiative will involve locating “clusters” of interested citizens in different underserved areas encouraging the formation of seed groups, taking programs to those groups to build interest, and nurturing the birth of Member-at-Large Units (MALs) that can grow into Local Leagues. Currently the bulk of our membership is concentrated in cities; spreading into less populated areas will increase the rural-urban diversity of our membership as well as provide opportunities for advocacy, voter services, and, eventually, VOTE411 to more S.C. citizens. Increasing the number of local Leagues will enable more League work on local issues and will encourage the education and interest of citizens in their local elections. Having more local Leagues will increase LWV leadership opportunities and the number of members available for state working groups and state board positions.

A second thrust of the project will focus on finding individuals who support our mission and can be part of our work even in areas where there is no “cluster.” We have always had “members-at-large”; this project envisions seeking more members-at-large and forming relationships with individuals who may not be members but who will be responsive to calls for action. With many counties not included in our current membership, there are many legislators who never receive a call on issues that LWVSC is working on at the Statehouse.

We realize that this project will be a difficult and long-term one. Many ideas are being considered, such as occasional Zoom meetings of supporters from all over the state and communicating other opportunities for them to interact with LWV. We welcome your help! Please tell us your ideas. If you know relatives or acquaintances or friends-of-friends who live in unserved areas but might be interested in a supportive relationship with the League, please let us know by calling the LWVSC at (803) 636-0431.

— *Christe McCoy-Lawrence, LWVSC Co-president*

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SC VOTER

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Established in 1920, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina is a nonpartisan, political organization that encourages people to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. League membership is open to men and women who are at least 16 years old. All members receive the *SC Voter*, email communications and news from their local League.

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Amount Enclosed \$ _____ Donors will be listed in the SC Voter. If you wish to remain anonymous, please check here.

Your annual or recurring gift empowers voters and defends democracy. You can donate with a one time or recurring gift. Help empower voters and defend democracy. Donate today!

Donations to the League of Women Voters of South Carolina, a 501(c)3 organization, are now tax deductible.

We have added suggested levels of donations that you may choose:

\$1000 or more	<i>Sarah E. Leverette Circle</i>
\$500 to \$999	<i>Defender of Democracy</i>
\$300 to \$499	<i>Suffragist</i>
\$200 to \$299	<i>Advocate</i>
\$100 to \$199	<i>Supporter</i>
\$99 or less	<i>Friend</i>

Any amount is appreciated! You may contribute on the LWVSC website or mail a check to LWVSC, P.O. Box 8453, Columbia, SC 29202. Checks should be made payable to LWVSC.

Every little bit helps empower voters and defend democracy! Thank you for your support!