

# The Voter

SPRING 2024

newsletter from the  
League of Women Voters  
of Bucks County



members engaged in the discussion on democracy

## message from the president

We are moving into the 2024 Election season full steam ahead. This past quarter we have had several very informative Advocacy programs which were presented on Zoom and are now available on our [YouTube Channel](#).

- Ending Closed Primaries
- Improved Voter Access and Security
- Eliminating the Electoral College

Our Speakers Bureau presented two programs (on the Electoral College and the ABC's of Civics). We held four tabling events around the county, and registered voters at 6 high schools.

We also held a very well attended, in-person event entitled: Democracy: A Discussion. This program attracted fifty-two members and their guests to consider the current threats and dangers facing American Democracy and what we can do to ensure its future strength. Prior to the meeting, we invited attendees to peruse a list of books, articles and podcasts all relating to the issue of Democracy ([available HERE](#)).

The session began with Tam St. Claire presenting a very thoughtful overview of the importance of History for context and perspective ([available HERE](#))

In the discussion that followed, participants identified a wide range of threats to our Democracy including:

- Dark money in politics
- Growing economic imbalance and inequality in our population and blaming "the other" for our unhappiness
- Spread of conspiracy theories and mis- and dis-information
- Lack of comprehensive voter education and understanding of civics
- Attempts to break down governmental guardrails and separation of powers
- The rise of authoritarianism and Christian Nationalism
- Efforts to manipulate fair elections through voter suppression and gerrymandering.

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Jean Weston  
President

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## Upcoming Events

Apr 16th - [Electing the President](#)

Apr 23rd - PA Primary Election

May 8th - [Harrisburg Lobby Day](#)

June 1st - Annual Meeting

# LWVBC - empowering voters.

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER, CONT.

These threats lead directly to:

- A loss of trust in our elections
- The election of more extreme and less qualified legislators
- Power in the hands of the wealthy and the abuse of power in government
- Political disengagement among moderates and young people
- Erosion of voting rights and women's rights
- Fewer well-qualified candidates seeking office

The meeting concluded with a discussion of some of the things the League of Women Voters and we, as individuals, can do to address these threats:

**You** can help the LWV of Pennsylvania to counter the effects of mis- and disinformation in social media. ([Read more here](#))

**You** can endeavor to engage the young people you know and help them understand how to find trustworthy information and the importance of voting

**You** can write Letters to the Editor supporting issues you care about.

(<https://www.palwv.org/letters-to-the-editor> )

**You** can contact your legislator about issues of concern (note: a personal letter or email will be more effective than your name on a petition or a mass mailing)

Go to <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/findyourlegislator/> to find your legislator's contact information

The League of Women Voters urges everyone to take a personal interest in the upcoming election.

Learn about the candidates at [www.Vote411.org](http://www.Vote411.org) .

Encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to vote.

**Our democracy cannot protect itself.**

**It is up to all of us!**



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# LWVBC - defending democracy.

## RULES AND REDISTRICTING REFORM PROGRAM

By Sharon Forte

On January 9, our League hosted the program "Make Your Vote Count-End Gerrymandering" presented by FairdistrictsPA guest speaker, Rich Rafferty. His presentation outlined the basics of rules and redistricting reforms needed to enable fairly drawn Congressional and Legislative maps.

The presentation explained that for over three decades the League of Women Voters of US has advocated for an end to Gerrymandering by creating an Independent Redistricting Commission to draw the Congressional and Legislative maps. In Pennsylvania, bills to create the commission gained solid bipartisan support from legislators. In fact, sixty percent of representatives in the House and Senate co-sponsored the legislation. However, a few party leaders blocked the bill and they were able to do so due to procedural rules in the House and Senate. These few party leaders represent a mere 1% of PA citizens and yet they wield this tremendous power. Therefore, the rules reform campaign, know as Fix Harrisburg, commenced. It became apparent that without better rules, chances of ending Gerrymandering are near impossible.

There are three basic reforms to the procedural rules that are being proposed:

- Guarantee a vote in committee if a bill has strong bipartisan support
- Guarantee a vote on the Chamber floor if the bill has passed favorably out of committee with bipartisan support
- Guarantee that a bill passed favorably in one chamber get an automatic vote in the other chamber.



To address Gerrymandering, Rich went on to explain that PA needs to change its "Players and the Process," which will end the inherent conflict of interest of Legislators drawing their own districts and enable an Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) to draw the maps. This will help to ensure that citizen's interests are represented, not just those of party leaders.

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# LWVBC - engaging members.

## RULES AND REDISTRICTING REFORM PROGRAM, CONT.

The IRC will:

- Have Process Transparency (open meetings, public input, public access to tools and data)
- Be truly Independent (made up of: 4 voters registered with party with largest political party, 4 voters registered with the second largest political party and 3 voters not registered with either party)
- Abide by Prioritized Map Criteria (found in US Constitution, Federal Laws, Voting Rights Act and will not purposely favor/disfavor any incumbent or candidate nor provide a disproportionate advantage to any political party)

The road to these reforms will not be easy. It will take amending our state constitution by passing the bill in two consecutive legislative sessions. The current goal is to get the bill (unchanged) passed in the 2025-26 session and again (unchanged) in the 2027-28 session. Passage will enable a referendum posed to the voters in the general election of November of 2028.

I'll be reaching out, suggesting ways to get involved, to all who have expressed an interest in making our votes count, ending Gerrymandering and eliminating dysfunction in Harrisburg.

JOIN THE LEAGUE

**Voters overwhelmingly support redistricting reform because the current system puts party interests ahead of voter interests, creates gridlock and polarization, and ultimately allows officials to choose their own voters instead of voters choosing their elected officials.**

## PA VOTERS WANT FAIR DISTRICTS

The current system of drawing legislative districts in PA ...

Allows party leaders to put party interests ahead of voters' interests → **72%**

Creates polarizations and gridlock → **70%**

Allows elected officials to choose their own voters instead of voters choosing their elected officials → **65%**



Gives voters less choice on Election Day → **62%**

Prevents voters from holding their representatives accountable → **61%**

Works because legislators know their districts → **38%**

Works fine as is and should be left alone → **18%**

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# LWVBC - empowering voters.

## RECAP OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

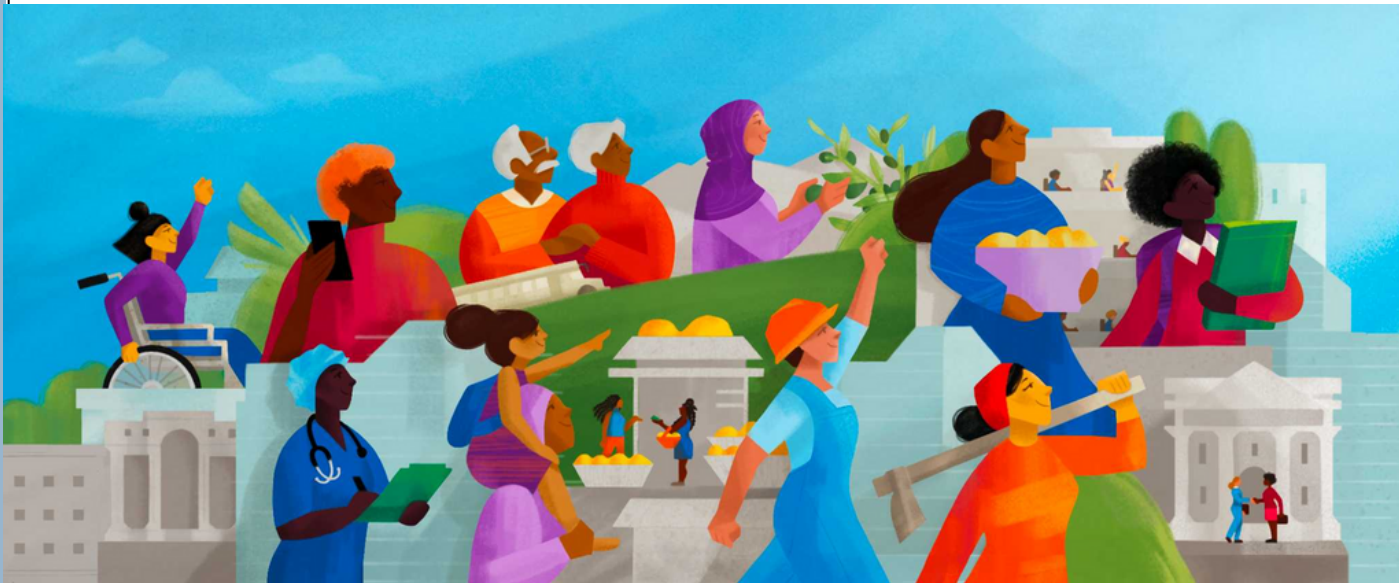
by Jillian Giaccio

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1946 and remains the major international institution focused on increasing gender equity and empowering women. CSW's annual two-week meeting brings together representatives from UN member states and civil society organizations. As a longstanding supporter of the UN (since 1944, before it was officially established), the League is one of these organizations.

This year's priority theme was addressing poverty and strengthening financial institutions while using them to empower women. In addition to the formal negotiations, CSW68 included more than 250 side events, which took place on the UN grounds, as well as a parallel NGO Forum, which offered even more events offsite.

These events included lots of information about both specific problems women are facing in different regions and contexts and the interesting things governments and NGOs are doing to address these problems. It was also incredibly cool to be surrounded by thousands of people from all over the world with a common dedication to women's empowerment. With the diversity of outfits ranging from saris to dresses featuring traditional Mexican embroidery to pantsuits, conversations in multiple languages and the opportunity to attend panels in other languages thanks to simultaneous interpretation, it truly felt like a global gathering. It was also a friendly one - it was easy to fall into conversations with other delegates about where we were from and what our organizations did.

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# LWVBC – empowering members.

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## UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, CONT.

While it's impossible to cover everything that was discussed- I attended a total of 19 events, and there were usually ten or more to choose from at any given time - these are some common threads and recurring ideas I noticed. First, and most centrally, poverty disproportionately affects women. When economies are slow, social safety net programs tend to be the first thing cut, leaving women to pick up the slack. Even in the best economic conditions, women are more likely to perform unpaid care work for children, seniors and people with disabilities, which limits their economic opportunities.

Technology trends can also be doing more harm than good. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT are trained on historical and current content, which means they're picking up historical and current biases and stereotypes. An AI tool that associates women with the home and men with leadership can cause concrete damage if it's used to screen resumes. Big data on the other hand has the potential to be helpful. Collecting gender-specific data about workforces, refugees, crime victims and just about any population helps decision-makers understand the scope of the gender inequality problem and measure progress.

Finally, existing biases usually prevent gender parity from happening organically, so we should consider adopting tools like quotas and leadership rotation systems. At several different events, I heard María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, the fourth female president of the UN General Assembly, advocate for a gender rotation system for the General Assembly presidency similar to the existing region-based rotation. Hearing from so many accomplished and passionate speakers meant that while learning about the pervasiveness of gender inequality could be discouraging, I ultimately left CSW feeling inspired and hopeful about the future.

## IMPORTANT ELECTION DATES

Last Day to Request a mail-in or Absentee Ballot: April 16th, 2024

Primary Election: April 23, 2024 Polls Open from 7am to 8PM

For Drop Box Locations, [Click Here](#)