



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF VIRGINIA

# **Working the General Assembly - The League in Action -**

**(Based solely on reports submitted to the State Office)**

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# Contents

## Recheck items and page Numbers

Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
I. League Advocacy for AVR/Election Modernization Only	
A. The Problem	4
B. The Solution	4
C. How We Get There	4
D. What is Automatic Voter Registration?	4
E. Meetings Held with Registrars	5
F. League AVR Advocacy Efforts	5
II Additional Advocacy/Lobbying Efforts	
A. Preparation for Visits	6
B. WLRT Strategy Sessions	6
C. Benefits of Both Strategy Sessions and WLRTs	6
D. Minuses and Improvement Needed	7
E. Miscellaneous Comments	7
F. Facebook Activities	7
III Events Attended	8
IV. Visits with Legislators	
A. Locations of Visits	8
B. Appointments	9
C. Follow up	9
D. General Assembly Members Visited	9
E. Discussions with Legislators	9
F. Handouts	10
G. Other Comments	10
H. Group Visits	10
V. Other Thoughts Offered	
A. More Diverse Presenters	11
B. Walk in Presenters	11
VI. LWV-VA and Next Year at the Virginia Legislature	11

# Executive Summary

Representatives from each League, 112 in all, responded to the request for input on their activities in support of the Election Modernization grant.

Strategy sessions were held the night before each Women's Legislative Round Table (WLRT) to prepare and update participants on what to expect the following day. The 38 attendees over the five evenings were provided talking points for use with Legislators. These sessions were well received and people felt they were helpful in understanding the scope of League efforts. Suggestions included making more use of coalition advocates, especially on key issues, and inviting presenters with knowledge of specific bills.

As for the WLRTs themselves, some felt a need to encourage more diverse GA participation by legislators, but overall felt good about the WLRTs. Some very much appreciated the use of the projector to put up the name of the legislators and districts as they spoke. A rough estimate of the attendees over the five days was 350. At least six legislators spoke at each WLRT. Next year's planners are urged to do a more careful job of signing in attendees, including board members.

"Boosted" Facebook ads were used to make people aware of the WLRT dates and this bought a lot of awareness, but some felt paid ads are much less effective than sharing from a friend to get people to take a step to learn more about the events. However, paid ads seem to encourage such sharing. Several non-League people said they came because of the ads.

Registrars were contacted in their home communities by 25 members to check on election problems and modernization efforts. Forty-two legislators in Richmond were contacted about Election Modernization in the early days of the GA, but it soon became apparent that existing DMV regulations already permitted a form of automatic voter registration. The bills regarding AVR were then pulled and Leaguers began to concentrate on other priorities such as redistricting and no-excuse absentee voting.

Seventy-two Leaguers reported on their visits to their Legislators after the WLRTs and 32 attended committee meetings the day before or later on Wednesdays. Around one-third of the state's Legislators were visited. Redistricting discussions were the number one topic (discussed 35 times), school discipline was second and voter suppression was third. Most visits were made by a single individual, but in other cases groups of two or more went together on visits.

# **Working the General Assembly - The League in Action – (Based solely on reports sent to the State League)**

## **Introduction**

In November, 2016, LWV-VA received a grant to advocate for Election Modernization, with emphasis on Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). The Board was excited about this grant and how Local Leagues (LLs) can benefit by advocating for AVR, with promotion of redistricting reform and No-Excuse-Needed Absentee Voting (NEAV) as an added advocacy focus. Other League priorities were involved later in the session.

## **I. League Advocacy for AVR/Election Modernization Only**

### **A. What is Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)?**

According to the Brennan Center, "Automatic voter registration makes two transformative changes to voter registration. Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote unless they decline, and agencies transfer voter-registration information electronically to election officials. These two changes would create a seamless process that will be more convenient and less error-prone for voters, agency staff, and election officials. This reform has the potential to boost registration rates, clean up the rolls, save money, make voting more convenient, and reduce the potential for voter fraud.

### **B. The Problem:**

Our outdated paper-based voter registration system diminishes full participation of eligible Virginians in our elections. Our online voter registration system is cumbersome and not always available in a timely way. Resources for modernization are limited. Virginians also do not have full confidence in the election process.

### **C. The Solution:**

We need to make common sense reforms to modernize Virginia's voter registration system to be smart, secure, and efficient, so every eligible Virginian can make their voice heard without barriers and obstacles. Modernization is needed in order to serve Virginians properly and fairly, to promote confidence, and to ensure integrity in our election administration. AVR, if adopted in several states, would help modernize our election system.

### **D. How We Get There:**

It will take all of us lifting up our voices to ask our elected officials to support modernization of our voter registration system. Our influence is needed to decrease the barriers to participation in voting and to promote the integrity of our elections.

According to the Pew Center's 2012 report, one in every four Americans who are eligible to register to vote are not registered. More have flaws in their

registration. [Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient: Evidence That America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade.](#)

Virginia League members and friends were invited to gather at the General Assembly Building in Richmond for the WLRTs on five consecutive Wednesdays Jan. 18 and 25 and February 1, 8 and 15. Members met with some of our leading legislators and heard about their hopes and plans for this session.

After meetings with registrars and legislators, the coalition of the League, New Virginia Majority, Virginia Civic Engagement Tables and others, reached a consensus that progress on AVR could be achieved with tweaking the language of the DMV. This was suggested to Delegate Sickles and Senator Ebbin and, as it turned out, they did.

### E. Meetings Held with Registrars

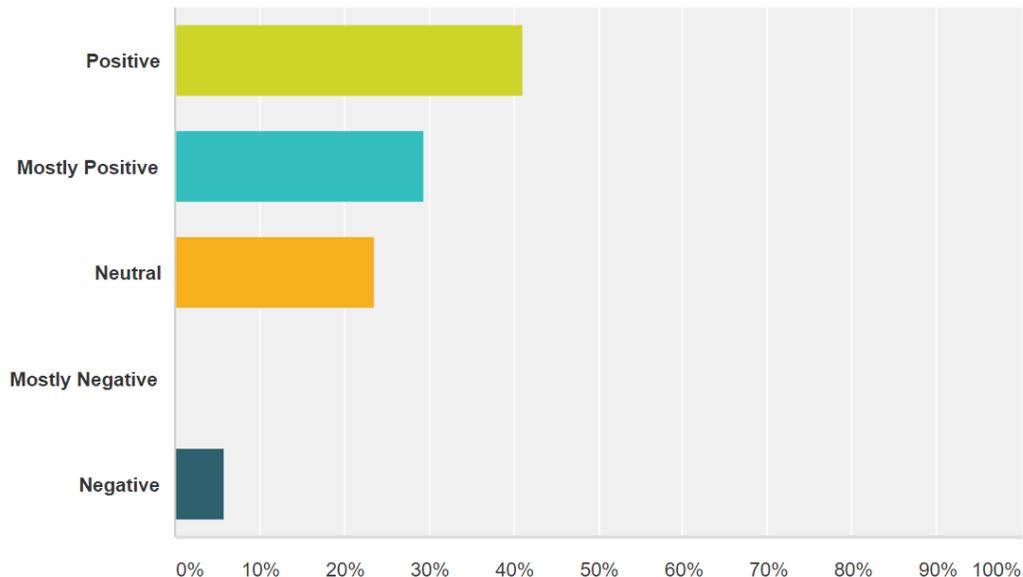
<u>Options</u>	<u># Responding</u>
Registrar (Home County)	25

### F. League AVR Advocacy Efforts

Even though AVR became a moot point part way through the legislative session, 42 responded and 70 did not. Twenty-four Leaguers specifically felt they were well prepared on this topic for their visit. However, several felt they were unprepared for the meetings. A few reported they didn't talk about AVR (more than likely those who attended the later sessions). Reception on the part of legislators is summarized below.

### How was the reception to Automatic Voter Registration?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0



## II. Additional Advocacy/Lobbying Efforts

### A. Preparation for Visits (based on reports submitted)

#### Participation by League

<u>League</u>	<u># Leaguers</u>
Arlington	3
Charlottesville/Albemarle	7
Fairfax Area	18
Falls Church City	5
Fredericksburg Area	0
Loudoun County	3
Lynchburg	6
Montgomery County	8
Prince William Area	6
Richmond Metropolitan Area	17
South Hampton Roads	13
Washington County	2
Williamsburg	<u>24</u>
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>112</b>

### B. Women's Legislative Round Table (WLRT) Strategy Sessions

In order to ensure effective advocacy, Co-President Lois Page created strategy sessions for the evening before each WLRT. She convened a group to prepare and update them on what to expect the following day. Talking points were distributed and some "leave behind" material also was available. Key bills of interest to the League were discussed and questions answered. Carol Noggle, LWV-VA Legislative Director, showed the group how to use the Legislative Index System (LIS). This was followed by a question and answer session.

### C. Benefits of Both Strategy Sessions and WLRTs

- Over all attendees were very pleased with the sessions and appreciated the work that went into carrying them out.
- Found the sessions to be outstanding and helpful in gaining an understanding of the scope of the issues.
- The WLRT is an excellent format and should be left alone.
- Food and drink mentioned by several participants as a plus.
- Use of projector helped immensely especially showing the speaker's names.
- Handouts (Fact Sheets) that could be left with Legislators are great and appreciated; everybody needs to be on the same page.
- LIS presentation was extremely informative.
- Helpful to gain the scope of our efforts.
- AVR discussion helped understand our responsibilities for the grant.

- Session at hotel seemed to garner the most praise because of space, networking time, etc.

#### **D. Minuses/Improvements Needed**

- Need to encourage more diverse GA participation by legislators (Republicans as well).
- Make more use of non-profit presenters, especially on key issues (i.e. Cannon, Tran, etc.) and invite presenters on specific bills.
- Too many bills were discussed. Suggested limiting the number of bills discussed and focus only on those top priority League issues.
- The 7 p.m. start of the strategic session puts too much pressure on those who desire to attend P&E Committee meeting so late in the afternoon.
- Many people felt the WLRT session should last longer
- It would be helpful if you could pass out list of committee meetings with their times and locations.
- Team up Leaguers with progressive representatives with Leaguers whose representatives are not sympathetic to League priorities.
- Fact sheets should be more professional in appearance and contain the League's logo
- One person felt that the purpose of the strategy session was unclear to her, another wanted more time to network.

#### **E. Miscellaneous Comments**

- Eye opening experience to many attendees, especially the power of the committee chairs.
- More social media and email information to share with the public needs to be available to Leaguers.
- As we actually have automatic voter registration, we need to update our handout/fact sheet and update what we've doing. We need a basic fact sheet covering what we want in terms of "voter modernization."
- LWV-VA needs to work with its partners to speak out on issues which directly affect women - health care, voting access, domestic violence, economic parity, and transparency.
- Ask attendees to introduce themselves and their League.
- One person suggested holding this training as part of the Pre-Session, to reach more people and allow more time for digesting the material. Another wondered if these meeting would be more helpful sometime before the GA meets.

#### **F. Facebook Activities**

##### **1. Introduction**

As part of the effort to publicize the Electronic Modernization effort, the League used its Facebook page to get the word out. They spent \$185 in total across the five WLRT events. The experiment in spending different amounts on different weeks was unintentional, but revealing. A total of 19,536 people were reached, that is, the event appeared on their screen in truncated form. That's about a penny each, but may include many duplicates across different weeks. Only 702 responded to seeing the event image. That works out to \$.26 per response.

## Dollars Spent by Week vs Results

<u>Date</u>	<u>\$ Spent</u>	<u># Reached</u>	<u># Viewed</u>	<u># Responded</u>
18-Jan	50	7,900	275	127
25-Jan	25	5,900	321	104
01-Feb	10	2,300	151	60
08-Feb	50	6,600	497	163
15-Feb	50	<u>3,500</u>	<u>219</u>	<u>71</u>
		26,220	1463	525

### 2. Results

The ad money bought a lot of awareness. People who liked the LWV VA page climbed steadily and much faster than in the past, though some of this may be due to nationwide energy around women's issues. We now have over twelve hundred people following the LWV VA on Facebook, an increase of 50 percent over the beginning of the GA session (from 764 to 1237). Paid ads are much less effective than sharing by a friend to get people to take a step to learn more about the event. But paid ads seem to encourage such sharing.

### 3. Recommendations

Looking towards 2018, it appears the largest effort should be concentrating onboosting the first WLRT, and also the December Pre-Session WLRT. Hopefully momentum will take over after that. There is probably little benefit in boosting the WLRT League of Women Voters Day since it is the one that more members will choose. Boosting after crossover appears to be less productive. However, a separate event page is recommended for each WLRT.

## III. Events Attended

The study looked at Leaguer's attendance at four main events, critical to the Leagues efforts. Eighty-five of those participating responded. It was no surprise that those members who attended the WLRT session followed up with visits to their legislator. Comments indicate a few visited other legislators as well. Leaguers were encouraged to attend committee meetings to help them gain a better understanding of how the legislative process works. Approximately one third of the members took advantage of this opportunity.

<u>Event</u>	<u># Attendees</u>
Strategy Session	38
Women's Legislative Roundtable	72
GA Committee Meeting	32
Met with Legislator	72

## IV. Visits With Legislators

### A. Location of Visits

As to who was visited and where, all but one person responded to this question. The numbers indicate Richmond was preferred as a meeting place for General Assembly

members. Apparently the WLRT session attendance played a major role in this decision. Only four Leagues reported making contacts in their home districts.

<u>Options</u>	<u># Responding</u>
Legislator in Home District	4
Richmond (Capitol/GAB)	90

**B. Appointments**

Thirty nine percent of those visiting legislators arranged their appointment in advance. Of the remaining 61percent, many found they had to wait and often met with the legislative assistant. This question was only answered by 61 of the 112 respondents

**C. Follow up**

Eighty six percent of the respondents indicated they followed up their appointments with a visit to one or more legislators. Fourteen percent did not reply to the question. Seventy percent met with their own delegate, senator or LA. About one-third of the Virginia legislators were visited by League members.

**D. Total General Assembly Members Visited**

	<u>Members Visited</u>	<u>Total Visits</u>
Senators	17	40
Delegates	25	47
Total Visits	42	87

**E. Discussions with Legislators**

With the elimination of the need for Automatic Voter Registration as noted earlier, the focus of the lobbying efforts switched to voter suppression issues and redistricting. Leagues around the state have become very involved in redistricting, working with Brian Cannon and OneVirginia2021 as shown in the table below. Four of the top five items discussed were on the League’s top priority list.

School discipline ranked number two probably because it was not eliminated by the legislators until near the end of the session. It also came up for discussion at several of the training sessions.

<u>Topic</u>	<u># Times Discussed</u>
Redistricting	35
School Discipline	14
Voter Suppression	10
Absentee Voting	6
Voter Registration	5
Felon Rights	3
Planned Parenthood	3
Gun Safety	2
Political Procedures	2
Environment	2
Constitutional Amendments	2

Cyber Security	1
Housing & Redevelopment	1
Term Limits	1
Money in Politics	1
Immigration	1

**Notes:**

- 62 Leaguers reported making visits with Legislators
- Numerous comments on respect for the job being carried out by the League were received from legislators
- Several legislators asked Leaguers to give their “elevator” speech
- Three Leaguers invited their legislator to come to a WLRT

**G. Handouts**

This effort is not considered one of the more successful parts of the study. Apparently not enough emphasis was placed on this part of the effort during the training session. Only 39 percent of the Leaguers left materials.

<u>Handout</u>	<u># Left Behind</u>
Talking Points	7
Fairfax “Facts for Voters”	5
Redistricting Information	4
Automatic Voter Registration	4
Did Not Have Anything	4
Business Card	3
Positions in Brief	3
Legislative Directory	2
Membership Information	2

This topic seemed to come up often in the comments. They should summarize each issue (including bill numbers), present three to five talking points, and look professional, including the League Logo. Everyone needs to be clear on the bills we are focusing on. Plenty of copies must be provided to ensure all Leaguers will have enough to leave behind. A suggested format is attached to this report.

**H. Other Comments**

- Learned a lot; good positive experience; more prepared.
- Patience is required due to busy schedules.
- Appointments made well ahead gave high priority in office.
- Some legislators and aids know nothing about individual bills.

**I. Group Visits**

In situations such as visiting legislators, many people often prefer to visit as a group. Two thirds of the 36 people who responded to the question made their visits alone, which is an indicator of the independence of many Leaguers. When there were three or more in a group, one person acted as the spokesperson for the group. The “Other”

category had several people reporting the same number and it is difficult to say there was more than one of each group.

<u>Options</u>	<u>Count</u>
One Person	25
Two People	3
Three People	8
Four	1
Five	1
Six	1
Seven	6
Eight	5
Ten	1

While the large groups did reduce the demand on a legislator's time, one spokesperson limited the exposure of the group. Allowing others in the group to speak on different topics makes a better impression on the legislator. The difference is akin to receiving many form letters on a subject vs. three or more personal communications. Thirty-three people commented on the dynamics and makeup of the group.

## V. Other Thoughts Offered

### A. More Diverse Presenters

Thought should be given to getting different points of view at the WLRT. It has been suggested that a different League be given the responsibility of lining up their Senator or Delegate to kick off the session each week. This would give more diversity allowing points of view from around the state being aired. Allow 20 minutes for this. The remainder of the time would be allocated to walk-ins.

### B. Walk-in Presenters

With the closing of the GA building next year, it will be difficult to get walk-ins to come to a different building. Legislators will not leave their building without a guarantee of being heard. Consideration should be given to scheduling all speakers ahead of time.

## VI. LWV-VA and Next Year at the Virginia Legislature

What we might carry over from this year's stepped up advocacy:

1. Ensure early and consistent publicity for all WLRTs, not just League Day
2. Put together talking points and leave behind materials for our members
3. Continue the strategy sessions the night before and include invitations to coalition people who have insight and updated info on our issues
4. Continue to provide coffee and pastries at WLRTs (though, it is recognized, things will be different for the next 4 years due to remodeling of GAB). I think this helped to attract some legislators.

5. Continue to provide something along the lines of what Carol Noggle did, the Yes/No charts
6. Continue to use the Survey Monkey report forms so that we have metrics we can use for fund raising and motivational purposes. This supposes we continue to overcome our members' uneasiness over its use through additional training and cheerleading. Maybe we could set up a reward of some sort for the League with the highest percentage (based on membership) of advocacy "points."
7. Continue to try to get people to sign up for WLRTs with Sign Up Genius as it helped us to see how many to prepare for and maybe set up carpools and hotel sharing. (See 6 above regarding uneasiness.)

Would be great if we can use this amazing windfall to maintain our truly significant impact on legislation this year. Next session is the crucial redistricting one.