



League of Women Voters® of Virginia



Voter Express

April, 2018

Making Democracy Work

Volume 64, No. 8

From LWV-VA President Sue Lewis

April – April is filled with special days - April Fool’s Day, Easter, Earth Day, Arbor Day, and Tax Day, among others. For Leaguers, there is also the Special Session of the General Assembly (11th), Veto Override Session (18th), and the first of Virginia LWV Annual Meetings. Also, the month when spring might finally make it to Virginia!

Since most of this Voter Express will be about what happened in the GA this session, I’m going to add some data points about the WLRTs that happened during January and February. I took a short course in statistics, and love throwing out numbers!

Seven weeks of the WLRT had 182 attendees, which came from 10 Local Leagues, and included 8 State Board Members and 9 AAUW friends. We also had 8 members of the GA, 4 members of the Administration, and 8 coalition partners who spoke to us. The LWV of the Williamsburg Area wins the “prize” for the most faithful attendance with 14 members showing up during the session, two of them for all 7 weeks! Followed closely by the LWV of the Richmond Metropolitan Area with 12. We were very pleased to have a member of our new Roanoke Valley MAL unit attend!

As for our drop-in speakers, Delegate Vivian Watts spoke to us 4

times, Delegate Sam Rasoul twice, and we heard from Senator Adam Ebbin, Delegates Betsy Carr, Paul Krizek, and three new Delegates; Elizabeth Guzman, Danika Roehm and Kathy Tran. The location didn’t seem to be too difficult, although we did change the time for the last three sessions from 8:30 am to 9:30 am. We’ll keep tweaking it for next year!

Your State Board will be meeting for a work session on April 3rd in Richmond, to finalize the program for the 2018 Council meeting and deal with other planning issues. Council is scheduled for June 16 at the Roslyn Retreat Center in Richmond. Full details will come out after our meeting! Enjoy April, and stay in touch!

Sue Lewis

General Assembly Wrap-Up for 2018

Valarie Fillgrove
Legislative Coordinator



Excitement, Mass Confusion, New Legislators, New Building, and Fast paced

These are only a few of the adjectives used to explain our first few days at the General Assembly. Even the more experienced lobbyist and Legislators were having a hard time finding their way and the most important sentence from Legislators was; where is the coffee? With 1558 bills in the House and 966 in the Senate, everyone had to work fast. By crossover day, a little over 800 had survived and it was off to round two.

This was not the year for election bills. Anything having to do with election fraud seemed to garner more attention of the committee members. SB825 increasing the membership of the State Board of Elections from three members to five and then amended to six was eventually sent to a joint committee and back to the committee where it died during the last days of the General assembly. Another bill SB591, sponsored by Jill Vogel, requiring electoral boards and general registrars to conduct post-election audits also died in the in the last days. All other bills were blocked and sent to a special joint committee to be formed after the General Assembly session where they will be studied and recommendations entered.

Redistricting bills had even less luck than Election Laws and were defeated early in the session. One outstanding success was raising the

felon threshold from \$250 to \$500. It's still too low, since we were pushing for \$1000 to keep up with inflation. At least there was movement. The Constitutional Convention bill was back and defeated. We used a national League position in opposition.

The ERA was defeated not by a vote but instead by a number of maneuvers in committees. It was sent to the Rules committee chaired by Senator McDougale from Hanover. He originally refused to hear arguments and dismissed the bill. The room was filled with women who had come to promote the ERA and they began to sing "We Shall Overcome". The Chairman was unable to continue with committee business when Senator Howell asked why they couldn't have arguments and a show of hands. Again the Chairman refused. The women began singing and finally Senator McDougale agreed to listen and to a show of hands. The vote was 5 to 7 to defeat. Had it gone to the floor it would have passed?

The General Assembly passed two bills dealing with expansion of Medicaid, however; without the full funding from the federal government, these bills mean nothing. Since the General Assembly was unable to come to consensus regarding the budget, Governor Northam has called for a special session and their return April 11, 2018. The Governor's budget includes the \$400 million from the Affordable Care Act to fund Medicaid expansion and he will probably veto any budget which does not include this or a close facsimile.

2018 Virginia General Assembly Session Highlights

Carol Noggle

Major changes swept through Capitol Square for the 2018 General Assembly session

Virginia Voter Express

1. Composition of 2018 General Assembly.

The 2017 election dramatically changed the composition of the House of Delegates to narrow the Party status to 51 Republicans and 49 Democrats after the previous years of two-thirds Republicans (66-34). The House now includes 12 new women (11 Ds and one R) for a total of 28 women in the House.

That 51-49 ratio also affected most House Committee and subcommittee membership.

The 2017 election also changed the Speaker of the House because long-time Speaker Howell retired. This put the spotlight on the new Speaker, Delegate Cox, as his different approach to presiding was expected. Everyone agreed that Speaker Howell would be a "tough act" to follow. The newly elected Lieutenant Governor, Justin Fairfax, took on his job as President of the Senate where his upbeat approach and parliamentary procedure expertise were evident.

2. Location:

With the destruction of the old General Assembly Building underway and the move of all offices and meeting rooms to the Pocahontas Building there was a climate of newness and frequent wandering and confused navigation. The newness was actually refreshing by creating a sense of adventure. Everyone traveled on the pedestrian "corridor" to cross Bank Street to the Senate and House chambers and large rooms converted to committee rooms in the Visitor Center.

3. Transparency increased exponentially!

Every single committee and subcommittee room provided each legislator with an electronic device to record every vote – green or red -- that was displayed on a board in that room. All votes! Rarely was there a voice vote. Live video

streaming of every committee meeting, that included a view of the vote board, was available. All are archived on the General Assembly website. There seemed to be no reluctance by legislators to use the electronic voting system. Subcommittee meeting videos are also available on "Eyes on Richmond."

4. Legislation

a. Disposition of over 3,000 bills was significantly impacted by any hint of a fiscal impact. If a bill required a Budget Amendment its survival was impeded.

b. Elections and Voting: Most bills to affect Voting and Elections such as no-excuse absent voting, photo ID, overseas voting, redistricting, precinct management, and adjustment of precinct lines have been carried over to 2019 because of the plan to establish a post-session Joint Senate/House workgroup to develop a comprehensive legislative package for 2019. Stakeholders, including the League, are lining up to participate.

c. Constitutional Amendments: 5? 3? NO – just 2. The five Constitutional Amendment proposals that passed in 2017 were introduced for the required second passage, but were thankfully reduced to two. Five on a November ballot would be very cumbersome and no doubt cause delays on election day. One of the two remaining proposals (HJ6, SJ76) addresses a slight change in the real property tax exemption given by local jurisdictions to surviving spouses of veterans killed in action or with a permanent service-related disability. The other provides authorization for a county, city, or town to provide for a partial exemption from local real property taxation on improved real estate subject to recurrent flooding where the owner had expenses for flooding

abatement, mitigation, or resiliency efforts. (SJ21)

d. Closing the “School to Prison Pipeline” and promoting “Classrooms, not Courtrooms” was advanced with legislation this year. In 2017 the school suspension bills that we supported did not survive but there was new support this year even though the pathway to passage required substantial debate and advocacy. HB1600 reduced long-term suspensions from a maximum of 364 school days to a limit of 45 school days unless there are certain offenses or aggravating circumstances to allow an extension of the suspension.

Secondly, there was success in limiting pre-K through 3rd grade suspensions and expulsion with SB170: “No student in preschool through grade three (3) shall be suspended for more than three school days or expelled from attendance at school, unless (i) the offense involves physical harm or credible threat of physical harm to others or (ii) the local school board or the division superintendent or his designee finds that aggravating circumstances exist, as defined by the Department.”

e. Justice: “Ban the Box” on state agency job applications.

Governor McAuliffe, in 2015, signed Executive Order #41 to prohibit the requirement to inquire of an applicant for a state agency job of any criminal arrest, charge or conviction. The order eliminated that box to check on the application form, that is, it was the “Ban the Box” order. The bill this year was to codify that order into law. The good news is that the Department of Human Resource Management states that they continue to comply with that Executive Order so the Ban the Box bills were not considered necessary this year. <https://governor.virginia.gov/media/3762/eo-41-ban-the-boxada.pdf>

5. What is Next?

The bills that passed are now on the Governor’s desk for his recommendations for changes, signature or veto by April 10th.

Redistricting Update

Several hundred activists, including members of Virginia League chapters, gathered in Richmond on March 4 to launch a 10-month drive for a Virginia Constitutional amendment to promote reform of the redistricting process.

The “March Forth” event was organized by OneVirginia2021, the bipartisan redistricting reform coalition of which the League of Women Voters of Virginia is a member. Participants gathered at the Hippodrome Theater, then marched to Capitol Square and back. The rest of the afternoon was spent learning more about lobbying techniques, networking with other supporters, and hearing from redistricting reform supporters, including Del. Sam Rasoul (D-Roanoke), Del. Glen Davis (R-Virginia Beach) and Bo Davis, chairman of the Libertarian Party of Virginia.

Although the General Assembly took action on redistricting legislation in this session, OneVirginia2021’s sights are really set on the 2019 session, which will consider constitutional amendments. Under the Virginia Constitution, if the General Assembly passed an amendment, it would be referred for a second vote to the next session of the General Assembly after a legislative election, namely the one in January 2020. If the amendment is passed a second time, it would be put before state voters in November 2020—in time to set the process for the next legislative and congressional redistricting in 2021.

As part of the latest drive, OneVirginia2021 will be seeking signatures on a new petition supporting a constitutional

amendment that includes anti-gerrymandering language, that promotes transparency and that supports redistricting that preserves “communities of interest.” It is also seeking donations (which can be designated for its tax-exempt educational foundation), and volunteers willing to collect signatures, host events, visit legislators in their districts and do additional outreach. The coalition has organized Local Action Groups in many parts of the Commonwealth and Leagues are working with these teams to share volunteers and ideas, and to maximize their effectiveness. See www.onevirginia2021.org for more information. The League of Women Voters of Virginia shares information on the issue via a restricted Facebook group, LWV-VA Redistricting. Interested LWV members can contact the administrator of the page to gain access.

On March 28, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in a case challenging Democratic gerrymandering in Maryland. Earlier in the term, the Court considered arguments in a case challenging Republican gerrymandering in Wisconsin. Supporters hope that these cases could lead the Court to establish a standard for unconstitutional partisan redistricting, which up to now it has been unwilling to do.

On March 1, a three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court in Richmond heard arguments in a lawsuit involving 11 legislative districts in Virginia. The lawsuit argued that the lines drawn for those districts amounted to an impermissible racial gerrymandering. In March 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court said the federal judges had applied the wrong standard when they first heard the case and directed them to rehear it. A decision is expected in a few months; the outcome could impact

legislative maps for the 2019 General Assembly elections.

Gun Safety Update

Ruth Hoffman
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Over the course of the 2018 session, the legislature held lengthy floor debates on many issues but one issue received very little thoughtful debate, proposals to curb the epidemic of gun violence. While over 60 bills were introduced this legislative session, nearly all of those bills were quietly and summarily dismissed very early by Republican-led committees and subcommittees along party-line votes. On the Senate side many were dismissed on the morning of the first day of the session.

Among the gun safety bills introduced were proposals to require universal criminal background checks on every gun purchase, disarm domestic abusers, prevent open carry of guns at demonstrations and allow libraries to prohibit guns. Additionally there were bills to reinstate provisions that had been repealed in recent years as part of the gun lobby's agenda to dismantle current gun laws over the past two decades. For instance, in 1993 Virginia enacted a 1 gun per month law to stop illegal bulk purchases by straw buyers and the illegal interstate transfer of firearms. That law was repealed in 2012. This year, bills HB353, HB650 and SB385 were introduced to reinstate that law because Virginia, once again, ranks among the top 3 states for supplying crime guns to other states. The bills all failed in committee. Prior to 2009, Virginia law required hands-on safety training of a firearm to obtain a concealed weapons permit. In 2009 lawmakers changed the law to no longer require hands on training instead an electronic, video, or online course was allowed to satisfy the safety training. Two bills (HB91

and HB602) were introduced to revert back to hands on training by eliminating electronic, video and online course as an option. These bills were defeated in committee.

The school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on Valentines Day and the subsequent groundswell for stronger gun laws at both the state and national level resulted in Florida passing a package of gun laws three weeks later. That package, which was signed by the Governor called attention to key measures that could make a meaningful difference. For example, it raises the minimum age to purchase any firearm to 21 from 18; impose a three-day waiting period on gun purchases; ban bump stocks; and give law enforcement more power to seize guns under the new "risk protection" law.

Bills similar to these measures had been introduced in Virginia this session. For example, a "risk protection" bill (HB 198/SB 276) would have given law enforcement a legal method to remove firearms from those deemed a threat. They failed in committee. Legislation introduced in the wake of the Las Vegas massacre to make mass shootings less deadly such as bills that would ban bump stocks (SB113, SB1, HB41) were also swiftly defeated.

Of particular interest to the League are measures to prevent the reality of everyday gun violence among children and domestic violence. HB707 would have strengthened Virginia's child access prevention (CAP) law by increasing the age to less than 18 (up from 14); change the criminal standard from "reckless" to "endangers" and impose a class 6 Felony (versus a class 3 MISD). HB172 would have exempted gun safes from retail sales tax to incentivize gun owners to keep guns where children can't easily get them. Both were defeated.

For domestic violence, SB372 would have included stalking and applied the prohibition of weapon to possession and transportation following convictions for certain misdemeanor crimes. While current law prohibits the purchase of new guns following a misdemeanor conviction, convicted domestic abusers are allowed to keep their existing guns. This bill was defeated.

Only HB287, the Stop Gun Violence Virginia license plate bill passed the General Assembly conference committee and is expected to be signed into law.

One silver lining was that the vast majority of firearms legislation introduced this session focused on gun violence prevention. Past years, efforts were largely spent on playing defense against bills to expand concealed carry reciprocity, arm teachers and introduce guns into domestic violence situations. A bill (SB372) to allow guns in churches passed the Senate on a party line vote, but was quietly defeated in the House when the Speaker of the House assigned the bill to the Rules committee and neglected to have it taken up for consideration. A companion House bill (HB1180) was pulled from floor consideration and sent back to committee to be squelched.

It has become clear that the voices of legislators alone cannot move this issue forward. In the aftermath of the school shooting that claimed 17 lives, the bravery and resilience of the young people in Parkland have moved and inspired action. Students throughout the country are standing in solidarity with the survivors and speaking out in loud, informed and passionate voices to amplify this message.

The actions of young people are rekindling important debates in Washington about common-sense gun violence prevention measures.

Their activism has begun to have widespread impact in the private sector as well. Under public pressure, several companies have distanced themselves from the NRA and retail giants like Walmart and Dick's Sporting Goods have raised the age to purchase firearms to 21.

Delegate Kathleen Murphy and Senator Ebbin have formed a General Assembly Gun Violence Prevention Caucus to coordinate efforts as lawmakers to complement this grassroots activism. The first meeting was attended by over 25 members from both the House and the Senate and featured a discussion with the office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security. The caucus will discuss avenues available for reform, enforcement actions and other steps that the executive branch may be able to take, and craft a 2019 agenda.

Meanwhile, Speaker Cox announced on March 8th the formation of the "House Select Committee on School Safety" to review state and local policy on school safety and make recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly during the 2019 Session. Speaker Cox sent a letter to the Clerk of the House of Delegates outlining the scope, membership and work plan. This is the first select committee formed in the House in 155 years. The committee will look at hardening school security infrastructure, implementing security best practices, developing prevention protocols at primary and secondary institutions across the state. But according to the letter the committee will not discuss issues related to guns.

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**LWV-VA 2018 Council is June
16th! Be ready for some
excitement.**
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Notes on P&E Subcommittee Meetings

Mary Crutchfield

(Learn about the LWV-VA positions on these bills at: <https://bit.ly/2GyZPZN>. Please remember that any individual can attend and speak up at these meetings but only the LWV-VA President or designee is authorized to speak for the League as a whole.)

At the first House Privileges & Elections Subcommittee #1 meeting I attended on Jan. 30 there were eight absentee voting bills presented and all of them failed: HB57 Delegate Herring, HB74 & HB92 Delegate Sullivan, HB186 Delegate Hayes, HB1072 Delegate Heretick, HB1134 Delegate Aird and HB171 Delegate Filler-Corn, HB449 Delegate Rodman.

Both Delegate Hayes and Delegate Aird had bills for allowing persons 65 and older to vote absentee without excuse and I thought that their bills would be combined and passed in this committee. Unfortunately they were both "laid on the table" meaning they failed. I thought Delegate Sullivan's bill, HB92, to allow certain caregivers who are not family members to vote absentee, would be passed but that bill also failed. Delegate Filler-Corn's bill, HB171, which allows newly naturalized US citizens extra time to register up to election day also failed to pass. Betsey Carr was not able to attend the meeting so her bill HB733, for no excuse absentee voting in person 21 days before the election, was not heard that day and was not scheduled for later meetings.

On Feb. 1 I was asked by Delegate Gooditis to speak in support of her bill HB568 at the House P&E Subcommittee #2. The bill HB568 extends polling place hours for one hour from 7:00pm to 8:00pm. After I spoke in support and mentioned that I work as an election officer I

was asked if I would be willing to work until midnight. I said yes I would because we could take more breaks or have two shifts. The registrar who spoke in opposition said, "We don't have enough funding to hire more election officers to be able to have two shifts."

On Feb. 6 at the House P & E Subcommittee#1 meeting five redistricting bills were presented to the committee and all failed except one. Delegate Rasoul's bill HB276 for an Interim Redistricting Commission and Delegate Sullivan's bill HB205, for criteria for districts to be drawn when such districts have been declared unlawful, failed. Delegate Keam's bill, HB784, for criteria for the General Assembly to observe in drawing districts, also failed. Delegate Marcia Price's bill HB616 prohibiting any district for the Senate or the House from being drawn for the purpose of favoring or disfavoring any political party, failed. Delegate Jones' HB1598 establishing standards and criteria for congressional and state legislative districts, was the only redistricting bill that passed. Delegate Dawn Adams had HB1381 for a public referendum question to be asked in the November election about establishing an Independent Redistricting Commission for drawing districts. I spoke on behalf of LWV-VA to support this bill and was sorry that it failed.

One bill that I was supportive of was Delegate Sickles' HB1226 for post election deadlines. This bill extends from the third day after the election to the first Monday after the election, the period for persons voting provisionally, to provide an acceptable form of identification. This bill was first continued to 2019, and then reported with substitute out of the full P & E Committee. Then in the full House it was referred back to the P & E Committee.

At the House Privileges & Elections Subcommittee#1 meeting on Feb.20 I spoke on behalf of LWV-VA to oppose several bills that had crossed over from the Senate. The first one was Senator Peake's SB331 for registrars to verify social security numbers. This was reported [4Y-2N]. The next bill I spoke to oppose, SB521, patroned by Senator Obenshain, directs registrars to investigate whenever the number of registered voters 18 or older exceeds the most recent population figures provided by UVA's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, and to investigate lists of voters whenever the number of voters exceeds the number of persons registered. This bill also was reported [4Y-2N]. In the last reading in the full House the vote was [51Y-49N]. The second bill of Obenshain's that I spoke to oppose for LWV-VA was SB523, a bill to require electronic poll books to contain photographs of voters. This bill was reported [4Y-2N] and referred to Appropriations and then left there. I also spoke to oppose Senator Chafin's bill SB834 which requires the Department of Elections to provide the General Registrar a list of registered voters found through list comparisons with other states to be registered in another state. This bill was reported [4Y-2N] and then later passed in the full House [51Y-49N].

There were two bills that I stated support for: SB589 patroned by Senator Ebbin, for an election day page program, and SB825 patroned by Senator Edwards, which increases the number of persons on the State Board of Elections to five and states that the Commissioner of Elections is to be a member of the Board. Both of these bills were reported out of committee. Senator Edwards' bill SB589 passed with a substitute in the full House [51Y-49N]. The substitute was rejected by the Senate. The House requested a conference committee to which the

Senate agreed. The last posting on the LIS on 3/10 was "No further action taken."

Status of our Studies

Anne Smith
Program Director

LWV Members ... I am delighted to say how very beautifully the studies are progressing! The Women's Rights Study has reviewed the Code of Virginia and confirmed legislative progress made since the position was adopted. That Team will be meeting again in the next several weeks to work on drafts of findings and positions.

Both the Behavioral Health and Schools studies are complete. Each has opted for the concurrence alternative and is prepared to seek action at Council in June.

The Behavioral Health study has been circulated and the Team warmly welcomes input from Local Leagues by April 15. Comment will be carefully considered in finalizing the report for distribution in the Council package.

The Schools Task Force has also completed its work and materials were sent to Local League Presidents for review and to share with League members. They have opined that:

"our previous documents with principles, standards, approval criteria and talking points for other school choice options could still stand. The LWVUS positions on Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits are still valid but we have added Virginia specifics."

The Schools Task Force is interested in promoting the materials and facilitating discussions at local Leagues. League Presidents or Program Chairs are encouraged to contact Carol Noggle at cnogg@comcast.net to arrange a presentation session.

Both Behavioral Health and Schools Study Teams have worked efficiently, expended enormous energy with a strong commitment to the goal of completion and readiness before the next General Assembly Session. And **Congratulations** to those Teams for their highly successful achievement of that goal!

School Choice Task Force Update Did 2018 Legislation Send Public Funds to K-12 Private Schools?

Report by the League of Women Voters of Virginia, "School Choice Task Force"

The members of the LWV-VA School Choice Task Force's extensive research of the types of funding provided to Virginia's K-12 public and private schools made it clear that there could be 2018 legislation to scrutinize and possibly oppose. The School Choice Task Force is not promoting school choices such as more public Charter Schools or private schools that would receive public funds.

We quickly determined, indeed, that legislators proposed bills that would provide more funds for private schools with tuition tax credit programs, vouchers and virtual schools (Online Learning). Analyzing and monitoring these bills and those regarding new Charter School laws were done carefully and extensively. Our chief goal has been to assure that state funds (primarily general revenue collected as taxes from taxpayers) are directed to public schools, not to private schools, as prescribed in our Virginia Constitution.

The short story is that this year there were definitely guardians of public schools, and the revenue to sustain them, in both the House and Senate.

Results and explanations:

1. Tuition Tax Credits (Educational Improvement Scholarship Tax Credits) (EISTC)

The EISTC program allows taxpayers to receive a 65% tax credit and charitable donation deductions when they donate to a Scholarship Foundation that provides scholarships to certain students at approved K-12 private schools. Currently the program targets families with incomes at or below the 300% Federal Poverty Level, or 400% of the Federal Poverty Level for families with children with disabilities. The scholarship amounts cannot exceed the SOQ amount provided for each student in school division where the student resides. The average per student is about \$4,600 to \$4,700.

Several bills to expand the EISTC program were proposed.

SB869 would have expanded eligibility to students with an IIP that are attending a school for students with disabilities, and significantly increase the allowed scholarship amount by 300% for those students. Thus, an average state fund amount of \$5,000 would be increased to \$15,000. It passed in the Senate 21-19, but the House directed it to Appropriations because it had to have specific appropriations passed by the General Assembly first. It was then left in House Appropriations.

SB172 would have expanded eligibility to Pre-K children in a nonpublic pre-K program. The grant would not exceed the state share of the local Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The bill passed the Senate but did not survive the House Finance Committee with an 11 to 11 tie vote.

Some of the EISTC bills proposed by Delegates were withdrawn or failed:

HB221 was similar to SB869. HB395 would have actually increased the scholarship amount 400% and to even \$26,000 for a student with an autism spectrum disorder.

HB1165 would have expanded eligibility to Pre-K nonpublic students but also failed in House Finance by a vote of 11 to 11.

2. Vouchers: “Parental Choice Education Savings Accounts”

HB1286 would have allowed parents to apply for local school division per pupil SOQ funds to be used for their child’s education-related expenses wherever they wanted outside of the public school system. The estimated fiscal impact was \$394,200 for just the first year start-up costs. This bill was heard only in an Education subcommittee where it was defeated with a vote of 4-4. The 2017 bill passed in the House and Senate but was vetoed by the Governor based on noncompliance with the Virginia Constitution.

3. Virtual Schools (Online Learning Programs):

HB1504 would provide for all public and home-schooled high school students to enroll in **Virtual Virginia**, the public online learning program and free of charge. It had an unusually long journey after once defeated, but then amended by striking the free of charge portion. After passing in the House the Senate amended it to require that the home-schooled students pay tuition. The House rejected that and sent the bill to a Conference Committee after which the House rejected its recommendation.

HB521 and HB831 to expand online learning options failed also.

4. Charter Schools

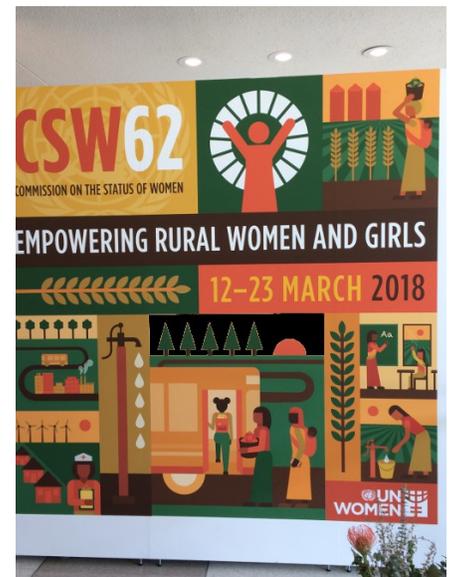
SB 516 proposed Regional Charter School Divisions that would have a board that could approve applications for charter schools without approval from the Virginia Board of Education or by a local School Board in those divisions. The Senate Education Committee passed it 8 to 7, but the Senate

Finance voted 16 to 0 not to approve it this year.

To repeat, these 2018 results show that we have guardians of public schools, and the revenue to sustain them, in both the House and the Senate.

The League at the United Nations

The LWVUS sent 20 delegates to the United Nations in **mid-March** 2018 to attend the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62.) The CSW is the largest annual gathering at the UN of individuals interested in pursuing initiatives for gender equality. This year 4300 representatives from 600 civil society organizations plus 170 Member States (nations) attended. Annual participation is trending upward and suggests the leverage of NGOs in holding governments accountable for improving and accelerating the pace of reform for gender equality.



Historically, CSW has researched the status of women globally and formulated international conventions targeting the elimination of discriminatory laws affecting women and girls.

This year, CSW62 focused its programs and deliberations on the needs of women and girls living in poverty in rural areas throughout the

world. The end result of the two-week session was the publication of the AGREED CONCLUSIONS. This document was adopted by the participating Member States. It identified action steps to lift rural women and girls out of poverty, ensure their human rights and promote their resilience.

The challenges facing rural women and girls are exacerbated by armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and adverse impacts of climate change. And yet, we must meet these challenges and lift rural women and girls out of poverty because their well-being and success is essential to sustaining the development of our world. The following concrete steps, articulated in the AGREED CONCLUSIONS from CSW62, are necessary to empower rural women and girls:

- Adopt reforms that eliminate discriminatory laws prohibiting women's access to land ownership and inheritance rights.
- Accelerate progress toward closing gender gaps in secondary and tertiary education in rural areas.
- Reduce the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work burdening rural women and girls.
- Ensure that rural women participate equally in household and community decision making as a means of ensuring women have access to decent jobs with equal pay for work of equal value.
- Provide access to safe drinking water, clean stove, sanitation facilities and internet connectivity as beginning steps toward developing essential rural infrastructure and technology.
- Step up investments and access to financial services for women farmers as a means to ensure their food security and nutrition.
- Provide universal health coverage and recognize the need for rural

women and girls to manage their own sexual and reproductive health.

- Accelerate actions to end all forms of violence against women, including the elimination of child marriage and female genital mutilation.

We must leave no one behind. Your contribution to the work of the LWVUS at the United Nations is requested. Please let me know of your interest in learning more about the work of the UN Observers and delegates to the annual Commission on the Status of Women. Email me at UN@lww-fairfax.org

Jill Follows
UN Observer LWVUS and member LWVFA

Empowering Voters Defending Democracy

That is the new Mission Statement for the League of Women Voters. The League of Women Voters states this about our "identity" of which our Mission Statement is a part:

"It says that we are 140,000 members and supporters strong. While each League is unique in its local activities and grassroots efforts, as a unified group, all Leagues contribute to our core goals—encouraging informed and active participation in government, increasing understanding of major public policy issues, and influencing public policy through education and advocacy—ultimately, our overall mission of empowering voters and defending democracy. "

Be sure that you are incorporating this into your websites and social media.

Important Upcoming Events

- **April 11:** Reconvened session of VA General Assembly to consider the Governor's amendments and vetoes
- **June 16:** League of Women Voters of Virginia 2018 Council (see our website for more information: <http://lww-va.org/lww-va-2018-council/>) This year's theme for Council is **"TAKING ACTION TO MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK"** Special guest speaker is Rachel Bitecofer, author of The Unprecedented 2016 Presidential Election.
- **June 28-July 1:** The League of Women Voters' 53rd National Convention 2018 will be held June 28 – Sun., July 1, 2018 in Chicago, IL.

Rising Tide of Future Voters

Get your voter registration tools ready! There is a huge growth in interest in government in our youth. Many of those individuals will be eligible to vote in the November elections. But, before they can vote, they must be registered. Then, to be informed voters, they need to be informed of the issues and the candidates.

This is exactly the things that League does best. We are the nation's largest and longest-standing grassroots voter registration organization. Add to that our strong work to educate voters by using VOTE411, candidate forums, voter guides, and other events and programs and you see why we need to be gearing up to work to empower this new generation of voters!