



THE VIRGINIA VOTER

In this issue:

In this issue:	1
Remember Why You Joined the League?	1
WLRT Pre-Session: All In for All Issues	2
2020 Women’s Legislative Roundtables	3
League Day 2020	4
2020 Voting and Elections Update	4
Gun Violence Legislation	5
The time is now for People-Powered Fair Maps©!	5
The Role of the LWVRMA in Efforts to Ratify the ERA in Virginia	6
Fundraising Tidbit:	7
Connecting the Dots: The Link between Poverty and Affordable Housing	7
Participate in the Affordable Housing Committee’s Survey	8
January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month	8

From the Editor (votereditor@lwv-va.org)

If you are interested in writing articles for The Virginia Voter, please review our submission criteria [HERE](#). Any articles exceeding the word counts provided must be approved by the President and will be edited as needed. Email President president@lwv-va.org

Remember Why You Joined the League?

Deb Wake, President LWV-VA

I joined the League because we moved to a new area where I didn’t know anyone-- I especially didn’t know anything about the representatives in my new part of the state. I’d known about the League for a long time. When my kids were too young to vote, I used the information from VOTE411 and *Henrico Citizen*, and anywhere else, to pull together a “voter guide” for my family so that we could talk about the candidates and my husband and I could make informed choices. It was important that I give my children an unbiased resource so that they could consider for themselves who was the best candidate regardless of party-lines. By the time we moved, I was troubled at how partisan everything had become. I hoped the League would teach me language that I could use to have thoughtful conversations with those who hold different views.

As it turns out, it wasn’t that easy to join the League. It was summertime and many Leagues don’t meet. There were a few meetings in member’s homes, but that wasn’t a good way to slip in and see if it was the right organization for me. Six months passed before I finally joined the League.

However, once I joined the League, I had a hard time finding a way to get involved. I thought I wanted to do

communications and advocacy. The communications person was out of the country, so nothing happened. You don't exactly walk in and start advocating for the League either. Four months after joining, I had a chance meeting with Therese Martin, Sherry Zachry and Olga Hernandez—three powerhouses. Therese was representing the Fairfax League in the Fund It, Fix It coalition formed by Stewart Schwartz of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. Our seemingly impossible task was to secure dedicated funding for Metro—and we did. We spent a lot of time in Richmond meeting lawmakers and attending meetings—lots and lots of meetings. I didn't know anything about Transportation when I started out but I learned a lot.



Coalition for Smarter Growth's Sanders-Henn Community Heroes Award presented in April to LWNCA, LWVDC, LWVMD, LWV-VA for our role in the Fund It/Fix It campaign for dedicated funding for Metro. Pictured: Nancy Soreng, Edie Snyder, Deb Wake, Anne Anderson, Kathy McGuire, Elaine Apter, Bee Ditzler, Tina Slater, Barbara Sanders, Stewart Schwartz

Therese has retired, Sherry has stepped back some and Olga moved out of state. However, they are all still wonderful resources--and they are not the only ones. My time in the League has been filled with wonderful people with vast experience and knowledge. Our members have been supportive and generous—whether they have been in the League for a very long time or whether they're new but want to make a difference.

The League is at a bit of a cross roads. Some members are slowing down and others are just getting started. There are many ways to be involved whether it's mentoring a newer member or sharing your passion for

an issue or just knowing you want to do something but you don't know what.

Why did you join the League? How do you want to be involved? I'd love to hear from [you](#).

WLRT Pre-Session: All In for All Issues

Martha Rollins, LWVSHR

LWV-VA President Deb Wake quickly summarized the overall message of our day of legislative issues for the upcoming General Assembly: "Public Education!" With great resolve she added, "We must get this information out."

A record-breaking number of about 150 League members and allies met on December 4, 2019, at The John Marshall Hotel Ballroom in Richmond to grasp the array of topics for legislative action. The enthusiasm reflected the high voter turnout of the off-off-year election of the General Assembly—the members who will act on decennial redistricting.

The Pre-Session edition of the Women's Legislative Roundtable (WLRT) continued the tradition of leading with a report of the fiscal framework. Current Secretary of Finance Aubrey Layne delivered a positive report for revenue that he labeled "cautiously optimistic." He explained that Virginia was responsive to defense spending of the federal government and finally shows benefit from the lifting of sequestration. He acknowledged high consumer confidence. He commented that 2.6% was the lowest unemployment rate in Virginia history. Secretary Layne also expressed concern for the impact of mandated expenditures, particularly the impact of Medicaid. Without upstaging the release of the Governor's budget on December 17, Secretary Layne anticipated significant "investment" in K-12 education and higher education, as well as attention to mental health services. He also raised expectations for change in the process of the legislative branch because of new leadership and a substantial number of newly elected members in the committee structure.

The Issues Slam began with Edgar Arando Yanoc's pitch on behalf of the Virginia Coalition of Latino

Organizations that our roads would be safer if driver's licenses were issued to all drivers, including undocumented drivers. Kim Bobo of the Interfaith Center called for paid sick days for low-wage workers. Commenting that because she spends so much time in front of the Commerce and Labor Committees, she predicts passage of the modest proposal being developed by Senator Barbara Favola. Bobo noted that Virginia could be the first state in the South to support the paid leave issue. The Interfaith Center's message to increase the minimum wage was echoed by the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. Chris Duncombe said that Virginia's minimum was the lowest comparable in the country and that over a million people would benefit.



Claire Guthrie Gastañaga, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia (ACLU)

[\[CONTINUE READING THIS ARTICLE HERE\]](#)

1st WLRT Meeting Jan. 15th, [Register Now!](#)

Feb. 12, 2020 is League Day!

RSVP For League Day [HERE!](#)

2020 Women's Legislative Roundtables

Mary Crutchfield,
LWV-VA 2nd V.P., Legislation

History

The LWV-VA has been hosting the Women's Legislative Roundtable (WLRT) as a weekly forum to share information on issues and legislation with legislators, non-profit leaders, and League members and friends since 1981. The WLRTs were held on Wednesday mornings in the General Assembly building and legislators were invited to drop in whenever they could take the time to speak about their legislation. Two years ago, when construction for a new building for the General Assembly (GA) began and legislator's offices were moved to the Pocahontas building, WLRTs were also moved and are now being held in the SunTrust Center across the street from the Pocahontas Building.

First Day of Session: January 8

On the first day of the 2020 GA Session, January 8, League members are invited to join with partner groups advocating for ratification of ERA in a "Welcome Back Rally: at the Capitol at 10am.

New Format & Schedule for WLRTs

The first WLRT will be held on January 15, 8:30am-9:30am in the Tidewater Room, 4th floor of the SunTrust Center at 919 East Main Street, Richmond. At the first WLRT, members of the LWV-VA Legislative Team will present the basics on how to advocate, how to follow bills on LIS (Legislative Information System) and how to find your way in the Pocahontas building and the Capitol. Registration is not required, but if you sign up on [Eventbrite](#), we'll be sure to have enough material and resources available for everyone.

We will focus on one or two LWV-VA issues or legislative priorities each week. Legislators and issue experts will be invited to speak and answer questions. There will also be time for updates on bills and announcements from LWV-VA lobbyists and from our partner organizations.

Proposed schedule for WLRT topics:

- January 15: Advocacy Training, Redistricting, Voting & Elections
- January 22: Gun Violence Prevention/Safety, Criminal Justice
- January 29: Human Rights (incl. Women's Rights), Education, Behavioral Health
- February 5: Environment, Transportation
- February 12: League Day: Voting & Elections, Women's Rights
- February 19, 26 & March 4: to be determined

Remember to allow time for traffic and [parking when planning](#) to attend the WLRTs. After the WLRT, you can go to the Pocahontas building to visit your legislators (it's best to schedule in advance if you can). You can also observe any committee meetings that day. At noon, you can observe the Senate or the House Floor Sessions from either gallery at the top floor of the Capitol or on the widescreen in Senate room 3 or House room 3 on the first floor. Please [let us know](#) if you would like to be paired with a more experienced League member for your visits. We are looking forward to an exciting 2020 Session! Please come join us!

League Day 2020

Erni Bridges, LWV-VA Director-at-Large

League Day, February 12, 2020 is just around the corner. This will be a very special League Day because we are 100 years old! In addition to a WLRT (Women's Legislative Roundtable) in the SunTrust Center auditorium, we will be recognized from the floor of the House and Senate followed by a festive lunch with special speaker, historian and author, A'Lelia Bundles.

On League Day, LWV-VA will be advocating for: Redistricting, Voting Rights and Election reform, ratification of the ERA, Gun Violence Prevention, Immigration, Health Care access, and many other issues that affect our communities and families. Members will have an opportunity to meet with their legislators to discuss and share their concerns.

Please click [here](#) for more information and to register. We envision a democracy where every person has the

desire, the right, the knowledge and confidence to participate. We empower voters and defend democracy. We believe in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy. Our Work Continues.

2020 Voting and Elections Update

Lisa Koteen Gerchick,
Co-chair LWV-VA Elections & Voting Study

Voting in Virginia could become easier when the smoke clears from the General Assembly's 2020 legislative session. Several bills are pending that would eliminate or reduce obstacles to voting, allowing more people to vote.

Bills have already been pre-filed that would allow voters to vote absentee, either in-person or by mail for the full 45-day early voting period without having to state an excuse for not voting at a polling place on Election Day. Those bills are HB1, introduced by Del. Herring, HB25, introduced by Del. Lindsey, SB45, introduced by Sen. Spruill, and SB111 by Sen. Howell. Virginia already boasts a longer early voting period than many other states but removing the requirement to provide an excuse removes barriers, however low, to voting. Passage of this measure should boost voter participation.

The requirement that each voter present a photo I.D. at a polling place would be abolished by the passage of HB19, introduced by Del. Lindsey, or one of its corollaries, SB65 (Sen. Locke) and SB 113 (Sen. Deeds). A specified type of identification would still be required but not a photograph. There are still voters in Virginia, particularly low-income and rural voters, who lack photo identification. Even the current provision that lets such voters obtain a photo I.D. for an election at the registrar's office poses a burden. Voters would no longer have to jump through such hoops to vote.

SB74, introduced by Sen. Deeds, would set up a pilot program to test same-day voter registration. The way it would work, any voter who registers at the polls on election day would complete a ballot similar to a provisional ballot. After the election, the registrar in that locality would confirm the voter's eligibility to vote there. On the Friday of election week, those confirmed

voters' ballots would be counted during the traditional adjudication of provisional ballots. Registrars seem to like this approach. Given the transient nature of the population, same-day registration would enfranchise many eligible voters who had not previously registered to vote.

There are a few other bills with variations on these themes and more may be filed in the days to come. The likelihood of passage of any of them is far greater this session than in recent years. They would be good news for voters in the Commonwealth.

Gun Violence Legislation

Christine Payne, LWV-Williamsburg

We have a gun violence problem in the Commonwealth. Since the tragic mass shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, the General Assembly has demonstrated a woeful lack of political will to enact any meaningful legislation to address the greater-than 1000 gun deaths each year. Virginia Voters spoke out on November 5th. They elected a majority who ran on the commitment to enact evidence-based legislation intended to reduce gun violence in our communities. A Forbes study reported that gun safety was the top issue for Virginia Voters. "It's clear that the public doesn't just support gun safety, but are now deciding their votes based on where candidates stand on gun policy."

Currently, attention has been focused on the extremist gun lobby's attempt to promote sanctuary status as it applies to gun ownership. A concerted effort to designate localities as 2nd Amendment Sanctuaries has grown, primarily in rural counties. These largely symbolic gestures have no basis in the law.

The 2020 General Assembly session promises to bring real change to the state code as it pertains to dangerous weapons. The LWV Gun Violence Prevention Interest Group advocates for legislation intended to enhance public safety while protecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners. We will maintain our vigilance during session, and communicate with our state senators and house delegates. Thus far, bills that have been filed to address Gun Violence in the Commonwealth reflect

those filed during the Governor's Special Session in July. Policies addressing who can have weapons and legal mechanisms to remove them from dangerous individuals are essential and include categories of prohibited purchasers; intersection with domestic violence; disarming prohibited purchasers; extreme risk protection orders; and minimum age. These policies are built on cornerstone legislation, Universal Background Checks, the foundation upon which all other gun violence prevention policies must build.

Legislation has been filed to address these concerns. Continue reading for a list of the bills.

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The time is now for People-Powered Fair Maps^{©!}

Chris DeRosa
Co-chair LWV-VA Redistricting Committee

In the next 3 months, the Virginia General Assembly will have the opportunity to take a huge step towards ending gerrymandering in the Commonwealth. We are very close!

Gerrymandering rigs the system. It robs the citizens of fair representation. It allows legislators to draw maps to protect their own seats. It allows them to choose their voters, rather than the voters choosing their representatives. Gerrymandering is voter suppression and must end now.

In 2019, the General Assembly passed [Senate Joint Resolution 306](#), a constitutional amendment*, with strong bipartisan support. The General Assembly must pass the constitutional amendment once again, in its entirety, with nary a comma nor word substituted or deleted, in the 2020 session before it comes to the voters for approval in November 2020. Once Virginia voters approve the constitutional amendment at the polls, it will set the stage for the drawing of fair maps in 2021 after the 2020 census. According to the recent [Wason Center Poll](#) conducted by Christopher Newport University, 70% of Virginians support passing the constitutional amendment a second time.

The constitutional amendment may not be perfect; few, if any, bills or amendments are. However, there are many important features that merit our approval:

- For the first time, citizens will serve on the commission that draws the maps. Eight members of the sixteen-member commission will be non-politicians. One of the citizen-members will serve as the commission chair. A super-majority of at least 6 (of 8) citizen members plus 6 (of 8) legislator members must approve the maps that are drawn.
- For the first time, transparency will be required of the commission and its decisions. Redistricting decisions will be brought out into the light, not hidden away in dark, secret backrooms. All meetings shall be open to the public, and at least three public hearings must be held in different parts of the Commonwealth. All records, documents and internal and external communications shall be available to the public.
- The maps drawn by the commission will be submitted to the General Assembly, which will vote “yea” or “nay”; the General Assembly may not amend the maps.

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The Role of the LWVRMA in Efforts to Ratify the ERA in Virginia

Pat Fishback, LWVRMA

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony met in 1851 as Elizabeth was advocating for suffrage and Susan was advocating for temperance. Both young women were raised to be outspoken, courageous individuals. Elizabeth was the intelligent, energetic daughter of a wealthy judge who instructed her in the oppressive laws and customs of the day, all encoding strict and universal misogyny. Susan’s father, a Quaker, believed in the equality of women. When his business failed, he relied on her to be his helpmate and to work, physically and mentally, as hard as he did. This she gladly did. Elizabeth became the devoted mother of seven children. Susan became a venerated teacher. Two different women from different worlds combined their vision and

their strengths - to change America. They constructed the supporting structure of the platform upon which we all stand.

The “*Sentiment of Rights*,” written by Elizabeth in 1851, was a call to action for full legal equality for women. They chose a suffrage amendment to the Constitution as their first goal. They did not live to see it happen, but the example of their life-long dedication and incredible sacrifices inspired others to charge forward. The 19th Amendment, the Suffrage Amendment, became law in 1920. The League of Women Voters was formed that same year. Even then, it was clear that the Constitution did not grant full legal equality to women. Another amendment was needed and it was proposed for ratification.

The Equal Rights Amendment has been viciously opposed. Every possible obstruction has been utilized, including unlawful deadlines and a well-financed smear campaign that distracted many citizens from the true meaning of legal equality, and the necessary protection of the Constitution. I was shocked to learn that women did not have equal rights when I was teaching in the mid-seventies! I immediately joined the Virginia Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Council whose members represented groups that supported the ERA.

At that time, LWV-VA did not take an active role in ratification efforts. The smear campaign had been successful in the United State for years and the ERA did not appear on the League’s list of priority issues. Finally, in the early 1990’s, a LWV of Richmond Metropolitan Area member convinced the state board to accept the ERA as a priority issue. More recently I was invited to make a presentation about the ERA at a LWV-VA state conference. One attendee suddenly rose and stalked out of the session expressing her anger that I was addressing such a horrible issue. But some members of LWV-VA showed interest in the ERA and began working hand-in-hand with other groups on ratification efforts. They rallied, lobbied, emailed, and participated in fund-raising events. They helped plan and implement ERA programs and education efforts. This surge of activism on the part of the LWV-VA has made a strong impression on members of the General Assembly who respect the League. LWV members’ presence in

organizations such as VARatifyERA has helped create an unstoppable force. It has helped elect ERA advocates to the General Assembly and has built support for the essential justice of the ERA in Virginia and in Congress.

We are now at the brink of ratification in Virginia. As the 38th state to ratify, Virginia will be the final state needed to submit the report that the Amendment for Equality of Rights for all Citizens has met the requirements for inclusion in the United States Constitution. This is the most significant social legislation of our time. It will last forever. Our foremothers are smiling.

Important Dates from VARatifyERA

- **January 7th [Women's Equality Legislative Summit](#): Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, 9:30am-12:30pm**
- **January 8th [Party4Parity](#): Sam Miller's Warehouse, 2-4 PM**
- **January 20th (anticipated) Ratification Celebration: Virginia Museum of History and Culture 7:30-9:30 PM; watch [website](#) for detail**

Fundraising Tidbit:

Joan Porte, 1st VP LWV-VA

In this season of giving, one of the easiest and least painful ways that you can help support the League of Women Voters of Virginia is through Amazon Smile. Amazon gives a percentage of money made on sales to nonprofits. League of Women Voters Virginia is a designated nonprofit by Amazon. It is already set up in their system!

All you need to do is to go into your Amazon account put Amazon Smile in the search box. When you are redirected to it, use the drop-down box to click on League of Women Voters of Virginia Education Fund. From then on every time you buy on Amazon, a percentage of your order will go to us.

The League benefits and no money has left your pocket! It is a classic win-win!

Please consider making us your designated Smile recipient. It is a great way for us to grow programs such as Pre-Session and other educational forums!

Happy Holidays and thank you!

Connecting the Dots: The Link between Poverty and Affordable Housing

Alice Tousignant, LWV-VA Housing Study Chair

People who wait on you at restaurants and care for seniors and people with disabilities earn about \$9.50 per hour, while those who clean stores and offices pull in \$11.50 and those who assist teachers make \$12.50 an hour. All of these workers are considered very low income using the [statewide income limits](#) for Virginia for a one person households-- \$31,000. What can they afford for rent? Housing is considered affordable if you don't spend more than 30% of your income for it.

Every year, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) releases their Out of Reach (OOR) [report](#), which documents the gap between renters' wages and the cost of rental housing across the US. In order to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment in Virginia, you would need to work 109 hours per week at the State's minimum wage of \$7.25. The average US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a one-bedroom apartment in Virginia is \$1,025 per month. In order to afford this rent, you must earn \$19.70 an hour or \$40,981 a year. None of the workers mentioned above could afford the average one-bedroom apartment in Virginia. These numbers differ substantially depending on where you live in Virginia: Arlington - \$1,454, Richmond City - \$932, Blacksburg - \$759, and Giles County - \$529 for a one-bedroom apartment. To obtain data specifically for your area, click [here](#), scroll to Jurisdictions, and plug in your city or county.

If you pay more than 30% of your income on housing, you are considered cost burdened. The lower your income, the higher the cost burden, making it difficult for persons earning low wages or those on fixed incomes to pay for basic necessities such as food, medicine and transportation. While the very low income earners mentioned above would pay more than 30% of their

income on rent, 69% of extremely low income households (\$18, 650 annually for a one person household) pay more than 50% of their income for housing according to the NLIHC.

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Participate in the Affordable Housing Committee's Survey

The LWV-VA is undertaking a two-year Affordable Housing Study to culminate in a position on the issue presented at the LWV-VA's Convention in 2021. An Affordable Housing Study Committee (AHSC) has been formed with representatives from most local Leagues across Virginia. The Study will be focused on affordable housing for people at 50% of Area Median Income and below, who are primarily renters. The AHSC would like you to take this short survey to gauge your interest in the issue and your feelings about priority housing issues and needs in your area. You do not have to be experienced in affordable housing to complete the survey. The survey should only take about 5 minutes to complete and is anonymous. Survey results will be posted on the Affordable Housing study [webpage](#) on the LWV-VA website. **Click [here](#) to complete the survey by January 14.**

January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month

Perspective by: Jill Follows,
LWVFA and UN Observer LWVUS

One year ago, a U.S. Presidential Proclamation declared January to be National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month. The Proclamation called on all of us to raise awareness of the need to end all modern forms of slavery. "As a Nation, we cherish and uphold the notion that all people are created with inherent dignity and entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Human trafficking and enslavement robs victims of these God-given endowments." Read the full text [here](#).

The Presidential Proclamation is a ceremonial announcement of a policy and does not have the force of law. As with many policies, the title of the Proclamation

is suitable and the text requires scrutiny, if only to crystallize the facts and appreciate diverse perspectives. The perspectives of the United Nations, LWVUS and the Commonwealth of Virginia vis a vis human trafficking are presented in this article.

The Title of the Presidential Proclamation is Suitable: On the first anniversary of the Proclamation, it is appropriate that the Virginia League of Women Voters recommit itself to raise awareness of and support steps to combat human trafficking within our own state and national borders. [Estimates](#) are that human traffickers exploit 77% of victims within the borders of their own country. People do not have to move across international borders to be exploited by human traffickers. Indeed, the [vast majority](#) of trafficked persons do not move across such borders.

**Hotline for Human Trafficking
1-888-373-7888**

Tackling
the
scourge of
human

trafficking in the "hot spot" known as the Metro DC region has been a priority initiative of the Virginia LWV. Previous League [reports](#) of studies on human trafficking noted that women and teens are disproportionately affected.

The [Position](#) of the National League on Human Trafficking: "The League of Women Voters opposes all forms of domestic and international human trafficking of adults and children, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking. We consider human trafficking to be a form of modern-day slavery and believe that every measure should be taken and every effort should be made through legislation and changes in public policy to prevent human trafficking. Prosecution and penalization of traffickers and abusers should be established, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. Extensive essential services for victims should be applied where needed. Education and awareness programs on human trafficking should be established in our communities and in our schools."

[\[CONTINUE READING THIS ARTICLE HERE\]](#)

**Hope to see you at the WLRT meetings.
[Here is a list of dates and times.](#)**