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Why We Vote

Deb Wake, President, LWV-VA

This is a big year for the League of Women Voters. One hundred years ago, our organization was formed out of the right for women to vote. From our inception, we championed voting rights. Why? Because laws did not protect women and children and others who lacked representation. In order to affect changes to the laws, our League founders reasoned that they needed to be able to vote for lawmakers who would represent them and pass laws accordingly.

On November 10, we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the League of Women Voters of Virginia. Because our anniversary is so close to Election Day, we are pushing the celebration back a month so that we can focus on the election and the fact that the results may take a while to determine.

We also recognize that the right to vote is precious and it comes at a cost--it has never been freely given--not to the mostly white women who suffered imprisonment and torture 100 years ago. Not to those who were bloodied and killed in the civil rights movement. Not to native Americans who were born on this soil but were not

allowed to vote because of their tax status. Not to Dreamers who were brought here as children and could not affect their status. Nor is the fight over for those who were incarcerated and had their right to vote stripped. We continue to advocate to expand voting access--especially during a pandemic when voters need to be able to cast their ballots without endangering their health.

We've been working across the state to register first time high school voters and to pass redistricting reform so that power is restored to voters. Voters need to be able to vote for lawmakers who represent them--not have lawmakers draw safe seats for themselves as part of the redistricting process.

Important Announcement Regarding Witness Signature for Absentee Ballots

To all Virginians voting by mail/absentee ballots for the November 3, 2020 elections: If you believe you may not safely have a witness present while completing the absentee ballot for the November 3, 2020 Election, you are not required to have a witness present or have a witness sign your ballot envelope. Your ballot will not be rejected due to a missing witness signature. These instructions override any instructions on your ballot envelopes regarding witness signatures.

Voting is a PRIVILEGE

Claudette Monroy, DREAMer and activist

Happy Hispanic Heritage Month! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Claudette Monroy, a DREAMer from Mexico, who is passionate about education, serving the immigrant and Latinx community and cooking all kinds of international food (currently trying out meatballs recipes from around the world). Every year from September 15 to October 15, the United States celebrates the traditions and influence of Hispanic, Latino and Latinx culture in this country. I am grateful for this month that elevates the hard work and the beauty of my community. Although, most of the time, I carry the pain and the sadness of how my community continues to be dehumanized, labeled and "othered".

As a DREAMer from Mexico, my identity is completely rooted in both Mexican and American culture. Now as a 33-year-old, I have lived more than half of my life in the United States. I love this country and I care about what I am contributing to make it the best it can be; not only for myself and for my community but for everyone.

Election year is always emotionally draining. It reminds me of my first years in the U.S. when I was a teenager and I was told to feel deep shame about my undocumented status and to fear being deported. (I no longer feel paralyzed by either shame or fear.) It also brings to the forefront of how, even if I pay taxes and I am an active member of society, I am still treated as a second-class citizen.

One of the most difficult aspects of election season, is that my future ,and the future of vulnerable and marginalized communities, is in the hands of those who have the privilege of voting. Some of whom do not understand that voting is a PRIVILEGE; it's power in your hands. Additionally, I think about all of those who

came before us, who fought hard for the right to vote. Women who fought for decades (almost 100 years!), I think of Black Americans and other people of color who risked their lives so that they could vote, and stop being treated as second-class citizens. Do not waste their fight and their sacrifice.

Even if this is a hard time that brings up pain and heartbreak, I try my best to hold onto hope. Hope that pushes me to keep fighting, to keep advocating, to keep elevating marginalized voices, to keep educating others. I hold onto the hope that one day, my community's livelihood and human rights will be an absolute given, irrevocable part of society, not dependent upon those who have the power to vote.

I challenge you to ask yourself, how are you using your power and privilege? How are you using that power and privilege to advocate for those who are part of marginalized communities? Are you wasting or utilizing the gift others fought for you to have? Are you fighting with everything you have to make this country the best it can be not only for yourself but for everyone?

Volunteering at the Polls

[Volunteer with Fairmaps to Answer Questions and Encourage Voters to Support Redistricting on the Ballot](#)

[Volunteer for Election Protection at the Polls](#)

Redistricting Forum

Register [Here](#)



**PEOPLE
POWERED**
FAIR MAPS™

SAVE THE DATE

**Racism and Redistricting: How Unfair
Maps Impact Communities of Color**

October 8, 2020
7 p.m. ET

LWV

New Laws Improve Access to the Ballot for Virginians

Lisa Koteen Gerchick, Chair, Election Integrity Committee, LWV Arlington

Early voting is underway in Virginia and there are several new measures aimed at making voting easier and safer for eligible voters. Within the past few months, new laws have eliminated any need to state a reason for voting before Election Day, removed the specific requirement for a photo on a voter's ID, eased the absentee ballot witness rule, provided for prepaid return postage on mail ballots, and instituted drop boxes where voters can put voted ballots they would otherwise mail.

In addition to the new laws applying to early voting, any registered voter can still go to the polls on November 3 to cast a ballot. To vote in Virginia, a person must be a U.S. citizen, be 18 years of age on or before the November 3 general election, be a resident of Virginia, and be registered to vote. The deadline for registering to vote is October 13.

In 2020, a new law was enacted that removes the requirement that voters must give an "excuse" to vote absentee, either in person or by mail, for the full 45-day early-voting period in Virginia. Early voting began September 18 and continues through October 31. In every county and city, voters can either go to their [registrar's office](#) to vote, go to a [designated early voting location](#), or [apply for a mail ballot](#) for voting from home.

Also in 2020, the law changed concerning the types of identification a voter must present at the polling place or when voting early in person. No longer must the voter show ID that includes a photo. Virginia driver's licenses are still accepted, but there is a long list of [acceptable forms of identification](#). These include the voter registration confirmation, a utility bill, bank statement, and employer or college and university IDs (including out-of-state).

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many voters are opting to vote by mail this year. To vote by mail, a voter must request a ballot from the local registrar. The last day to request a ballot by mail is October 23.

Any voter who chooses to vote in person, however, whether during the early voting period or on Election Day, should not apply for a ballot. Those voters receive their ballots when they go to vote. All they need to take with them is an appropriate form of identification.

Several new measures enacted on September 4, during the General Assembly's special session, reflect the need to take health precautions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Voters do not have to have a witness in order to vote absentee by mail. Those who live alone could be unwilling to expose themselves by finding a witness. During the primary elections, the League of Women Voters of Virginia, represented by the ACLU of Virginia, reached a court-approved consent decree with the state's Attorney General to allow a mailed ballot to be counted even if the voter did not have a witness. The new law also applies to the November 3 general election. Voters who request and receive their ballots in the mail and who do not have a witness can vote notwithstanding any printed instruction requiring a witness. The ballot will not be rejected even if there is no witness signature.

As voters who have received ballots in the mail will see, they do not need to put a stamp on the return envelope. The new law sets aside two million dollars for postage. The state will reimburse the local registrars for the cost of providing return postage.

Another way to return an absentee ballot is in a drop box. Drop boxes protect voters from contact with other people and have the advantage that the voter knows it will be received and counted. It does not go through the mail but is collected by election workers each day during the early voting period and on Election Day. Also, a voter who drops off a completed ballot does not have to stand in line or check in. Drop boxes can be found at the registrar's office and at early voting places. There will also be a drop box at every polling place on Election Day. Drop boxes are only for absentee ballots received in the mail. They substitute for a mailbox. Any voter who chooses to drop off the completed ballot must follow all the printed instructions for how to return the ballot. This includes placing the ballot in both an inner and outer return envelope. Then the voter can return the ballot either by mail or by taking it to a drop off location during the [hours when the drop off location is open](#).



To learn what is on the ballot, find one's polling place, or research candidates and ballot questions, the League of Women Voters offers a tool, www.VOTE411.org.

Governor's Challenge for High School Student Registration is Off and Running

Janet Boyd, Director of Voter Services, LWV-VA

Do you have or know a high school student who is or will be 18 years old by November 3, the date of the General Election? If so, now is the time to work with your student about registering to vote. And if your student will turn 18 by the General Election next year, in November 2021, the newly launched 2020-2021 Governor's Challenge for High School Registration is important resource for you and your student. The Challenge is scheduled to last through April 2021.

What is the Governor's Challenge? Late last month, Governor Northam, partnering with the LWV-VA, launched Virginia's Fifth Annual Governor's High School Voter Registration Challenge for 2020–2021. Every Virginia high school can participate in this program. Schools compete against each other to register the highest percentage of their voting-age population. Additionally, schools that reach or exceed 65 percent registration of their eligible senior class will receive a congratulatory certificate from the Governor. We need volunteers to reach out to every public and private high school in the Commonwealth to encourage them to participate. More details are on the LWV-VA website: <https://lwv-va.org/virginiahsvr/>.

Our task is to reach out to high school students while they are learning virtually this fall. We have materials designed specifically for high school students saved on the shared Voter Services Google Drive. Schools will get credit for each student who registers to vote, by using their school's unique URL via the Department of Elections' Citizen Portal. Please reach out to Janet Boyd, voterservices@lwv-va.org, if you can assist with high schools in your area.

Legislative Update

Julia Tanner, Action Coordinator, LWV-VA

What's happening with state legislation? The Virginia General Assembly is passing Special Session bills addressing the budget, the COVID-19 health crisis, and equity in the Virginia state and local justice systems.

Elections Changes Overview. The General Assembly rapidly passed Senate Bill [5120](#), supporting access to voting in the General Election. Brava to all who [contacted legislators](#)! Your advocacy made a difference.

As [the League proposed](#) in April and reinforced through meetings and filings, the [new law](#) provides for **absentee ballot drop off** locations, which can speed receipt of ballots, decrease opportunities for transmission of coronavirus, and lessen crowding at the polls on Election Day.

The new law also provides for **prepaid postage** on return envelopes for absentee ballots and **correction of certain procedural errors** by absentee voters.

Witnesses. The law strengthens a result won by the League in litigation: for the November 3, 2020 Election, a voter is not required to have a witness present. Accordingly, voters may [disregard](#) the witness signature requirement.

Redistricting. While the Virginia Senate has again filed "[enabling legislation](#)" for the redistricting constitutional amendment, in furtherance of diversity on the commission and avoidance of conflicts of interest, the House of Delegates is expected to reject passage at this time. In the [likely](#) event the constitutional amendment is passed by voters, signs indicate the General Assembly will then pass the enabling legislation, in order to provide these "guardrails." [Legislation](#) passed earlier delineates thoughtful criteria for redistricting.

Justice and Civil Rights. As of this writing, the General Assembly has started passing criminal justice and civil rights bills. These will reduce the penalties for possession of marijuana and certain minor traffic infractions ([SB 5013](#), [SB 5029](#)); provide for local civilian oversight boards for law enforcement agencies ([SB 5035](#)); and recognize June 19 of each year, Juneteenth, as a holiday ([SB 5031](#), [HB 5052](#)).

Additional criminal justice legislation appears likely although not assured. Bills still moving at this time include omnibus legislation ([SB 5030](#)) and bills requiring, for example, that law enforcement officers intervene to end unlawful use of force by another officer ([HB 5029](#)); mandatory crisis intervention team training ([SB 5014](#)); a statewide mental health awareness response system ([SB5038](#), [HB 5086](#), [HB 5043](#)); a bill ensuring decertification proceedings are initiated against officers who commit misconduct warranting decertification ([HB 5051](#)); permitting establishment of local law-enforcement civilian oversight bodies ([HB 5055](#)); adding a class 6 felony for sex by law enforcement with arrested individuals ([HB 5045](#)); reducing penalties for possession of marijuana and certain minor traffic infractions ([HB 5058](#)); establishing a process for automatic expungement of criminal records for certain convictions and dismissed offenses ([SB 5043](#), [HB 5146](#)); and revising the systems for compassionate release and earned sentence credits ([HB 5148](#), [SB 5034](#), [HB 782](#), [SB 5018](#)), among others.

Advocacy Issues Update

Joan Porte, First Vice President, LWV-VA

Our advocacy issue groups are designed to assist the advocacy team with information on legislative and regulatory changes that need to be made to further our goals. They may also suggest educational programs for League members and the public.

The Education Issue Group will meet via Zoom on October 16, 1 PM.

The Building Codes Subgroup of the Environment Group will host a discussion with Sarah Stillman, of the Sierra Club on the impact building codes on environmental management, November 23, 7 PM.

For the zoom link to either meeting, email: Firstvp@lwv-va.org.



Nottoway Land Added to Virginia Landmarks Register

Stephen Falesk

This article originally appeared in the September 24, 2020 issue of [The Tidewater News](#) and is reprinted by permission.

By the early 19th century, much of the two tracts had been sold off. Around 1830, the Nottoway began deeding the remaining lands under tribal control to individual tribe members — a process that continued for roughly 50 years. Millie Woodson-Turner, a Nottoway descendant born sometime in the early 1830s, received such an allotment around 1850 when she came of age.

“Millie and her sisters all received shares,” said Dr. Buck Woodard, an American University anthropologist who served as one of the co-principal investigators in the process of getting the Millie Woodson-Turner farm listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Turner is sometimes listed in land records as Millie Woodson, owing to the surname of her father. Turner was her mother’s surname. She later married a man with the last name of Hurst. Her children used different last names, one of them being Hurst.

Turner’s daughter, Susanna, who sometimes used the surname Hurst and sometimes Turner, died in 1949, which resulted in the family losing control of their allotment around 1950 due to back taxes.

“Native peoples controlled this tract of land from before Christopher Columbus through circa 1950,” Woodard said. “It’s an untold story. That’s what’s amazing.”

“The Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia has worked on this designation for the past five years in collaboration with DHR [Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources], archeologists and academic historians,” said Nottoway Chief Lynette Allston.

The DHR, which manages the Virginia Landmarks Register, will forward the documentation on the Millie Woodson-Turner site to the National Park Service for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Listing a property on state or national registers is honorary, and sets no restrictions on what property owners may do with said property.

“The designation is foremost an invitation to learn about and experience authentic and significant places in Virginia’s history,” said Randy Jones, a spokesman for the DHR. “Designating a property to the state or national registers — either individually or as a contributing building in a historic district — provides an owner the opportunity to pursue historic rehabilitation tax credit improvements to the building.”

While there are no longer any standing structures on the site dating to the days when Nottoway descendants lived there, the tribe’s and DHR’s interest in the site is archaeological in nature.

“So little is known about the lives of reservation people in the 18th and 19th centuries,” Woodard said, calling the listing an opportunity to “broaden the conversation about native Virginians to include the Iroquoian-speaking peoples.”

“Nat Turner happened while that reservation was there,” he said, referring to the 1831 rebellion of enslaved Blacks in Southampton County.

“This is an opportunity to look at a different story, a different experience,” he added. “Most of Virginia history focuses on the Powhatan.”

There were, in fact, three local native language groups in colonial times: Algonquian speakers like the Powhatan, Siouan speakers and Iroquoian speakers like the Nottoway, who actually referred to themselves as Cheroenhaka. Algonquian speakers referred to the Cheroenhaka as “na-da-wa,” meaning “snake” or “enemy,” to some and “traders” to others, which the English repeated as “Nottoway.”

LWV-VA Fall Workshop Recap

Jane Hill, LWV Washington County

I attended the meeting via Zoom and found the meeting worthwhile. Certainly cost effective- \$22 versus cost to drive, hotel, etc.

I specifically attended the meeting to determine if our funding LWVUS and LWV-VA is worth our \$48 for every \$50 paid. I must say my conclusion is a resounding “Yes”!

1. Among other things, the LWVUS serves us locally and powerfully through litigation. There were 40 lawsuits filed just related to voter suppression. ACLU represented LWV-VA in filing the lawsuit that removed the VA witness requirement on absentee ballots. 15 lawsuits are still ongoing.
2. The LWV-VA demonstrates skill in presence, information, and lobbying in our VA General Assembly as well as action-oriented guidelines for local activity.

In hearing local Leagues around the state report activities, I applaud those few people in our small local League that are getting wonderful things done. The power locally is encouraging participation in local elections, protection of our local voting process, and clear simple instructions in how to vote. An example is the upcoming local election forums via Zoom and the excellent handout that Merry made regarding when/how to vote this year.

I still find the format for LWV position determination far too cumbersome but others find the long process worthwhile.

I recommend watching the first 2 presentations from the workshop:

- A. “How to Get out the Vote” by Maggie Bush LWVUS
- B. “How To Combat Voter Suppression” by Andrea Miller of the Center for Common Ground (Poor People’s Campaign of Virginia). This latter group is a tech company organization that works for people of color. Amazing tech work. Has currently

200,000 volunteers nationwide. MSNBC uses one of its apps on election nights for identifying trouble spots at polling places.

These 2 presentations are a total of 1 hour and 20 minutes. They lifted me out of the sense of overwhelm. 2 excellent powerpoint presentations.

Workshop materials and recordings can be found [here](#).

Celebrate Our Past and Forge Our Future: The League of Women Voters of Virginia 100th Anniversary

Joan Porte, First Vice President, LWV-VA

Join other League members for a celebration of “100 Years of Perseverance” – the 100th birthday of the League of Women Voters of Virginia on December 10, 2020 at 7pm for a Virtual Event.

Speakers include Mari Julienne of the Library of Virginia who will discuss Virginia Suffrage efforts and LWV member and former LWVUS Executive Director, Nancy Tate, who will focus on League history. She will also have several ideas on how we can all preserve our history.

Local League presidents will highlight their past accomplishments and share their hope for our future.

THEN we PARTY! Bring a cupcake, brownie or whatever (perhaps an adult beverage) to the screen – with a candle and we will have a group celebration of US.

RSVP [here](#) to get the ZOOM link.

Bring Your Ballot to the Booth

October 6 at 7:30pm, LWV-VA is partnering with National Council of Jewish Women and Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights to answer your absentee ballot questions. Click [here](#) to register for this free event.

We Have VOTE411 Masks



GET A JUMP ON YOUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING AND SUPPORT THE LEAGUE!

Shop at home! <https://lww-va.org/lww-of-virginia-shop/>
Our three-layered fabric masks are a great way to remind people to vote – and to use 411. These are also great for people who live out of state because they do not have “Virginia” stamped on them. The perfect “stocking stuffer” for friends near and far.

Another gift good for people all over the country – and the world – is our red t-shirt – celebrating 100 years of the League “Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy.” What better way to remind people that

Democracy is not free? For Virginia lovers, try our purple and gold “sash” long sleeved t-shirt. We only have a few of these left in stock.

Our silver ERA lapel pin is the perfect reminder that Virginia was THE state – the 38th to ratify – and that the fight is not over. If you want a more casual pin to stick on your coats and sweaters this winter, you can choose from one of the four that come in our “pin set.”

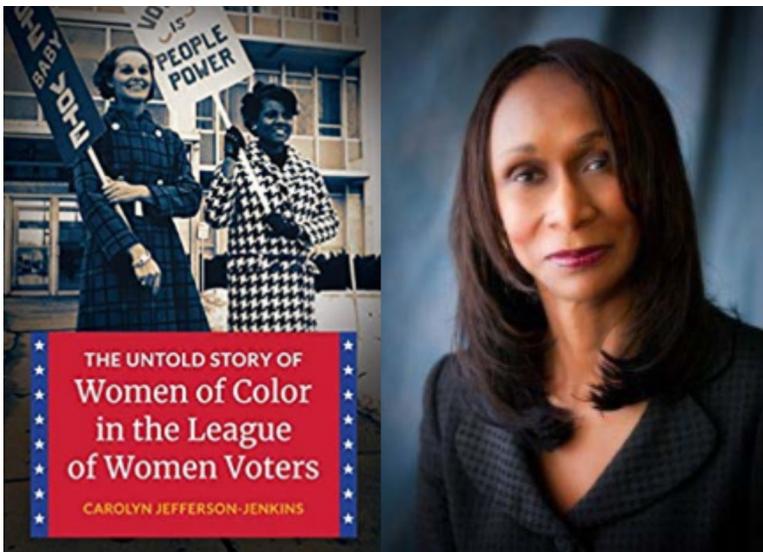
Order today. For questions contact Joan Porte at firstvp@lwv-va.org.

Save the Date for Pre-session, December 2

Joan Porte, First Vice President, LWV-VA

Pre-Session will be virtual this year – but we will still have our stellar line up of speakers sharing their legislative goals for 2021. Of course, you will hear from our Advocacy Team! More information to come.

Save the Date for LWV-VA 2021 Convention



Virginia League State Convention 2021 will take place May 21-23, 2021 at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center. The theme will be: Democracy for All – Now is the Time. Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins, former President of LWVUS and author of The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters, has accepted our invitation to speak at the Opening Session. We are looking for members who can help with fundraising and identifying exhibitors for the convention. We are also in need of a sign language interpreter. If interested, please [email](mailto:convention@lwv-va.org) convention organizers: Judy Helein, Kathy Matusiak, and Sabeena Rajpal.

Important Election Dates



- NOW [Check your registration](#)
- NOW [Request Absentee Ballot](#)
- October 13 Deadline to Register to Vote
- October 23 Deadline to request Absentee Ballot
- October 31 Last day for in-person early voting
- November 3 Election Day