

I. LWV-VA Position in Brief – Affordable Housing - Proposed Consensus Statement

The League of Women Voters supports state funding mechanisms and laws/policies that increase the supply of and equal access to safe, quality, affordable housing for all Virginians.

II. LWV-VA History

The LWV-VA has not adopted a specific LWV-VA position on affordable housing. The LWV-VA has however adopted a position on housing that is included in Social Policy/Behavioral Health (*LWV-VA Positions for Actions, 2018, p. 28*):

“C) Housing

The League recognizes the need for affordable and permanent supportive community-based housing and residential services. These services would enable Virginians with a wide range of behavioral health needs to live as independently as possible in their home communities. Some required initiatives are:

- Enhanced funds for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund.
- Private/public partnerships to obtain housing for the mentally ill.
- Consider a waiver for Medicaid to pay for counseling for housing options.
- Establish tax credits or other financial incentives for landlords and developers who build affordable housing, and local government policies that increase affordable housing stock.

III. LWVUS Position:

The LWVUS supports equal access to education, employment, and housing. (*Impact on Issues: A Guide to Public Policy Positions, 2018-2020, p. 14*). LWV-US has a formal position on equal opportunity for housing (*Impact on Issues, p. 115*), has supported fair housing laws (*Impact on Issues, p. 117*), and lists housing, or shelter, as one of the basic human needs (*Impact on Issues, p. 136*). The LWVUS has supported every major piece of federal housing legislation including the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, the 1987 Housing and Community Development Act and the 2002 National Housing Trust Fund (*Impact on Issues, p. 139*). The LWVUS also specifies that the federal government has the primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families and that the states’ role is to supplement what the federal government is doing (*Impact on Issues, p. 136-37*).

IV. LWV-VA Issue Study: Affordable Housing Scope

At the May 17-19, 2019 Convention, delegates adopted the recommended study to Review a State-Wide Affordable Housing Position:

“The Study would focus its efforts on affordable housing for people at very low income (VLI) or 50% of Area Median Income and below and would mainly focus on rental housing (State maximum income for 50% AM is \$29,650 for a household of one and \$42,350 for a household of four.

Specific housing issues that the study could examine and make advocacy recommendations about would include the following:

- 1) Increasing the supply and preserving existing VLI housing through increases in the State’s Housing Trust Fund (DHCD), funding for additional Permanent Supportive Housing for persons with serious mental illness (DBHDS) and potential changes to proffers and affordable dwelling unit laws.
- 2) Researching the possibility of creating a State Low Income Housing Tax Credit program that would mirror the Federal LHITC program and targeting households with VLI.
- 3) Removing barriers to siting affordable housing through law changes such as inclusionary zoning.
- 4) Reviewing landlord/tenant law changes that mainly protect landlords resulting in extremely high eviction rates.
- 5) Fair Housing law changes, such as source of income that would enable tenants with vouchers to rent in any neighborhood.”

Attached is the full Affordable Housing Study Report. All 14 local leagues reviewed the report and/or held meetings to study the report summary through presentations, and for the most part, reached consensus on all study questions. Attached is a summary consensus report of the local leagues.

V. LWV-VA Position in Full (Proposed Consensus Statement):

The LWV-VA supports funding mechanisms that would increase the supply of and equal access to affordable housing and help people maintain their housing. These include but are not limited to:

1. The Virginia Housing Trust Program, administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which provides low or no interest loans to develop and preserve affordable housing and provides grants to reduce and prevent homelessness.
2. Permanent Supportive Housing, administered by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental services, which provides rental assistance and support services to individuals with serious mental illness who are either chronically homeless, discharged from state hospitals or unstably housed and frequent users of health and criminal justice systems.
3. Homeless programs and services through DHCD that are targeted at reducing and preventing homelessness and getting people into permanent housing as quickly as possible.
4. Eviction Prevention/Diversion Programs through DHCD that would provide short-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services for households who are behind on their

rent and in danger of being evicted.

5. A State Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program as a companion to the federal LIHTC program, which has been the primary federal funding source for the development and preservation of affordable rental housing. Investors in developments receive tax credits that provide developers equity in a project. A companion state LIHTC would add additional equity to the project and could potentially target households at very low incomes.
6. A State-funded Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) to supplement the underfunded and oversubscribed federal HCV program, where the low-income household pays 30% of its income for rent, and the remainder is paid by the voucher.

The LWV-VA also supports laws and regulations/policies that ensure equal access to affordable housing, remove barriers to the creation of affordable housing, and help people stay in their housing. Examples include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring tenants who hold a Housing Choice Voucher equal access to an apartment where they choose to live by requiring landlords who own four or more units to accept voucher-holders if they meet the same rental criteria as other prospective tenants, provided their tenancy is approved in 15 days.
2. Through state enabling legislation, allowing all localities in Virginia the right to adopt mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinances that provide incentives to developers to add affordable housing units in their multi-family projects.
3. Providing more tenant protections in state law to help tenants maintain their housing that include measures such as capping late fees and extending pay or quit time periods.
4. Mitigating the impact of evictions with state laws allowing an automatic expungement of an eviction from a record if the case is dismissed and setting a reasonable timeframe for expunging a record in all evictions.