



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF WARREN COUNTY



Encouraging active and informed participation in government since 1960

The Voter

Summer 2023

1. Phyllis Wright, VP for Communications, attended **the LWVPA State Convention** in Harrisburg, June 16-18. For her full report, *see p. 2-4*.
 - Hot topics at this year’s convention:
 - Navigating Non-Partisanship during a Hyper Partisan Time – *See p. 4*.
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Updating some policies and by-laws
2. **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy** – *See p. 5-6*.

Did you know that our League has adopted a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy? Help us think about how to “operationalize” this policy! Here’s a brief summary:
“The Warren County League of Women Voters is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of any characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization’s current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.”
3. **2022-23 LWVWC** – In case you missed these (or to celebrate your memories if you participated):
 - a. With the help of the Sally Sokolski Fund, the League of Women Voters of Warren County, led by stellar editor Sally Eaton, produced an up-to-date Government Directory and distributed 2000 copies thereof.
 - b. Phyllis Wright made a public presentation entitled “Making the PA Legislature More Effective” in which she shared insights from FairDistrictsPA and FixHarrisburg about the need for better legislative rules in PA.
 - c. Voter Services activities were highlighted by Voter Registration at the Farmers’ Market in the fall and at the Warren County LGBTQTA Rally on June 17, as well as contact with 6 schools, resulting in at least 50 opportunities for new registration.
 - d. On March 15, we sponsored a two-part public meeting, including a presentation by Attorney Andrea Stapleford about recent updates to PA’s Sunshine Laws and a presentation by LWVWC about our Election Reform Study and its results.
 - e. On May 10, we hosted a very successful forum for candidates for Warren County Commissioner, ably moderated by Barbara McGuinness and chaired by LWVWC President, Susan Swab. The recording is on our website.
 - f. Our May 31 Annual Meeting featured a great presentation from Wendy Anderson of the Allegheny National Forest. She presented a great historical overview of the Forest, which is celebrating its Centennial this year.
4. **In Memoriam** – Our League lost 2 wonderful members this year, **Ellen Ruffalo and Bob Sokolsi**. *See more on p. 4-5*.
5. **What’s Up with FairDistricts PA and #Fix Harrisburg** – *See p. 6*
6. **Sunshine Week: A Volunteer Opportunity** – *See p. 7*

Summary Report of 2023 PA LWV State Convention

June 16-18, 2023

For Warren LWV, by Phyllis Wright, - member/ delegate
(Seven, one hour daily Zoom calls prepared delegates for this meeting.)

Highlighted speakers- Kadida Kenner of New PA Project Citizen Education Fund- chief executive officer. She is an advocate for social and economic justice issues, empower voters, passage of judicial gerrymandering, constitutional amendment, raising minimum wage, fairly fund public education, and protect federal courts from extremist attempts to undermine their independence. There are 1.2 million PA citizens eligible to vote, but are not registered. This organization goes door to door encouraging people to vote. They focus on ways voting is hindered as transportation access, ballots not clearly understood, gerrymandering, etc.

Video messages were from Speaker of PA House of Representative Joanna McClinton and Senate President Pro Tempore – Kim Ward, plus meeting the President of the National Council of Negro Women PA

Workshop speakers:

- PA Youth Vote – organization who organizes yearlong school voting programs with school districts in Philly
- Fair District PA – update on gerrymandering, legislative rules, etc.
- *Navigating Among Partisanship during a Hyper Partisan Time – remaining political but non partisan
- LWV PA board structure Task force

Discussion / Caucus groups:

- Growing Diverse Membership with a DEI Lens
- Juneteenth and Its Significance for the League
- Education Funding
- Climate Crisis – Next Steps

There were 84 voting league members from across PA. All voting done by cell phones.

Many awards were given to outstanding members, local leagues, and cooperating organizations.

Adoption of budget

Revenue LWV of PA total \$285, 236. (membership dues, sale of promotional items)

LWV of PA Citizen Ed Fund total \$827,219 (programming)

Expenses

LWV of PA total \$285,144

LWV of PA Citizen Ed Fund total \$595,702

It was noted that grants and other contributions were the income for the 50C3 Citizen ED Fund and currently this where most money goes as it is tax deductible.

Goals of budget:

- Strengthen the organization identity and social media advertising
- Increase local league impact and engagement funds for local league programming and state staff offering local leagues support
- DEI – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion workshops and communications
- Building sustainable board – A \$500 stipend is given to board members for travel, communications, etc.
- Enhancing Policy and Program Advocacy
- Voter Service Position – new hire staff

There is a “1920 Donation Circle” designated for PA LWV members donating \$500+ to the Citizens Ed. Fund

Election of Board of Directors –

Elected co presidents Mary Grill of Lancaster Co. and Maria Delgado – Santana of Lawrence Co. *The other 10 board members elected will be on the PA LWV web page.*

By Laws – all the below took the major business of the convention HUGH, HUGH!!!

Reinstating Associate Membership category which is anyone not qualifying for membership and are without voting privileges (example – Non citizens, younger students)

Ranking of VP if the current president is not able to serve. VP of Administration and VP of Policy, and clarifying Executive Committees’ power.

The league term of “PA Member Units” is now “Member at Large Units” where there is no league in the community.

The total amount to be paid annually by each league and provisional league will be determined by the number of paid voting members based on the official membership roster which is used by the LWVUS. The old method was the second fiscal quarter roster.

Programs – Much time was taken on clarifying these words:

Program – term of the issues that members/ local leagues have chosen for study and action from local leagues.

Includes detail resources, seeking experts in the field of study and adoption by local leagues for the program years. This is a money and time costly process.

Study – a research committee gathers information for local study for committee to read consider and discuss.

Consensus – study members reach consensus on their responses. Then appropriate board (local, state, national) forms a position based on the consensus.

Position – member agreement based on consensus and approved by the board.

LWVPA positions are included in WHERE WE STAND and IMPACT ON ISSUES

Changes of the following LWV PA positions – Major business time was taken on this part of meetings

Representative Government – The league supports nonpartisan merit selection of trial and appellate judges. Until such merit selection becomes a reality, all candidates for elected judicial office should be permitted to cross-file. We support retention elections for trial and appellate judges. Update study to include details on the timing, resources, deficiencies on confirmation process, the term “merit”, issue of bias, power taken from voters, campaign finance, pros and cons of appointment versus election, transparency and reducing political influence.

Natural Resource- Marcellus Shale change to continue study on proper decommissioning of wells, banded wells and reclamation of lands. The study is to include transportation of hazard materials including natural gas (Note much business time was taken on determine how extensive this study would be expanded.)

“Pooling” - clarifying the term to reflect procedures for shutting down wells. This is only for review, not study

Social Policy – Child Health and Welfare

Recommended Updates on Juvenile Justice - includes disparities by race and low income of youth incarcerated, type of placement as institution, homes, etc. monitoring of children, successful transition to adulthood, education etc.

Following is concurrence statement:

PA LWV supports LWV of California’s “Climate Smart Agriculture and Food Action Policy” relating to economics, sustainable and boi-diverse agricultural practices, reducing waste of food, human labor issues, energy, natural resources, reducing greenhouse gases, etc.

Further Recommendations to focus: *these are areas local groups may consider of interest for various community programs*

Representation Government: election and voting systems, open primaries, elimination of electoral college or passage of National Popular Vote compact, legislative rules and collaborative policymaking, Constitutional Amendment processes, and redistricting.

Social Policy: digital equity, gun safety, education, fair school funding, criminal justice, reproductive choices, living wage, increasing immigrant access to basic privileges and services.

Natural Resources: water conservation, zero-waste initiatives, environment justice.

I was impressed with the two PA LWV office leaders, especially their organizational skills: Meg Pierce –Ex. Director and Samantha Anthony – Membership and Operations Associate

Navigating Non-Partisanship during a Hyper Partisan Time

Phyllis drew our attention to this Hot Topic from the State Convention – a workshop hosted by the Bucks County League. In the current, very partisan atmosphere for just about every issue, whether local, state, regional, or national, people who differ with the League on the positions we take want to paint the League as partisan. Our behavior in public, in the media, and on social media can reinforce the League’s long tradition of non-partisanship, or we can slip up and inadvertently get ourselves painted as taking partisan positions or even favoring individual candidates. There are many [resources on the national League of Women Voters web site](#) to help us avoid such a crisis and guide us to success in remaining non-partisan without giving up our advocacy on issues we’ve studied carefully and thoughtfully.

One area that is particularly vulnerable to hyper-partisanship is social media, and the League gives some good tips aimed primarily at League leaders and spokespeople, but worth reviewing even if you are neither leader nor spokesperson. Check out the League’s “[Non-partisanship on Social Media](#)” to learn more.

Note: If the two links above don’t work, try this. Go to www.lwv.org, scroll to the very bottom of the home page, click on League Management (lower right), choose the drop down menu “Operations and Guidance,” and from that menu “Policies and Guidance.” The link to “Non-partisanship on social media” is a subtopic on the page “Sharing the League’s Non-Partisanship and DEI Commitments with Members & Leaders.”

In Memoriam

The League of Women Voters of Warren County lost two members in 2023.

- The model of good citizenship and committed League service provided by 50-year LWV member **Ellen Ruffolo** will inspire us for a long time. As she had chaired many, many candidate forums, we included a public dedication of this year’s forum to her memory. Her obituary in the *Times Observer* read, in part:

Ellen Ruffolo, 87, beloved friend, mother, and community servant, of Warren, PA., died at Hospice House on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, after an extended illness. She was born August 20, 1935, in Burlington, VT. Ellen

was the daughter of Harold George and Emma Douglas Austin. She had resided in Warren since 1980. Ellen was a graduate of Burlington High School and the University of Michigan, where she earned a Bachelor's of Arts Degree. She earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh. Ellen was employed with the Mental Health Clinic in Warren County, Warren General Hospital from 1983 and retired from Hospice of Warren County in 2014.

Her life was devoted to her community; she served on the boards of Hospice of Warren County, the Transit Authority of Warren County, the League of Women Voters, and other bodies. She volunteered at the Warren Library, the Cray Gallery, and in many other civic groups as well.

She will be greatly missed.

- A model of philanthropy and leadership is also provided by **Bob Sokolski**. In recent years, we have depended on Bob to support our appeals to the Sally Sokolski Fund for production of our government directories, and on his passionate support for the League's work to end gerrymandering. His obituary in the *Times Observer* read, in part:

Robert Daniel (Bob) Sokolski passed peacefully in his home on Friday, June 30, 2023, at the age of 90. Born in Flushing, Queens, New York, March 7, 1933, Bob went to The Bronx School of Science High School and then on to Dartmouth College.

It was at Dartmouth Bob met his best and lifelong friend Hal Conarro. Hal will tell you one of the smartest decisions he ever made in life was to convince Bob to move to Warren, PA and become lifelong business partners in 1960.

Bob was introduced to his future wife and lifelong partner Sally Plumb Sokolski (thanks to Hal Conarro). Their marriage was a true partnership. Bob and Sally always put philanthropy as a top priority. Their fingerprints and heart and soul are found in over 100 nonprofits throughout Warren County.

Bob, too, will be deeply missed.

Warren County League of Women Voters Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy

The Warren County League of Women Voters is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, political perspective or affiliation and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy, Statement of Implementation:

Our work should be measured against the yardstick of a DEI Lens the goal being to ensure that all members, volunteers, and the public are treated with respect and that League and League endorsed activities are welcoming to all individuals, groups, and communities.

In order to build and maintain equity within the organization, the Board of Directors has established the following guidelines:

1. All Board members are expected to understand, demonstrate good faith and practice adherence to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy, as written. Examples include but are not limited to partnerships, outreach events and membership training.
2. All DEI statements may not lessen or diminish the intention and impact of the League of Women Voters Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy. We encourage reading and displaying the DEI Policy.
3. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion should be actively sought, not just in membership development, but in recruitment for leadership and full representation in policy-making and leadership positions.
4. Transparency is expected in all areas of League work, including recruitment, policy-making, and decision-making.
5. Meetings and activities should be welcoming for all and consider the time, place, cost, and comfort-level of everyone. Community outreach initiatives should be inclusive to everyone.
6. The league shall provide appropriate and ongoing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training to its members. Leadership should participate in LWV PA equity training and support and implement League endorsed equity practices.
7. Should a LWV Board Member, or any other member, be confronted with a situation involving a question of discrimination or other violation of rights:
 - Report to and consult with the LWVPA
 - Seek reconciliation through consideration of all parties involved.
 - Implement agreed upon changes that will resolve and prevent future acts of discrimination or abuse.
 - Enact new strategies and programs which ensure full inclusion and equity.

What's Up with FairDistricts PA and #Fix Harrisburg

You may recall that FairDistricts PA and the #Fix Harrisburg campaign worked hard first, to get the best politically possible outcome for redistricting after the 2020 census. Then, with a legislature elected from the districts that resulted, the #FixHarrisburg campaign highlighted the many ways that the standard legislative rules that had governed the PA House and Senate for many terms got in the way of bipartisan solutions and true legislative representation of constituents. There, too, progress was made. But not enough. On the FairDistricts PA website, look for a story entitled [Breaking Rules. Breaking a Simple BiPartisan Solution](#). It starts with this question: “Try to imagine for a moment what mileage reimbursement for ambulance services has to do with school choice vouchers for students in the bottom 15% of Pennsylvania schools.”

You can see in an instant that this story is highly relevant to the on-going search for a good solution to our emergency services crisis in Warren County, and you can see in the next instant why legislative rules matter.

Next up for Fair Districts? The next census is only seven years from now. It's time to start working toward a constitutional amendment that would mandate that the next redistricting effort be completed by an independent commission.

Sunshine Week – Are You the One to Lead LWVWC Programming?

Sunshine Week 2024 is in the week of March 16 to coincide with the National Freedom of Information Day, which occurs on the same day. This year, it takes place from March 10 to 16. Did you know that when the United States signed the Freedom of Information Act into law in 1966, it was the third country in the world to do that? Sunshine Week raises awareness of the importance of open government and promotes dialogue on the impact of excessive official secrecy. Public discussions on open government with participants, including nonprofits, schools, civic groups, and media organizations.

Under the able leadership of Jennifer Bliss, the LWV of Warren County has led our county's celebration of Sunshine Week with a variety of interesting programs, most recently a very informative talk by attorney Andrea Stapleford about recent changes to Pennsylvania's Sunshine Law requirements. One idea for our 2024 celebration would be to invite someone from the news site Spotlight PA to talk about their site and the importance of government transparency from their point of view.

Jennifer is ready to pass the torch to another member, and quite willing to help her successor take on this very clearly defined and one-shot per year opportunity. Please contact Jennifer at jenniferblisswc@gmail.com for more information.