



The Mass. League Voter

A newsletter for members of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

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CALENDAR

Friday, Jan. 31	Deadline to Update LWVUS Membership Database
Saturday, Feb. 1	Launch of LWVMA Student Video Contest
Monday, Feb. 17	Daniel Scharfman Citizen Education Grant Deadline
Friday, Feb. 28	LWVMA Board Meeting, 11am - 2pm, LWVMA office
Saturday, March 1	LWVUS Program Planning Due
Saturday, March 8	League Leaders' Lunch, 11am - 3pm, Wellesley Unitarian Universalist Church
Wednesday, March 26	LWVMA Day on the Hill, MA State House
Friday, March 28	LWVMA Board Meeting, 11am - 2pm, LWVMA office
Monday, March 31	Deadline for Student Video Contest Entries
Saturday, May 10	LWVMA Council 10am - 4pm, Framingham State University

CO-PRESIDENTS' LETTER

A Word from Anne and Marilyn

Happy New Year from the League! We had an incredibly busy, productive, and exciting Fall!

We are especially pleased that Meryl Kessler joined us in November as Executive Director. Literally within days, it both seemed like she had been with us forever, and we wondered how we had gotten along without her! We hope that you will all have a chance to meet Meryl in the next few months; you will be as thrilled as we are.



The Massachusetts League made its voice heard in several areas:

- We joined an *amicus* brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold the 2007 Massachusetts buffer zone law that protects women seeking services at abortion clinics.
- LWVMA was one of the three lead organizations that collected 130,000 signatures to put an updated bottle bill on the November 2014 ballot. League members across the state collected 20,000 of those signatures!
- LWVMA, as a member of the Election Modernization Coalition, worked hard for election reform. Massachusetts League members answered the call and sent many messages to their elected representatives. The result is a very good bill. We are not yet done, as you will read in the [article](#).
- Again due to your participation, this year's Fall Appeal and Phonathon look to be one of the most successful ever!

But, the work of the League never ends... We have a lot coming up in the next several months: Day on the Hill, Council 2014, legislative advocacy, League Day at Fenway Park, LWVUS 2014 Convention, plus much more.

We want to give special mention to a new youth civic engagement program: *Dear Future Governor... Student Video Contest*. We are very excited about this new program - we hope that you will help publicize it in your community.

You will find more detail about all of these programs and initiatives in this newsletter. It is the work of a great team, and we are very proud to work with such committed, hardworking, and generally awesome League members! We hope you will join us! You will have fun and make a difference.

Marilyn Anne

EVENTS

LWVMA Video Contest Launches Feb. 1



Join the fun!

Interested in getting involved with a high school program sponsored by the League? Be part of an exciting initiative designed to foster youth civic awareness! LWVMA seeks volunteers now to publicize, judge, and sponsor its "Dear Future Governor..." Student Video Contest.

What is the "Dear Future Governor..." Student Video Contest? The Massachusetts gubernatorial election is just 10 months away! LWVMA is asking Massachusetts high school students to submit two-minute videos illustrating a problem or issue in their communities that the next Governor should address. First place wins \$1000; second place wins \$500; and third place wins \$250. The winning videos will be displayed on our website.

Who can enter? The Contest is open to any Massachusetts high school student in grades 9-12.

When is the Contest? Entries may be submitted online starting Saturday, Feb. 1, 2014. The deadline for submissions is Monday, March 31, 2014. Judging will take place in April, and winners will be announced in May.

What can you do? We need League volunteers to help publicize the Contest at local high schools and community centers. We also need judges and sponsors. For further information about the Contest visit www.lwvma.org. Download a flyer [here](#).

Questions or want to get involved? Email LWVMA Executive Director [Meryl Kessler](#) or call 617-523-2999.

Council 2014 on "Civility and Politics: Challenge to Good Government"

Council 2014 will be Saturday, May 10, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m at [Framingham State University](#). Watch for the Call to Council in mid-March for more details.

Council this year will focus on the issue of civility in elections and government. In this era of blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and talk radio, the lack of civil discourse is making its way into town and city politics. You may have seen the impact in your own town.

This incivility is affecting whether candidates are willing to run for public offices and to serve on public boards and committees. We will consider this issue and explore roles for LWV in improving the civic conversation, particularly at the local level.

Council is an opportunity for League members to come together to share League experiences, explore the theme topic, learn what's happening around the state, and attend workshops to help you and your League be more effective. All members of LWVMA are welcome to attend Council, including local League members and Members-at-Large.



Take the League out to the Ball Game!



Save the date Sunday, May 18 for League of Women Voters day at Fenway Park!

After last August's fun-filled event, we are looking to make a League day with the Red Sox an annual outing. Information on purchasing tickets for this game will be sent to all our

members soon. Watch your inbox and make plans now to come to the game with family and friends.

ADVOCACY

Day on the Hill is March 26

Make your voice heard at the State House. The League's annual lobbying day is Wednesday, March 26, starting at 10 a.m.

This year's theme is advocacy on Beacon Hill - and beyond. State Auditor Suzanne Bump will speak about her office's work and how League members can effectively approach executive branch offices about issues in their communities. We also hope to have a state Senator discuss how Leagues can work with organizations in nearby cities which don't have local Leagues.



And your legislative specialists will have information on bills the League supports so that you can effectively ask your Senators and Representatives to take action on them. Remember, the more people who talk to their legislators, the more influence the League has in election reform, gun safety, campaign finance reform, environmental issues, and other important areas.

Consider organizing a carpool of interested members from your League and then contact your state legislators for an appointment after the morning's program ends at noon.

If you plan to invite your legislator to lunch, please schedule lunch after 1 p.m. so other Leagues in that legislator's district have a chance to talk to him or her between 12 p.m. and 1.

Pending in the Legislatures

With the legislature back in session after its holiday break, several bills the League has been working on are likely to come to the floor for votes over the next few weeks. Look for Action Alerts and please contact your legislators when alerted to do so. Even when legislators are supporters of a bill, it makes a big difference if they can tell the leadership

their constituents are in favor of legislation.

Election Reform: As you know, the Senate passed a very strong election reform bill Jan. 16, including just about every significant improvement in voting procedures: Election Day registration, early voting with some required weekend hours, pre-registration for 16-year-olds, online voter registration and an online portal where citizens can check their voting status, and post-election audits of random precincts. It ties classification of a voter as inactive to voting history rather than to returning the town or city census form. Amendments to require voters to show a photo ID or other forms of identification before casting a ballot were defeated.

We hope the conference committee reconciling the House and Senate bills keeps these important reforms and makes Massachusetts a leader in the nation in voting rights, an important distinction at a time when states around the country are passing laws restricting voting rights. We are lobbying the conference committee to do just that. If you missed it, take a look at our [letter to the editor](#) in the Boston Globe that ran the day of the Senate vote, and also the Globe's [editorial](#) that day with a nod to the League's work.

Campaign Finance - "Disclose Act": Massachusetts' version of the Disclose Act, S.321/H.651, is expected to be reported out of committee soon with some provision to require real-time disclosure of the source of campaign contributions.

Gun Safety: A gun safety bill should also be reported out of the joint committee in the coming weeks, after House Speaker DeLeo's task force on gun violence releases its report, expected by the end of January. The Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence, which LWVMA belongs to, is monitoring that situation, and we will recommend action once we know what provisions are in the bill.

Civic Education: LWVMA will be testifying at the Department of Primary and Secondary Education's upcoming public hearing on civic education, Feb. 24. LWVMA will address the importance of a strong civic education program in the schools, following up on the work of the legislature's Special Commission on Civic Engagement and Learning, which issued its report, *Renewing the Social Compact*, at the end of 2012. Terry Yoffie, our Education Specialist, served on that commission.

League Brings Updated Bottle Bill Closer to Updated Bottle Law



(The article below was prepared by LWVMA and posted as a blog on the [LWVUS website](#). It was written by Karen Price, Vice President, Lynn Wolbarst, Environmental Specialist, and Launa Zimmaro, Director and Environmental Specialist.)

[The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts](#) (LWVMA) along with our coalition partners, have been [advocating updating our current bottle deposit law](#) for the past 10 years. Massachusetts has had a bottle deposit law since 1983, charging a 5-cent

deposit for bottles and cans for carbonated beverages. The [updated bottle bill](#) would extend the deposit to containers of non-carbonated beverages-the on-the-go water, tea, and sports drinks that have exploded onto the market since the original law was enacted. In Massachusetts [the bottle deposit law is the most successful recycling measure in the history of the state](#), but it could be even more effective with passage of the updated bill. Currently, 80 percent of carbonated beverage containers are recycled/redeemed, while 23 percent of non-carbonated beverage containers are recycled, the rest going into the solid waste stream.

The updated bottle bill has been a priority issue for LWVMA for many years. LWVMA Specialist, Lynn Wolbarst, with guidance from legislative director Carole Pelchat, has [testified](#) in favor of the updated bottle bill in each of the past four, two-year sessions of the Legislature, including at the most recent hearing in September. In April 2012, at our [annual Day on the Hill lobbying event](#), our legislative specialists expressed the frustration of trying to get this popular bill before the Legislature. One of our members in attendance rallied us to action with "Let's go to the Speaker's office now!" Spontaneously members banded together, made impromptu signs, and marched up the State House grand staircase to the Speaker's office where we assembled in the hallway and broke out into a rousing rendition of "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall," with appropriate lyrical modifications such as, "One hundred bottles of water on the wall, one hundred bottles of water. Take one down, recycle it, ninety-nine bottles of water on the wall..." As a result of our musical advocacy, a few of us were invited into the Speaker's office to speak with staffers about our concerns!

Fast forward to Fall 2013, and our coalition has decided to move forward on the option of passing the bill by [ballot question](#) essentially by-passing the inactive Legislature. Given the spontaneous display of support 18 months earlier, it was no surprise that 36 Massachusetts Leagues answered the call to collect the 10,000 signatures LWVMA promised to collect. Leagues large and small across the state answered the call and collected anywhere from 50 to 3,000 signatures. In fact, our Leagues surpassed LWVMA's original goal by collecting 20,000 signatures, and making a significant contribution to [the total of 130,000 signatures collected](#), leading to [the Secretary of State's announcement that the initiative petition qualified](#), with well over the required amount of certified signatures.

What were the keys to our success? League members had been waiting for an opportunity to do grassroots advocacy work on this bill after a frustrating 10 years working on the legislative route. And while the bill has widespread support and signature-gatherers reported overwhelming support when talking to citizens collecting signatures, a well-organized effort was required. In eight short weeks LWVMA organized the local Leagues, set up weekly reporting, collected the signatures and delivered them. Our efforts paid off when we doubled our pledge.

But the road to a passage of this bill, either through the legislative process or as a ballot question, has many hurdles and is arduous by design. We will only attain true success when the updated bottle bill becomes law. The Legislature has another chance to pass the bill. If the petition is rejected by the Legislature or the Legislature fails to act by the first Wednesday in May, incredibly, we'll need to collect an additional 11,485 signatures in order for the question to appear on the November 2014 ballot. While public support for the update is high, [strong opposition from opponents is expected based on the history of the bill](#).

In the meantime, Lynn Wolbarst and Vice-President for Program and Action Nancy Brumback are back lobbying the Legislature, trying to get it to pass the bill, in the hopes of saving everyone an expensive campaign and a nasty fight with well-funded opponents.

We are ready and willing to advocate for the ballot question in November and we will never give up!

LWVMA Joins Amicus Brief in *McCullen v. Coakley*

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has joined an *amicus* brief, along with 31 other organizations, urging the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold a Massachusetts law establishing a buffer zone around abortion clinics. The case, *McCullen v. Coakley*, was argued before the Court Jan. 15. You can listen to an audio recording of the argument and read a transcript [here](#). The Court is expected to issue its decision in June.

The plaintiffs in this case seek to overturn the buffer zone law as an unconstitutional violation of free speech. The law establishing a 35-ft. buffer zone at abortion clinics was passed in 2007 to combat harassment and violence at the clinics. Two clinic employees in Brookline were murdered in 1994.

LWVMA's position supporting women's reproductive rights dates back to 1972. The League has joined several *amicus* briefs in abortion rights cases before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and was a co-plaintiff in a case against Operation Rescue for physically blocking clinics.

The Advocacy Flyer



This year LWVMA has assembled a list of all the legislative and advocacy areas that we are supporting. Take a look and see what your League is doing [here](#).

This impressive list is part of a new brochure and is also available as a one-page handout that can be downloaded and printed. This handout is perfect for distribution at meetings and visits with legislators, and handing out at events to reinforce the work of the state League.

OTHER

Thanks for your donations to the Annual Appeal and Phonathon

We are extremely grateful to all of our members who donated to LWVMA through the Annual Fall Appeal and Phonathon. We have raised \$56,000 for the LWVMA and the Education Fund! These funds will go toward defraying the costs of operations, initiatives in voter service and citizen education, and other costs beyond what the per-member payments cover. If you did not have an opportunity to give, donations can be made at any time. Visit lwvma.org and click on the red "DONATE" button at the top.

Thanks to the local Leagues which made phone calls during the Phonathon, and to Sharyn Roberts and Tami Roberts, who once again made an enormous number of calls for LWVMA and the Newton League. Participating local Leagues included: Acton Area, Andover/North Andover, Concord-Carlisle, Hamilton-Wenham, Lexington, Needham, Newton, Northampton, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley, and Winchester.

LWVMA Receives Boston Harbor Association's Founders

Award

The Boston Harbor Association has awarded the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts its Founders Award, recognizing the "extraordinary contribution" of the League in founding TBHA in November 1973. The League, along with the Boston Shipping Association, was honored in November, on the TBHA's 40th anniversary.



The award states: "Your actions contributed significantly to the cleanup of Boston Harbor and the restoration of its beaches and waterfront. We thank you for your legacy and look forward with great optimism to Boston Harbor's next four decades."

TBHA President Vivien Li presented the award and recapped the involvement of many League members in the grassroots efforts to transform Boston Harbor from one of the dirtiest harbors in the country to one of the cleanest. Executive Director Meryl Kessler accepted the award for LWVMA. Beatrice Nessen, who played an active role as a League member in the founding of TBHA, and current LWV Boston President Pamela Julian were also present. Take a look at our award the next time you're in the office.

Will the IRS Stop League Voter Registration Drives?

You may have read at the end of last year that proposed Internal Revenue Service rules could affect the League's voter service activities. Not necessarily, said the national League.

The IRS announcement seeking comment on a proposed rule to cover the activities of 501(c)4 corporations raised concern that a rule could affect many of the voter service activities the League undertakes, even voter registration drives. On Dec. 5, LWVUS president Elisabeth MacNamara issued the following statement to clarify the situation:

"Last week, the [IRS issued a notice asking for public comment on proposed rulemaking regarding 501\(c\)4 organizations](#). In the wake of the 2012 election during which millions of dollars in secret money poured through networks of such organizations, the [League of Women Voters has issued a statement](#) welcoming this new rulemaking process because we applaud those aspects that would rein in the dark money abuses that we have seen since Citizens United v. FEC. On the other hand, we are deeply concerned about those aspects of the proposal that would define voters service work, including the non-partisan work of the League, as political activity inappropriate for 501(c)4 social welfare organizations.

"Much of the reaction from other organizations, even those with whom the League works closely, has been aimed at stopping the rulemaking process. [The League has been held up as an example of why the proposal overreaches in defining political activity](#). It is important to note that we are at the beginning of a very long process of developing a rule that will clearly define what tax exempt organizations can do in the political arena. This definition of 'political activity' will likely be at the heart of the debate. (See the [press statement](#) for a listing of some of the outstanding questions that need to be addressed.) We intend to be very involved in the rulemaking process because the issues under

consideration are so important to the League and to our democracy. ... The initial comment period ends Feb. 27, 2014, after which there would normally be a new, fully developed proposed rule and an additional comment period.

"The rulemaking process is lengthy and complex and it will be important to find the right balance between protecting our elections from huge amounts of secret money and providing voters with truly nonpartisan voter information. But the fact that the task might be hard is no reason to scuttle the process before it begins. Given the gridlock in Congress, executive action to control money in elections is a key avenue that is available to us. I believe the right balance can be found if we do what League does best: speaking with one voice, providing facts and advocating in the public interest.

"The League has never shied away from challenges. Finding a way through legislative and administrative thickets to arrive at a solution that promotes the common good is something we know how to do. Let's take this opportunity to make democracy work!"
