



*Testimony in support of
S. 215/H. 2016 An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement
Submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
By Karen Mazza, LWVMA Education Committee
June 13, 2017*

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly supports civic engagement and learning, and, indeed, has established civic engagement and civics education as an action priority for the League. We therefore support the basic purpose of S.215 and H.2016 to promote and enhance civic engagement and learning in the Commonwealth's schools.

LWVMA's Legislative Action Committee discussed a number of recommendations we wish to bring to the attention of the Joint Committee on Education related to these and other bills dealing with civic engagement and learning. We would be happy to discuss our reasons behind these recommendations.

Civics Project Fund: LWVMA feels civics education in our schools should be funded by the state as part of the core curriculum and not be dependent on outside fundraising to provide professional development and curriculum.

Student-Led Projects: LWVMA does not support making student-led civics projects a requirement for graduation. We do support experiential civics learning and feel that every school district should be required to include at least two student-led civics projects at different grade levels integrated into existing required course curriculum within the K-12 school program, and that students should complete those projects. We support integrating those projects with various subject areas, not just social studies.

Media Literacy: We would encourage the joint committee to include in civic engagement and learning legislation some version of the recommendations in Sen. Eric Lesser's bill, S.278, to "encourage school districts to implement instruction in news media literacy skills at all grade levels, and in any of the core subjects or other subjects, to equip students with the knowledge and skills for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating all types of news media, including print, online, television, and social media."

Edward M. Kennedy Civics Challenge: LWVMA recommends against this provision as part of a law. We feel the number of students qualifying for the top honor is very likely to far exceed 100, so that it becomes just a lottery competition.

High School Voter Challenge: While LWVMA encourages high school students to register to vote, we do not favor a legislative prescription for how schools should accomplish this.

The League salutes the sponsors of these bills, Sen. Harriette Chandler and Rep. Linda Dean Campbell, for their commitment to a stronger civic engagement and learning program in our schools, and we support those broad efforts even while we have questions about some of the specific provisions. We look forward to working with the sponsors and joint committee on these bills and to supporting a strong bill reported out of the joint committee.