



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
In Support of S.844 – An Act updating the definition of felony larceny
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has, since 1984, maintained its position that “alternatives to incarceration....would offer better and more cost-effective opportunities....for tailoring the punishment to fit the crime.” The League of Women Voters of the United States in 2012 adopted its position that “alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime.

Currently in Massachusetts a crime against property valued at or above \$250 dollars constitutes a felony and can result in up to five years imprisonment in the state prison. It is our understanding that this dollar amount has not been changed for decades, with the result that punishments now far exceed the nature of the crime. This current baseline is less than the cost of the average cell phone most of us carry. Further, it is less by a factor of 5 than the first cutoff in small claims court filings, which now goes up to \$7,000.

S.844 is one of many bills before this Committee this session that work to bring our statutes in line with the times, including the fact of the increased cost of goods. Increasing the limit to \$1,300, which is still low in relation current pricing, removes what would now be considered petty theft from the category of a felony and returns it to being a misdemeanor.

LWVMA would recommend that a helpful addition to the legislation would have the property value level in the felony definition be indexed to inflation levels.

Thank you for your consideration.