



**Testimony before the Special Advisory Commission
Regarding the Compensation of Public Officials**

**By Anne Borg, Co-President
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
November 6, 2014**

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is testifying today in support of the work of this independent Commission in tackling the important and politically-sensitive topic of compensation for elected officials and legislators. We applaud the decision by the state legislature during the past session to establish the Special Advisory Commission Regarding the Compensation of Public Officials during the budget process. We believe such an independent Commission is better suited than a committee of the legislature to assure a fair assessment and to remove the process from political pressure.

The Massachusetts League is proud that Governor Patrick invited the League to recommend someone to fill one of the Commission seats designated for “a membership-based public advocacy organization with experience in matters relating to government accountability, transparency and public integrity,” and that Mary Ann Ashton, co-president of the Acton Area League of Women Voters, is serving on this Commission.

The Commission is charged with studying the compensation of the state's six constitutional officers and its state legislators, comparing that compensation with the compensation for comparable positions in other states and in the private sector, and evaluating indirect forms of compensation. Our position is that public officials, including elected officials, should be adequately compensated for their work, or we risk having both legislative and executive positions filled only by people who are independently wealthy or who may be influenced by those in a position to aid them financially. Compensation should be adequate to attract talented people who might otherwise turn to the private sector.

The Massachusetts state legislature is in session for the greater part of every year, with committee meetings occurring even when the legislature is not formally in session. The jobs of State Senator and State Representatives are, for all practical purposes, full-time jobs that do not readily allow these legislators to hold another, outside job. Their compensation level should reflect the full-time nature of the job of state legislator. The citizens of Massachusetts deserve legislators who are focused on legislative research, committee assignments and constituent service, not on finding time in their schedule to be an attorney, a realtor, a business owner or a professor as well.

If public service is crucial to democracy, the people who perform it should not be penalized financially for that service. And these crucial positions must be compensated at a level that all citizens, not just the independently wealthy, can afford to fill if they are elected. We need to remember that our state officials and legislators have mortgages, loans and college tuitions to pay, just like the rest of us.

The League appreciates the willingness of the Commission members to take on the responsibility of recommending fair and equitable compensation for our elected officials and legislators. We wish you well and look forward to the results of your work. Thank you.