



Dear League Members,

During the program planning process to select LWVMA priorities for the 2015 – 2017 biennium, local Leagues suggested a study on charter schools because of the continuing public debate about charter school funding, numbers, location, authorization, outcomes and accountability. Recognizing that LWVMA did not have positions that specifically focused on charter schools, members proposed and the Board agreed that a study was necessary to allow LWVMA to participate in the development of policy and legislation regarding charter schools.

LWVMA urges every local League to participate in this study and hold a consensus meeting for its members. We have 44 local Leagues; we need broad participation to have a true picture of our state membership's views on charter school issues. The purpose of this study is to determine where we have agreement, so that the state board can draft a League position related to charter schools. Once we have such a position, we will be able to support, oppose and suggest changes to legislation, take stands on charter school issues and contribute to the conversation.

LWVMA urges each of our members to read the background material in the Charter School Study Guide and discuss the issues as you answer the consensus questions. The "Fundamentals" section provides a general overview of charter schools. The "Funding Massachusetts Charter Schools" section explains the current funding process and is crucial for understanding the issues. There is also a glossary and list of additional reading. All of these documents will give you background for tackling the consensus questions. We thank you in advance for your interest and participation.

As you work on this study, bear in mind that charter schools vary widely in their location, their mission and their approach to education. All charter schools are not like a charter school you may be familiar with. You may not have first-hand knowledge of a charter school if there is not one in your town; charter schools serve only 4% of Massachusetts students. But the issues of how charter schools are financed, authorized and operated are important and affect education statewide. Massachusetts has strong state controls in place.

The issues around charter schools in Massachusetts are often complex and can be polarizing. District school officials cite the detrimental effects of dealing with the loss of students and revenues to charter schools. Parents who want a charter school option worry that their children have to attend underperforming schools, even after 25 years of education reform. The NAACP, at its July 2016 convention, called for a moratorium on the proliferation of privately-managed charter schools, citing concerns about private boards spending public money, increased segregation of district schools, and high use of punitive and exclusionary discipline. James Peyser, Massachusetts Secretary of Education and a charter school proponent, says that charter schools are public schools,

as entitled to taxpayer dollars as district schools. Parents of charter schools students, at a State House hearing last fall, praised the education their children received and urged legislators to expand the availability of charter schools in Massachusetts, particularly in urban areas. The massive advertising campaigns—projected to easily exceed \$10 million on each side—for the November ballot question on lifting the charter school cap only exacerbate the polarization.

LWVMA limited the scope of this study to charter schools in Massachusetts. Positions developed from this study may help shape the much broader state and national positions on education that already exist. For that reason, we either did not cover or only touched briefly on education reform, district schools, alternatives to charter schools, and issues with charter schools nationally. We also deferred questions pertaining to performance testing because it wasn't feasible to include this topic within our time frame. We may want to revisit and update our state position on education at a later date.

The LWVMA board particularly appreciates the work of League members who served on the Charter School Study Committee to develop this study: Shelley Drowns, Waltham, chair; Mary Ann Ashton, Acton Area; Nancy Brumback, Sudbury; Clare Gordon, Concord-Carlisle; Louise Haldeman, Concord-Carlisle; Palma McLaughlin, Boston; Sanford Ostroy, Brookline; and Carolyn Sellars, member-at-large.

We look forward to your consensus reports by February 1. And thank you.

Board of Directors  
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts