

Guidance for Local League action on issues at the Federal, State and city/town level

The League is an organization with three different levels- national, state and local, each with its own priorities. League actions need to be coordinated and consistent to be most effective and ensure we speak with one voice. Our positions at all three levels empower our actions. This guide is based on our Advocacy 101 webinar (April 2022).

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I. If your local League would like to act on Federal level issues...

To determine if national positions support your potential action/issue...

Check LWVUS Positions [here in Impact on Issues](#)

For an overview on how to use LWVUS positions to take action

See the [Comprehensive Overview](#) in the Taking Action section of Impact on Issues Taking Action section

If you want to request permission to take action on a Federal issue, (includes legislation, executive actions, and litigation) fill out this form:

Federal action request form for requesting action at the federal level for legislation, executive actions, and litigation: [here](#)

How soon will I hear back from National about my request?

48 hours; if your request requires a faster turnaround time, please call the Advocacy department at (202) 263-1328.

What kinds of actions do local Leagues need permission to act at the Federal Level?

Actions include any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a federal issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter-to-the-editor; actions and priorities set by LWVUS Board or after individual approved request from local or state League. No permission is needed to act when LWVUS has issued an Action Alert on federal legislation or issues.

What are the LWVUS Legislative Priorities?

Legislative priorities listing: [here](#)

Can LWVUS Legislative Priorities change?

Yes, they can be expanded based on new situations.

See what issues concern LWVUS, to preview what might make it into Priorities:

LWVUS action center for current action alerts: [here](#)

Can action at other levels of government (local, regional and state levels) be taken based on LWVUS positions and principles?

Yes, LWVUS positions and principles are designed to be broad and can be used to develop support for actions taken at any level of government.

Who could use LWVUS positions and principles to act?

Local Leagues and State Leagues. Local Leagues are responsible for determining action at the local level, with local Boards making the decision after discussion. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for determining action at the state level and ensuring that the action is consistent throughout the state.

What kinds of actions might be taken based on national positions and principles at the state level?

Actions include any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a state issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter-to-the-editor. Actions are limited to issues approved by State League.

What kinds of actions might be taken based on national positions and principles at the local level?

Actions include any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a local issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter-to-the-editor; approved by local League Board.

More Info on LWVUS? Contact:

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Some nuts and bolts, dos and don'ts at LWVUS level

- Just because there is a LWVUS position on something, does not mean you can advocate for it on the national level. It must be chosen as a priority by LWVUS, which is why you would file a federal action request form.
- As a League member, follow the lead of LWVUS in advocacy at federal level
- Only advocate with your own member of Congress and Senator
- As a citizen, you can advocate with your own legislators on anything, just not as a League member

II. If your Local League wants to act on state level issues...

To determine if State League or National League Positions support your potential state action/issue

Check LWVUS Positions [here](#) in Impact on Issues

Check LWVMA Positions [here](#) in Where We Stand

If you wish to act on proposed state legislation, check LWVMA League supported/opposed bills [here](#)

- Note that LWVMA may add bills to the list throughout the session
- Local Leagues cannot advocate on statewide legislation that LWVMA has not voted to support, with the exception of bills affecting a single town or region as noted below.

Where in the legislative process is the bill I'm interested in?

- Check Massachusetts Legislature [website](#) and enter the bill number.
- You can also ask you League Envoy or the Legislative Action Committee about your bill.

How can I learn more about the Commonwealth's legislative process?

Watch "How The Legislature Works" featuring Beacon BLOC [here](#).

Who determines and runs state League advocacy on legislation?

LWVMA Legislative Action Committee, a group of 24 specialists (League members) who cover 20 broad areas of legislation. The LAC:

- Selects and monitors bills in 20 broad areas each two-year legislative session, guided by LWVMA's program priorities set by Convention.
- Submits written testimony and/or presents oral testimony during committee hearings
- Suggests advocacy actions that local Leagues and members can take, organizes educational events

How can I see if a bill is being supported by LWVMA?

- View all the bills [here](#)

- Note that LWVMA may add bills to the list throughout the session
- Note that list also includes bills LWVMA is opposing

How are bills chosen by LAC to support or oppose?

- There must be a State or national position relative to the bill
- Other factors:
 - Strong support from coalition partners such as Election Modernization Coalition, Common Start
 - Likelihood of passage
 - Broad policy implications
 - Number of cosponsors
 - If it did not pass previously, how far did it get, i.e. favorably out of committee?
 - Relationship to core League positions and principles
- LWVMA support carries over to new session if the bill is refiled

What if a bill our local League thinks should be supported by LWVMA is not on the list? How can we see if LWVMA would add it?

During the beginning of the session, (January of odd-numbered years), when bills are being filed, contact the LAC Chair with your suggestion

Can local Leagues support state bills that are specific to your city or town, but the state League does not support?

Yes, and [here](#) is the policy that covers the process “[LWVMA Legislative Action Committee Policy on Local League Support of Town/City/Region-specific Legislation](#)”

What is the approval process for local Leagues to act on state bills specific to their town or region not supported by LWVMA?

1. Find LWVUS/LWVMA/LWV local League position to support the bill
 - a. Check LWVUS Positions [here](#) in Impact on Issues
 - b. Check LWVMA Positions [here](#) in Where We Stand
 - c. Check your own local League positions
2. Get Local League Board approval
3. Next, contact LAC Chair
4. Prepare legislative research sheet to submit to LAC for approval (LAC chair will send blank form)
5. LAC votes to support local League efforts
6. Local League offers oral and/or written testimony to the joint legislative committee, posts to its website
7. LAC specialists available for guidance

How can local Leagues get involved in action and advocacy at the State level?

- Subscribe to state League newsletters and make sure all new members do so.

- Be informed by attending Day on the Hill, Meet the Specialist programs and other issue presentations; encourage your members to attend, especially new members.
- Keep your local League interested by inviting a legislative specialist to speak at a local League event open to the public
- Take action via the monthly LWVMA Action Newsletter
- Include updates/events in your local League newsletter
- Respond to Action Alerts, ramped up at key dates in legislative cycle
- Join issue- area email groups for timely updates, e.g. climate, criminal justice, healthcare groups (contact LAC for info)
- Join legislative Envoy program, one per local League

Some nuts and bolts, dos and don'ts

- **Just because your state legislator wrote it, does not mean it is a good bill for state League support.** With 8,500 bills LWVMA needs to be analytical and strategic. Our specialists' time is limited; we choose bills where we think we will have the greatest impact.
- **Do invite your state legislators to meet with your League.** Get to know them and their staff. Share State League legislative priorities.
- **Check LWVMA website to see if we already support your bill.** Newly approved bills can be added at any time and the list will be updated.
- **As a citizen,** you can advocate with your own legislators on anything, just not as a League member using the League name

III. If your local League wants to take action at the local level (city/town)...

When might a local League want to act?

A local League will often want to take action on local issues—for example, town meeting warrant articles, proposed actions by local government, other issues that come up. We encourage local Leagues to decide how they feel on an issue—often by a board vote—and then make your voice heard.

Do you need to do a local League study?

You probably don't need to do a study before you can act on local issues. State and national positions are deliberately broad and can be used. If you are not sure a state or national position exists to cover an action your League would like to take, please check with the chair of the LAC. The LAC is very familiar with the two position books and will be happy to help determine if there's a position to support a given action.

To determine if State League or National League Positions support your potential local level action/issue

Check LWVUS Positions [here](#) in Impact on Issues

Check LWVMA Positions [here](#) in Where We Stand

Examples of local League action without study

- **Plymouth and Cape Cod Leagues:** Used national positions on nuclear waste disposal to take action on Pilgrim nuclear plant cleanup including protests, speaking at local meetings, supporting state legislation
- **Springfield:** Was concerned about aggressive policing but did not see an explicit position on policing. What we have is positions supporting the constitutional rights of all. Since Springfield felt the police were violating constitutional rights, they could weigh in on the debate.
- **Amherst:** Wanted to support an effort to increase use of organic products in school lunches and generally improve school lunches, but didn't see a position on that. National position on children at risk, which includes: The League supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being, encourage the full development, and ensure the safety of all children. These include: ... Quality health care, including nutrition and prenatal care p. 143 [Impact on Issues](#)
- **Acton Area:** Acton League was approached to support a caucus on ranked choice voting at the national convention, but since Acton had not done a study on RCV, it referred person to the state League because there is a state position on RCV. It's certainly up to Acton to decide whether or not to participate in such a caucus. BUT Acton does not need its own RCV study to do so. It can take a stand on RCV based both on the state position and the election systems position adopted by the national convention in 2020. If a town is considering adopting RCV for local elections, a local League can support using the state and federal positions. The local League may want to research and even study the impact of such a move on the town, but would not have to before taking a position.

- **Hypothetical:** Does your town meeting have an article on leaf blowers and you are wondering if your League can take a stand? See if your local League Board wants to get involved. Find a position which would back your support, for example air pollution.

When to do a study:

You won't always find a relevant position. So local Leagues can certainly do studies related to local issues to develop their own positions.

Examples of local leagues choosing to do a local study

- Wellesley did a local study on Affordable Housing, even though there are state and national positions on affordable housing.
- Sudbury was not able to find any state or national positions that let them support Community Preservation Act warrant articles on historical preservation. They checked to see if Lexington or Concord had a position they could adopt by concurrence, but no. So Sudbury did a local study on the benefits of historical preservation to the town and developed its own local position.

Adopt a Position by Concurrence in lieu of a local League Study

If you want to develop a position on a specific issue in your town, doing a study is an option. But also look at the websites of several other Leagues around the state and check out their positions pages. Some of those positions might apply to your needs. You can adopt another local League's positions by a concurrence vote at your annual meeting, without going through a time-consuming study. You can't change another League's positions to adopt them, except to remove specific local references. (Just as an example, see LWV Needham's position on education or LWV Wellesley's on affordable housing).

Other Leagues also often have positions on issues you are interested in. Even if you decide to do a study instead of a concurrence, these positions can give you some ideas.

Can local Leagues work with coalitions?

Yes but. Please take a look at these [guidelines](#) on the LWVMA website to help avoid any pitfalls

Conclusion: In short, your local League can and should take a stand on issues that come up in your town! And the League is likely to already have a position to support you. Ask if you can't find it!

Make your League a force to be reckoned with in your town!

IV. Rallies, Marches, Events: Guidance for participation

- Guidance for determining involvement in local events, marches, rallies [here](#)
- Protest safety guidance [here](#)

A. What **criteria** does the LWVUS use to decide about participation? See [link](#)

B. What are the options for **levels of engagement** by the LWVUS for events on federal issues:

1. **LWVUS will partner and lead.**

For events that support the League's key priorities, participation may include sponsorship, co-branding, staff coordination on the ground, official speaking roles, other leadership activities as well as sister-event participation.

2. **LWVUS will participate but not lead.**

LWVUS, state and local Leagues will participate in events with board support.

3. **LWVUS will not participate but other levels of League may.**

For events that do not rise to the occasion of full League participation but meet a variety of our criteria, LWVUS will not coordinate but will welcome state and local participation.

4. **No Leagues will participate.**

For events that do not advance the key priorities of the League, are deemed too partisan or risky, LWVUS will mandate that these events are not appropriate for any official League participation. Members who want to take part in these events may do so as individuals. We request no use of the League brand or logo at these events.

C. The State League may choose among similar levels of engagement options for rallies, marches, events on state issues (see above).

D. **Where can I find out if I can participate in a rally, march, or event as a League member?**

1. First, monitor LWV communications at state and national level; check League websites and social media accounts especially Twitter for announcements.
2. Inquiries about participation in rallies, marches and events can be made to our state League office (857-452-1715 or lwwma@lwwma.org).

E. **Safety measures** for a rally, march or event: [Protest safety guidance](#)

V. RESOURCE List

1) LWVMA Resources

- LWVMA Positions [*Where We Stand*](#)
- How the Legislature Works [Webinar](#) featuring Beacon BLOC:
- [LWVMA Citizen Lobbyist Handbook](#)
- [Advocacy 101 Toolkit/ List of Resources online](#)
- View [LWVMA Supported/Opposed legislation](#)
- LWVMA Legislative Action Committee [Policy on Local League Support of Town/City/Region-specific Legislation](#)
- [Local League Guidelines for Collaboration with Coalitions](#)
- LWVMA Legislative Envoy program
Contact Mary Cummings: mcummings@lwwma.org
- **Contact information LWVMA Legislative Action Committee Chairs (2022)**
 - Kathy Leonardson, LAC Chair kleonardson@lwwma.org
 - Nancy Brumback, LAC Vice Chair nbrumback@lwwma.org

2) LWVUS Resource List

- [Impact on Issues](#)
- [Federal action request form](#)
- [LWVUS Legislative priorities](#)
- LWVUS action center: (view current action alerts from LWVUS [here](#))
- [LWVUS Guidance for determining involvement in local events, marches, rallies](#)
- [LWVUS Protest safety guidance](#):

- **Contact information: Director, Government Affairs, LWVUS**
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LWVMA Legislative Action Committee