

**EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**

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**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

**APRIL  
2021**

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**LWVLA CALENDAR**

Wednesday, April 21, 12 to 1:30 pm. "*The Circular Economy in Michigan: Change is Coming*," a webinar sponsored by the Environmental Advocacy Group. See the EAG item below for details.

Thursday, April 29, 12 to 1:30 pm. "*Gun Violence: How Research Directs Policy*" a webinar sponsored by the newly renamed, Public Health and Safety Committee. See their item below for more information.

Tuesday, May 11, 10 to 11:30 am. Book Discussion Group Zoom meeting to discuss *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson.

Friday, May 21 - Saturday, May 22. LWVMI virtual convention. More information below.

Tuesday, June 8, 10 to 11:30 am. Book Discussion Group Zoom meeting to discuss: *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

You should know that you are great partners in our most wonderful and “glorious task.” Many people have spent many hours lately on the myriad projects we have going on in our local League. Frankly, there were things that were dangerously close to dropping through the cracks. Then we came up with a strategy...ask for help from the members. Now you’ve done it! So many answered my call in last week’s message that we are teeming with Zoom sign-ups and are all over the local press. Witnessing this was so gratifying. I’ve always worked with dedicated people (I’m a social worker), but I have never been surrounded by so many motivated and talented people. To repeat, you should know that!



Voting: That’s what gave birth to the League and protecting it keeps us relevant. It’s also keeping us busy. We promote the vote. We educate the public on issues that are affected by the vote, partially to get them to the polls.

We are deeply involved in spreading the word about redistricting because it will bring a fair map to Michigan voters. We created an Observer Corps to bring local government closer to the community so they will be more likely to vote. And we long for the schools to be reopened fully so we can bring our good news to high school and college students.

Voting is what makes Americans equal to each other. Bill Gates and I each have one vote. Yes, money can affect the outcome of an election but, over and over, when voters come out it’s not always the person who spent the most money who wins...votes are more important than money. We know very well that people have risked their well-being and lives to be able to vote.

And voting is at risk. LWVMI is keeping track of the new voting legislation and the effort to do a run around the governor’s veto. While there is always room for improvement, the appropriate direction for a democracy is to remove barriers for eligible voters. That is the unequivocal position of the League and we will spare no effort to protect the voting rights of all citizens. We are in this for the long haul and will remain alert for any threat to voting rights.

Also true is that you are essential to this cause. So, take care of yourself. I may be calling on your considerable talents in the future!

Together,  
*Donna*

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**But wait—there’s more!**



## Casey Christy is graduating

Our first student placement from MSU's Community Engagement Scholars Program is ending with Casey Christy's graduation. With an abundance of talent, Casey has created logos, taken minutes and improved spreadsheets. We worked together to figure out how to make it work during a pandemic. Casey is forgiving as well as talented. She has plans to teach in France after she graduates. (Anyone have a French connection for Casey?)

I hope we will continue having students work with us in the future. Casey has been helpful and inspiring. The world is in good hands.

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## LWVMI CONVENTION MEETS VIRTUALLY MAY 21 & 22

Click here <https://lwvmi.org/member/documents/Overview2021.pdf> to see the schedule of the convention, which meets on May 21 and 22. You have until May 10 to register as a non-voting delegate at a cost of \$35. Since the cost of attendance at this virtual convention is substantially lower than a traditional meeting, we are considering subsidizing non-voting attendees. Let me know via email if you are interested in attending. Soon, the guest speakers will be announced to whet your appetite!

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## PROGRAM NOTES..... Dorothy Engelman, Program VP

Mark your calendar for the informative, educational meetings offered to LWVLA members and the community. You'll find details elsewhere in the Capitol Voter. A big thank you to the advocacy groups for planning these programs as we are still unable to meet in person.



**Book discussions take place via Zoom on the second Tuesday of the month from 10 to 11:30 am.** The most recent book was *Desk 88: Eight Progressive Senators Who Changed America* by Sherron Brown. You're welcome to join the discussion, even if you haven't finished the book. Please contact [Donna Mullins](#) if you would like to get the email information about

the meetings. Coming up:

- May 11 - *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson
- June 8 - *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Please watch your email, the LWVLA Facebook page, and the LWVLA webpage for updates and new meetings before the May issue of the Capitol Voter. *Make the most of your membership....get involved!*

Dorothy Engelman  
VP-Programs

*"In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders." –Sheryl Sandberg*

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## **VOTER SERVICE UPDATES**

**Joanne Winkelman, Voter Services Director**

### **Reminder to Vote on May 4, 2021**

No candidates are running for office in the May 4, 2021 election but there are several school and township proposals in Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham County. A list of the proposals and a link to each county's election site is provided below.



### **Eaton County**

#### **[Elections | Eaton County, MI](#)**

- Waverly Community Schools Bonding Proposal
- Holt Public Schools Bonding Proposal

### **Ingham County**

#### **[May 4, 2021 Ballot Proposal Language Ingham County](#)**

- Fowlerville Community Schools Bonding Proposal
- Holt Public School Bonding Proposal
- Okemos Public Schools Operating Millage Renewal Proposal and Sinking Fund Millage Proposal
- Waverly Community Schools Bonding Proposal

### **Clinton County**

#### **[May 4, 2021 Official Candidate List \(clinton-county.org\)](#)**

- Westphalia Township Road and Fire Millage Proposals
- Waverly Community Schools Bonding Proposal
- Fulton Schools MMC Annex Proposal
- Mid Michigan College Annexation Proposition
- Mid Michigan College Adoption Of Mid Michigan College Maximum Tax Rate In Annexed Territory

The proposals may also be found on [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org).

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**LWVLA HOSTS TOWN HALL ON REDISTRICTING IN MICHIGAN**  
**Joanne Winkelman, Voter Services Director**



On April 13, 2021 the League of Women Voters Lansing Area hosted a Town Hall, *Redistricting in Michigan: The MI Independent Citizen Redistricting Commission (MICRC) & Communities of Interest*, moderated by League President Donna Mullins. The Town Hall was attended by local League members, the general public, and Leagues outside the Lansing area.

MICRC Commissioner MC Rothorn was able to join the Town Hall for its entirety and answered questions about the Commission in general and explained how the MICRC plans to elicit public comment and testimony regarding redistricting and Communities of Interest. The attendees appreciated hearing directly from the commissioner and having their questions answered.

All attendees were dispersed into breakout rooms after the PowerPoint presentation to enable small group discussions on what was heard during the presentation, explore further questions they had, and learn what assistance the LWVLA can provide to those wishing to comment or testify in front of the Commission. A follow-up survey was sent to all participants who wish to request general information about the MICRC or assistance with identifying and testifying as a Community of Interest member.

We extend a special thank you to MSU Interns Nolan Rachocki and Hannah Richardson for their technical support in producing the Town Hall.

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## ONE THING

Find out what's going down at the Capitol that could change the *whole recycling scene* in Michigan! Attend our Zoom webinar, **"The Circular Economy in Michigan: Changes are Coming," Wednesday, April 21, 12 to 1:30 pm.**, with guest speaker Sean Hammond, policy director at the Michigan Environmental Council. And bring your questions! Register in advance for this webinar using this [link](#).

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## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: A LONG HISTORY SHORT ON SOLUTIONS Marion Gorton, Environmental Advocacy Group

For many decades minority and low-income neighborhoods have protested when government or private companies wanted to place hazardous waste facilities, pollution- and noise-producing factories or refineries, and storage facilities for hazardous substances next door to their homes, schools, and churches – as well as when government wanted to build a major highway dividing their prosperous neighborhoods. The protests went unnoticed and unheeded until a very noisy protest in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982. After that protest, more people took notice.

For a brief early history of what came to be known as the environmental justice movement, [click here](#).

In the following decade there were efforts by President Clinton and the U.S. EPA to create federal policies and programs to address the issues of environmental justice and reduce the environmental risks to minority and low-income populations and neighborhoods. But

good intentions and rhetoric did not yield meaningful results. In 2007, the report by United Church of Christ—[Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States](#)—was updated and found that populations of color were more threatened than ever by the presence of hazardous wastes in their neighborhoods.

Here in Michigan the administrations of Governors Jennifer Granholm and Rick Snyder formed environmental justice work groups, but progress has been minimal. The 2019 University of Michigan study “Assessing the State of Environmental Justice in Michigan” and a review of the [EPA Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#) show that the injustices continue with only an occasional victory for marginalized communities. **So, in the words of Christopher Robin, “What to do, what to do, what to do?” The answer is: pay attention, challenge the policy makers, and get involved.**

The events of this past year have brought new attention to the vulnerability of communities of color because of compromised health. Environmental justice and protecting children from air pollution, hazardous substances, and environmental contamination of all kinds has taken on renewed interest and opportunities to be informed and involved.

You can learn “what to do” by putting this on your calendar and attending this event:

**[Michigan Environmental Justice Conference:](#)  
**Rebuilding trust, reimagining justice, and removing  
barriers May 18 - 20****



This is a free conference sponsored by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy that would provide a good introduction to the problems and how you can help make a difference. It will focus on the following topics:

Environmental Justice in Michigan  
Federal Environmental Justice Priorities  
Back on the Table: Climate & Equity  
Meaningful Public Engagement  
An EJ Community Town Hall  
The Tribal Perspective: Justice & Collaboration  
Just Transition in EJ Communities  
and more ....

If you are not able to attend this virtual conference, there are several Michigan organizations that are actively engaged in the environmental justice movement. Here are some possibilities:

[Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition](#)  
[Michigan Environmental Council](#)  
[Sierra Club, Michigan Chapter](#)

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**REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**Bettie Menchik, Co-Chair**



Recently we watched the IPPSR webinar, ***K-12 Education: Moving Past the Pandemic***. The featured speaker was Dr. Doug Harris, a professor at Tulane University in New Orleans. He drew comparisons between the COVID pandemic and Hurricane Katrina. Similarities include: both were fundamentally man-made disasters; students were thrown out of school completely for weeks; students were isolated from friends, family and teachers for a year; health and the economic crisis that followed were inequitably distributed. The differences: with Katrina, students shifted into regular school buildings, not remote, and in COVID, the crisis affected everyone.

Dr. Harris noted lessons from Katrina that should be considered as the CARES Act funds become available.

- Education needs to be improved from the bottom-up and not the top-down or outside-in.
- Black voters and educators need to be actively involved in decisions regarding their schools. The community should be engaged in choosing which schools will be closed or open.
- We need to get the right mix of classroom instruction and online technology. Some of what we've used this year is very good, some of it isn't, and some could be if we have more time to learn.
- In terms of policy, at a district level, do we really want high school students to start at or before 8 am?
- Should students be able to take online courses from whomever offers it?
- Should all students come into buildings in person every day?
- And at a state level, how should we define "attendance" and "course credits?"

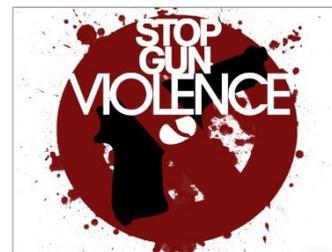
***And the bottom line: How will these changes affect school finance?***

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## NEW FOCUS ON ADDRESSING AMERICA'S GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC

**Martha Couretas, Co-chair, Public Health and Safety/Firearms Committee**

The week of April 5, 2021 was recognized as National Public Health Week. On April 7, the Biden-Harris administration announced **["Initial Actions to Address the Gun Violence Public Health Epidemic."](#)** These executive orders signed by President Biden are positive and necessary first steps to the reduction of firearm deaths and injuries in the U.S. Urgently recognizing that approximately 60 percent of the 40,000 gun deaths that occur each year are suicides, the executive orders draw attention to the importance of model "red flag" legislation and to halting the proliferation of ghost guns (unserialized and untraceable firearms). In addition, because gun violence disproportionately impacts underserved communities, the executive orders strongly support investment in community violence intervention programs.



Josh Horwitz, Executive Director of Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV), issued a **statement**: “Too many Americans have felt the horrific effects of gun violence and are united at record levels demanding action to prevent further gun violence... The Biden-Harris White House’s actions are encouraging, but we continue to demand the Senate pass the gun violence prevention measures that the House has already passed so we have laws on the books to ensure Americans’ safety and well-being is prioritized.”

“If things didn’t change as a result of ‘Sandy Hook,’ how can we ever expect them to change?” is a frequently quoted frustration when discussing gun violence prevention. In a **NY Times op-ed piece**, Dan Gross, former president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and co-founder of the Center for Gun Rights and Responsibility, wrote that the gun control movement is asking the wrong question. Of nearly 40,000 deaths by gun in 2019, just under one percent were defined as ‘active shooter’ incidents. Gross suggests that the gun control movement should focus on the causes of deaths and injuries that are the most common and identify solutions based on how much they would lower the number of gun deaths in our country. Gross stated, “I have spent the last two years building relationships with leaders in the gun rights community and have found that five specific moves provide a framework for common ground.” These moves would include:

- Pursue and prosecute those gun dealers who contribute to illegal gun trade.
- Identify opportunities to strengthen the background check system.
- Invest in a large-scale education and awareness campaign on the dangers of owning and carrying guns and what can be done to mitigate those dangers.
- Expand on the work of "violence interrupters" and similar programs proven to reduce gun violence in cities.
- Clearly define "federally licensed firearm dealer" and close the gun show loophole.

Because of the executive orders of the Biden Administration, the work to urge Congress to address meaningful legislation now has new potential and direction. Seeking common ground is a pathway to solutions that can make America safer from firearm violence. Have the conversations. Listen. Address all with respect. Contact your lawmakers. Do all that you can do.

Gun violence is a public health and safety issue.  
Gun violence is preventable.

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## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Thomas Carr, East Lansing  
John Ducat, Bath  
Jane Shultz, Okemos

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**OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK**  
All committees are meeting virtually using Zoom. Contact the chair for more information.

**VOTER SERVICE:** Contact Joanne Winkelman [jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com](mailto:jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com).

**K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE:** Contact Judy Andre [judith.arlene59@gmail.com](mailto:judith.arlene59@gmail.com) or Bettie Menchik [menchikb@msu.edu](mailto:menchikb@msu.edu).

**PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY/GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE:** Contact Marty Couretas [couretam@comcast.net](mailto:couretam@comcast.net) or Melinda Frame [framem@msu.edu](mailto:framem@msu.edu).

**ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP:** Contact Ellen Link [elink767@gmail.com](mailto:elink767@gmail.com).