

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**MARCH
2021**

LWVLA CALENDAR

March 14 through 20 - Sunshine Week. See the *In Celebration of Sunshine Week* article below for more information .

Thursday, March 25, 7 pm via Zoom - General Membership Meeting for Lane Duck Study Consensus.

Tuesday, March 30 - Deadline for recommendations for the LWVMI Convention Awards. Find more information on the [LWVMI website](#).

Tuesday, April 13 - Book Discussion Group. 10 to 11:30 am on Zoom. *Desk 88: Eight Progressive Senators Who Changed America*. Contact [Donna Mullins](#) for more information.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



“Oh, what a glorious task we are given, to continually try to improve this great nation of ours.” That was spoken at the Edmund Pettis Bridge by President Obama on the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

One of our newest tasks is working with communities of interest (COI) as it relates to the redistricting process. Even in the first several weeks we have broadened our understanding of redistricting, recent history and our community. Recently a few of our members were invited to attend a meeting of the Latino Leaders for the Enhancement of Advocacy and Development (LLEAD); Voters Not Politicians has given them a grant to work on COI. We were making our first step toward collaborating on communities of interest and it was an eye opener for me. Over and over again, the point was made that the best tool that under-represented populations have is the vote.

They talked a lot about “the illusion of inclusion” and that little phrase covers a lot. One is that the Hispanic community is not as inclusive as non-Hispanics believe it is. (Also true of LGBTQ, Whites, and Blacks, as well as men and women.) The assertion was made that in this society a change in caste is related to political involvement (see voting.) Civic education was lauded but there is a lack of Spanish language material. I wondered if we had members fluent in Spanish who could work on a presentation similar to the ones we have provided to local schools in English.

After a two-hour meeting where I had exactly nothing to say and everything to learn, I was convinced that we need to get out more. I think our involvement with communities of interest will help us do that. Also helpful will be the new Observation Corps, which will be introduced at our March 16 webinar on government transparency. This should increase our presence in the community as it increases our knowledge of community issues.

If you belong to an organization that would help to increase our understanding of the greater Lansing community, let me know. If we want to lead we must demonstrate our willingness to listen. If we connect with others humbly we will improve our organization and our nation. Oh, what a glorious task.

Together,
Donna

PROGRAM NOTES

Dorothy Engelman, Program VP

Spring is approaching and as the flowers are popping up, so are LWVLA activities. Be sure to check your email (and promotions tab) so you don't miss out! There are also links on the [LWVLA Facebook](#) page and the [website](#).

A General Membership Meeting-Consensus on the LWVMI Lame Duck Report is Thursday, March 25 at 7 pm. You will receive an email with information and registration link. Please attend and let your voice be heard.

The April Book Discussion Group meets on Tuesday, April 13 from 10 to 11:30 am via Zoom. **Desk 88: Eight Progressive Senators Who Changed America** by Sherrod Brown will be discussed. All are invited, even if you haven't read the book! Please let Donna Mullins know if you'd like to be on the email list.

If you missed the **Government Transparency: Let the Sunshine IN!** program on Zoom March 16, you can watch it on the [LWVLA YouTube channel](#). It celebrated **Sunshine Week** and introduced the newly-formed Observer Corps.

Plans are continuing for the 101st celebration of the passage of the 19th amendment in August. Please let me know if you'd like to be involved.

Dorothy Engelman
VP-Programs

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

IN CELEBRATION OF SUNSHINE WEEK Donna Mullins

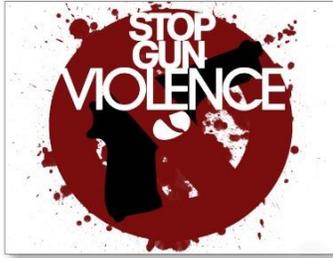
In 2005 the American Society of News Editors (now News Leaders Association) launched **Sunshine Week** to celebrate and promote access to public information. At its best the press keeps the public informed about government large and small. The freedom of the press may not be abridged. It is protected by the First Amendment. Our founders knew that a transparent government would not exist without a free press. So, we celebrate Sunshine Week because it is about preserving democracy. It is about making a more perfect union. The League and the press have something in common.



Like so many people who have risked life, limb and fortune to obtain the vote, nearly all members of the press have given up fortune and/or risked their safety to report the news. Many years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the now closed Newseum in Washington, DC. My heart broke when I viewed the Journalists Memorial. (I'm not one who cries easily but I sobbed.) It's now available **online** with the stories of 2,355 people who died in their attempts to report the news. In 2018 seven Baltimore journalists were murdered because the *Capital Gazette* reported a harassment charge in 2011. Journalists value the search for truth more than their own safety. We rightly applaud the courage of war correspondents, but all reporters are subject to risk.

The motto for Sunshine Week is "Open government is good government." Thank you to the press, who with integrity and persistence work to ensure that government is transparent.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY/
GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE
Martha Couretas & Melinda Frame, Co-Chairs**



*Please note: The members of the Gun Violence Committee have voted to change the focus and name of our committee to **Public Health and Safety**. Although the primary focus of the committee will remain Gun Violence Prevention, the name change will allow more flexibility in addressing issues of community health and safety that do not directly involve gun violence.*

Increased Suicide Risks during COVID-19

The National Institutes of Health have defined the period of time from 2020 to the present as “the dual pandemic of suicide and COVID-19.” The increased risk of isolation, fear of infection, trauma, illness, travel restrictions, abuse and economic issues have resulted in an increase in suicidal behavior. Rates of suicides have been rising primarily among teens and veterans, front line workers, elderly, migrants, homeless, and those financially and socially disadvantaged. Also at greater risk are those with pre-existing mental disorders. When the risk factors of suicide intersect with the impact of the pandemic, a dual vulnerability results ([Banerjee et al., 2020](#)).

However, suicides are preventable. And while these issues are global, the solutions can and should be local:

- Recognize the conditions of suicidal thoughts that can be magnified during this pandemic: Depression and anxiety can emerge from a wide range of concerns, including personal and family (grief over loss, substance abuse) and employment (increased COVID risk, job loss).
- Recognize the actions that can lead to suicide: Withdrawing personal contact with others; being preoccupied with death; purchasing a gun; excessive drug/alcohol use; giving away belongings. The isolation that we are experiencing during COVID-19 may make identifying risk factors more challenging.
- Recognize the lifelines that are available to you to help prevent suicide:
- Call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255**. Reach out to friends and loved ones. Contact a person in your faith community. Contact your doctor or mental health professional.
- Recognize and provide these lifelines when someone else is suicidal: Offer friendship. Encourage contact with a crisis center. Provide assistance and support with close contact until a safe environment can be arranged.
- Recognize prevention strategies: Check in with someone on a regular basis. Have a daily routine. Encourage physical and mental activity. Limit time with news sources. ([Mayo Clinic, 2020](#))

Many public health and safety issues have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, and these issues will exist for some time to come. Sales of firearms in Michigan have increased 40% and reports of domestic violence have likewise risen, while legislative efforts to weaken Michigan firearms laws are ongoing and economic recovery is uncertain. LWVLA is planning a webinar that deals with readjusting to post-pandemic living. Please watch for information in the month to come about joining this important discussion.

MEDICATION AND MEDICAL WASTE DISPOSAL
Protecting Your Family and the Environment
Marion Gorton, Environmental Advocacy Group

Protect your family

We all benefit from prescribed medications, over-the-counter relief from pain and congestion, and nutritional supplements. But those same drugs can be poison to children, pets, and others for whom they are not intended. Diabetics and others who use needles and injection devices are usually warned of the dangers when they first get instructions for their safe use and disposal, but it is easy to forget that those materials that are so important to your own health are a significant hazard to others when they are thrown away.

Protect the environment

You can protect your family by getting unwanted medications and medical waste out of your home as quickly as possible, but the quick disposal of these materials can be bad for our environment. Flushing drugs down the toilet or putting them in the trash can get them out of your house but may put them into water and soils as they drain or leach away from drain fields, treatment plants or landfills.

So what is the answer?

The solution is on the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) website where you will find the [Household Drug Take Back Map](#).



Learn how to use the Take Back Map

Watch the “Take Back Map Overview” video on the website and use these hints:

- Find a location that is near you that accepts the items you want to dispose of.
- Call the phone number provided on the map to learn of any special rules, recent changes in what is accepted, and how to prepare the items you have. For example: must medications be in the original packaging? Are there special rules for liquids? Can you include pet medications?

Pills & Liquid Medicines & Supplements

Almost every location on the map will accept the standard pills you have in your home. If it is a prescription medication, be sure to remove personal information from the label, but do not remove the name of the medication. Ask if you can drop off unlabeled pills. It is more difficult to find locations that accept liquids. Ask if there are any special rules for liquids.

Controlled Substances

Medications such as opioids and other drugs that are regulated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) **are not** accepted at all locations. Drop these dangerous substances only at locations where that category is checked on the map legend. The DEA publishes a list of places that can handle controlled substances; the map is updated every month based on that list. To find out if you have any medications that are controlled substances, visit the [DEA website](#).

Needles, Syringes & Injection Devices

The map shows you if sharps boxes are accepted at the location you choose. Sharps boxes are containers that are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for safe disposal of needles, syringes and other devices used for the injection of medication. Sharps boxes can be purchased at most stores that have a pharmacy department. They may also be available from your health care provider or online. There are also ways to make your own container at home using a detergent bottle. Go to the [FDA website](#) for directions for a DIY sharps container.

Inhalers

Asthma inhalers, such as the rescue inhalers, use propellants that are under pressure. These inhalers can be dangerous if punctured or placed close to a heat source. Check with your pharmacist to see if they will accept return of inhalers. Fortunately for our Lansing area,

inhalers can be put in Sparrow Pharmacy drug disposal boxes. Once you find a Sparrow Pharmacy location on EGLE's Drug Take Back Map, expand the window to see a "Note" that the pharmacy "Also accepts inhalers." This includes both propellant and diskus inhalers.

General Medical Waste **is not** included in the take back program

If you have waste that may be used in your home for medical procedures or for the care of wounds, you must take precautions in their disposal. These wastes may have blood, body fluids, or tissue that can present dangers to those who handle your household waste disposal. These wastes **cannot** be placed in drug take back bins. Protect others from contact with these wastes by placing them in a plastic bag or other secure container and placing it in your household waste.

Additional Resource: [Sparrow Medication Disposal Program](#)

ONE THING

Help EAG Get Climate Action Rolling

If you live in...

- Ingham County, ask your [commissioner](#) to support a Climate Action platform.
- Clinton County, send a message to the commissioners on this [petition](#).
- Eaton County, ask your [county commissioners](#) to take action asap.

This will take all of us, and every effort big or small counts. Thank you.

UPDATES FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Judith Andre, Co-Chair



The focus of our committee has been online learning (in its pre-pandemic forms). In January 2021, we presented a webinar describing what online learning is like. Michigan Virtual Charter Academy, one of the first virtual schools in the state, explained their curriculum and demonstrated their classroom practice. Speakers from the Michigan Department of Education described the legal and regulatory structure governing cyber schools. The session can be viewed through the League's [YouTube channel](#).

Continuing our focus on online learning, we presented a webinar in February 2021 asking what the research tells us. Our speaker was Dr. Michael Barbour, a leading national researcher on the topic. His conclusions were sobering: First, there is little unbiased data on student outcomes in virtual schools; it will be even more difficult with the pandemic affecting annual testing. Second, what we know from available data suggests that online schooling has not been effective, and the effectiveness of for-profit cyber schooling is still more problematic. This [session](#) is also available online.

The committee will continue to study this issue, learning more and planning visits (probably virtual) with other online schools. We would welcome new members. The issue is vitally important to Michigan, where online schools and especially those that are for-profit continue to proliferate. Our next meeting will be March 9 at 5 pm on Zoom.

VOTER SERVICE

Joanne Winkelman, Voter Service Director

Just a brief note to inform you that MSU will be conducting all new student orientation online again this summer. The East Lansing Clerk is working with MSU to provide an online video to students regarding voting registration and information. League members have always enjoyed interacting with students during these sessions but we will have to wait another year due to COVID-19.

"A TASTE OF THE LEAGUE" TRIAL MEMBERSHIP

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

Do you know someone who is interested in the League and thinking about joining but isn't sure about what League membership involves? LWVLA is offering trial memberships! Individuals will receive LWVLA information for a period of three months at no charge and may participate in advocacy groups, voter service and all League programs and events. Names will not be entered in the LWVLA database and they will not receive LWVMI or LWVUS information during a trial membership. At the end of three months, they will be personally contacted about becoming a member. Contact Camilla Davis, Membership Director, at cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com for more information.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Michellena Belton, Grand Rapids
Renee Brown, East Lansing
Joanne Galloway, Lansing

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.

K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Contact Judy Andre judith.arlene59@gmail.com or Bettie Menchik menchikb@msu.edu.

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

ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP: Contact Ellen Link elink767@gmail.com.