



On June 4, 2020 all local area Leagues received this statement from the national League of Women Voters: "It is time that the League of Women Voters take a stand for social justice for Black lives in America." The members of the Lansing Area League, many who have actively supported social justice, welcome this statement. It is our intent to run with it.

The League began a hundred years ago when the 19th amendment was ratified allowing women the right to vote. In order to obtain ratification, the White women fighting for the vote made compromises that would continue to limit Black voters' access to the ballot. It's not uncommon to juggle principles to achieve progress, but common doesn't make right. Would we have made that compromise? I don't know. I do know that we have benefited from it.

Even a respected organization that envisions "a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate" has been inextricably involved with the systemic denial of rights to Black members of our society. We acknowledge having been a part of the problem; we have also been a part of the solution, and we promise to increase our efforts to stand with any organization in support of a more perfect union.

Let us not forget that George Floyd had his hands handcuffed behind his back when three officers held him to the ground, one with his knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes. We learned of it from videos taken by bystanders. In February Ahmaud Arbery was jogging when he was hunted and then murdered by White men. No action was taken until late May when a video was available to news outlets. Peaceful protests, a hallmark of our democracy, have sometimes been met with unreasonable force.

Every American citizen has a right to equal justice under the law. Every American citizen has the right to peacefully assemble. It's very clear that those rights are being denied to Black citizens in a systemic and often violent manner. In this country the ballot box is a

powerful way to achieve systemic change. That is why so many in power continue to deny the ballot to people likely to vote for change.

The League of Women Voters is a committed ally in the quest for social justice. We pledge to educate ourselves even when it makes us uneasy. We will continue our efforts to make voting accessible to all. We will continue to educate voters and emphasize issues of justice. We will do this in humility, acknowledging our blemished institutional history and the organizational and personal need for constant reflection and growth.

It is more than time for us to make it clear that we support voting rights because we support social justice.

Together,
Donna Mullins
LWV-Lansing Area President
