

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**JULY
2022**

IN THE JULY CAPITOL VOTER

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- Voter Service Gearing Up for Elections
- Observer Corps: Learning and Sharing Information
- Promote the Vote Summary
- Book Discussion on Lifelong Realities of Criminal Record
- Education Committee Call for New Members
- EAG Defines and Promotes Community Science
- New Members

LWVLA CALENDAR

Tuesday July 12, 10 am. Book Discussion Group: *Halfway Home, Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration*, by Reuben Jonathan Miller. See below for more info and Zoom link.

**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
Donna Mullins**

In May, my message responded to the leak that announced that the

Supreme Court was poised to overturn Roe v. Wade, placing reproductive rights unequally throughout our nation. In June, it was overturned with an explanation that suggested there will be more rulings overturned in the future. Many demonstrated their disappointment and rage.



This decision impacts the poor and near poor more than it does people who can afford to travel to another state to terminate a pregnancy. It guarantees inequality with respect to reproductive rights. There are only two responses that I can think of that can change things. One is to try to replace conservative justices with liberal justices. The opposite was done by anti-abortion proponents and took 40 years to accomplish.

Another possibility is to elect representatives who will enact laws to protect reproductive rights. There is no question that the majority of our citizens support a woman's right to determine whether she becomes a mother. Here's the rub: It's a position held by most but it does not determine who they vote for! This ruling does not affect people who can afford to travel. It does not affect people who have easy access to contraception.

Many may march but not enough will vote. This is true when it comes to reproductive rights and school shootings. Our citizens feel one way and vote on matters that, oddly, politicians have little impact on. People vote their pocketbook. And many do not see violence or reproductive rights as their "problem."

What can we do as a League? We can support voting rights and we can help educate the public on the issues. We can remain staunchly nonpartisan so that voters continue to trust our Voter's Guide and Vote411 as places to get accurate information on candidates. We can find ways to explain why gas prices are high and shine a light on the sources of inflation. We can demonstrate that issues that aren't our problem have a way of becoming our problem overnight if we don't act on them. We need to come up with ways to speak not to the choir but to all.

Recently, I sent out a message to announce that we are looking for a new Vice President for Program. That position is key in any effort to address the critical need to educate the public. If you are interested in being a part of a program committee that will take on the need to bring information to voters, [let me know](#). If you would consider leading this effort, [let me know](#).

How much work would this be? It depends on the number of people interested! It would mean meeting together at least once a month to plan and divide up the work. You would be working with members who will help you find venues, use technology and publicize your efforts. Those people are in place. (I actually think it's the best job in the League. It offers variety, an opportunity to work with really great people, and you get a finished product to feel good about before you tackle the next fun thing.) It's another opportunity to change the world! [Let me know!](#)

Together,
Donna



VOTER SERVICE UPDATE

Joanne Winkelman, Voter Service Director

Registration

Voter Service is revving up for the elections. The Lansing City Clerk is planning on running registration drives around the area, so we are waiting to hear when they need people. As soon as we know we will ask for volunteers. Michigan State is not having their usual freshmen orientation sessions on campus this year, but we are brainstorming ways to reach out to students as they move onto campus. Any ideas? Please share with me at jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com.

Candidate Forums

There is a tentative plan for two forums this fall, with more to be added if there is interest. We are hoping the forums can be “in-person.” If that is the case, we will need lots of volunteers to assist. The plan is for any forums to be recorded and posted online for those unable to attend.

If you have ever wanted to be a forum moderator or timekeeper, this election season may be the time to learn. We will teach you the process and you can shadow a seasoned moderator/timekeeper through an actual forum. If you are interested, please contact me.

[Vote 411.org](http://Vote411.org)

Thanks to Anna Scott and all the volunteers, Vote 411.org went live on June 29. A slew of volunteers made a last-ditch effort to call candidates who did not respond to multiple email requests. The calls/texts to candidates got great results. We will have to go through the same “nagging” for the November ballot so please say “yes” when I email for help! If you have not received an email from me in the past and want to volunteer for voter service activities, [let me know](#) and I will add you. Also, if your circumstances have changed and you want to be removed from the list, just let me know.

Voter Guides

Dorothy Engelman is already busy formatting the Voter Guide for the November election, so gas up the car (or maybe wait until prices go down) and put on your sneakers as we will need people to sort the guides and deliver throughout the tri-county area.

Other Opportunities

Online voter registration has been so successful that there are fewer and fewer registration drives. However, the League is about more than registration. If you know of an event for which the organizers would like us to set up an information booth on Vote 411.org or other election-related topics, please let me know. Registration is just the beginning; we need to encourage people to vote.

The annual City of Lansing Trunk or Treat Souls to the Polls event will take place at the South Washington Office Complex at 2500 S. Washington, Saturday, October 29, 1-4 pm. It is loads of fun to give candy to the children and encourage families to go inside and

vote. There is a children's ballot to make it a family affair. More information will be forthcoming.

OBSERVER CORPS Valerie Lafferty, Chair

The logo for 'MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK' features the word 'MAKING' in a large, bold, blue font, with 'DEMOCRACY WORK' in a smaller, red font below it. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located to the right of the text.

The Observer Corps (OC) held a virtual educational meeting on the role of the school boards in our state with attorney and 20-year school board member, now Grand Ledge School Board President, Sara Clark

Pierson. The LWVLA has now heard from subject matter experts on the roles of townships and counties in our government by the respective directors of government/legislation, on the Open Meetings Act by the Michigan Municipal League, on the flow of federal funds by the Ingham County Treasurer, on the challenges of campaigning and governing in a small rural town in Michigan, and now school boards, which seem to be the front line for many of our communities' challenges.

Because elected, but often unknown, county commissioners make so many decisions that affect our quality of life in our respective home communities, we are running a pilot project of video interviewing county commissioner candidates in contested primaries. Please remember that counties funnel federal funds to local governments, collect taxes, run elections, provide road services and security protection, handle the courts, manage parks, etc. If the primary pilot project is successful, we'd like to offer all county commission candidates the opportunity to present a 5-minute video interview on four questions taken from the Vote 411 questionnaire they have already received from LWVLA. So much more is communicated with a video interview than with a paragraph of words on a document!

Please recall LWVLA's motto is "Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy." It is all too clear that defending democracy is not a passive undertaking! We need your help by observing and writing a short report and/or doing short video interviews. There will be training and ongoing education for us all. We currently need observers in DeWitt, Bath, Charlotte, Eaton Rapids, Delta and Delhi Townships and many smaller, rural towns like Vermontville, as well as on library or mental health boards and a wide range of commissions on many fronts. Pick your area of interest or the entity nearest you. We **are** making a difference by knowing and sharing information. Call 517-349-6660 or email [Valerie Lafferty](#)! *And don't miss reading the OC Reports below.*

PROMOTE THE VOTE SUMMARY Donna Mullins, President

The petition drive to make voting a fundamental right in Michigan is winding to a close right now. Our local League was able to add 377 signatures to the total needed. About a third of the signatures were collected by non-League members who contacted us to become involved! The League is the go-to place for people interested in voting!

Beyond what we organized, many of our members collected signatures for other organizations including Voters Not Politicians. (It's my understanding that Mary Pollack

was born with a petition and pen in hand!) LWV is an organization with a mission that is shared by others, and we are proud to be in the company of any other organization that works to make a stronger democracy. Hats off to all!

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP Donna Mullins

Hello! In August we will be discussing *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration* (352 pp.) by Reuben Jonathan Miller. The chaplain and mass-incarceration sociologist at Cook County Jail in Chicago examines the lifelong realities of a criminal record, demonstrating how America's justice system is less about rehabilitation and more about structured disenfranchisement. To participate in the discussion on August 9, 10-11:30 am, contact [Donna](#) for the Zoom link.



You can also listen to the author himself. An hour-long conversation with Reuben Miller sponsored by the Justice Lab can be found at [Columbia](#) and another by the [Ford School](#) at UMich, while the [Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice](#) at Brown University hosted a slightly longer conversation with the author.

REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE Bettie Menchik, Chair

The discussion of *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* has challenged us to rethink how the legacy of slavery not only pervaded our history but continues to impact our lives today. Twelve members of the League have led insightful discussions of the book's chapters, challenging us to consider the inheritance of slavery, Reconstruction, and current laws on gun control and access to women's health care which continue to differentially impact Black and White Americans. We'll complete our discussion July 27.

There are innumerable issues the Education Committee can turn our attention to next. All suggestions are welcome. Some of the issues include looking at how recent Supreme Court decisions impact schools (school prayer and funding for religious schools), how race is taught in schools, mental health issues in schools, how to overcome the consequences of two years of COVID on student learning, pre-school access and funding, etc.

We welcome new members to our committee. Our next meeting will be in early September—at a time and place to be determined by everyone's availability. Contact Bettie Menchik at menchikb@msu.edu or 517-402-3903 if you are interested in our children's and grandchildren's future.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SCIENCE? AND WHY SHOULD I TRY IT? Laura Rogers, EAG Member

The Xerces Society defines community science (also known as participatory or citizen science) as “a form of



research that provides everyone—regardless of their background—an opportunity to contribute meaningful data to further our scientific understanding of key issues. By engaging community members, researchers can collect a larger amount of data, and often span more geographic regions, in a shorter amount of time. In turn, this data informs larger conservation efforts. It's also a great

opportunity for participants to learn more about species that interest them.” Which is why I hope to host an in-person program later this year (stay tuned).

I personally define community science as a hands-on, immersive excuse to get outside, get dirty/muddy/weeds-and-seeds in your hair, and have a ridiculous amount of fun while actively contributing to how we understand the world around us.... Sign me up!!

In a nutshell, community science enthusiasts

- Pick a personal interest...ANY interest! Bugs, frogs, birds, weather, climate, flowers, soil, rocks, trees, worms...name your passion, there's probably a community science project out there for you!
- Search the internet for the community science project of your choice.
- Find out what needs to be known before, during and after heading out into the field: training, paperwork (yep, it's everywhere), special equipment needs, bonus reading/internet resources.
- Get out there and do science!

It's educational (the things you learn will unfold in real time, as you're doing them, and be cemented in your memories because they happened personally to YOU). It's fun (who wouldn't jump at the chance to lounge in a field of flowers on a beautiful summer day, punctuated with bouts of gleefully chasing monarch butterflies?). It's eye-opening (I never thought male American Toads were aggressive during mating season until I saw one hip-check another into a clump of weeds). And to top it all off, you'll be submitting your findings to contribute to the global understanding of how life on Earth works. Cool.

How can your humble findings help change the world? According to the EPA, “Citizen science is much more than collecting data. It provides a way to engage all parts of society in gaining a deeper understanding of human environments, **build an informed population that can advocate successfully for environmental protection**, and more effectively protect human health and the environment.”

And it's not just about nerdy nature stuff; the EPA further explains, “Community and citizen science is an invaluable tool for communities disproportionately impacted by environmental issues, also known as **environmental justice** concerns.... engaging community members directly in science projects that address local concerns about air and water pollution can lead to better environmental data, improved understanding of environmental issues, and productive community engagement in problem solving. Through [EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants](#) and [Collaborative Problem-Solving and Cooperative Agreement](#) grants are awarded that support community-driven projects designed to engage, educate, and empower communities to better identify and understand local environmental and public health issues and develop strategies for addressing those issues.”

Need more convincing? Years ago I worked at a nature center and participated in FrogWatch USA, a community science project managed through the Association of Zoos

and Aquariums. The local newspaper covered one of our monitoring sessions. As a result, a shy, awkward teenage girl registered who was extremely interested in joining us. Over the next several weeks, she blossomed into a talkative, energetic young woman who had found her (frog) calling, along with closely befriending other shy teens who were budding volunteer helpers. We collected data (temperature, wind speed, humidity, precipitation, species of frogs heard and at what intensities), made discoveries (spring peepers have a modified call that sounds like chorus frogs!), and had some dramatic moments (the police showed up when they saw our headlamps). My first community science experience filled me with purpose, excitement and gained knowledge. But the most memorable moment was when that shy, awkward young lady told me she had decided to attend college to get her naturalist degree. A future passionate scientist, dedicated to protecting our environment....? Yes, I definitely believe community science programs are worth a try.

Links/Resources:

<https://www.citizenscience.gov/#>

<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/get-involved/community-science-opportunities>

EPA Story Map of Community Science Projects:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/57b2ee78221341a18b0f7ebe8017340d>

ONE THING

Whenever possible, buy your meat from the counter, wrapped in paper instead of pre-packaged in polystyrene.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS Camilla Davis, Membership Director

Rebecca Scofield, Leslie
Payton Hallett, MSU Spartan Unit

MAY & JUNE 2022 OBSERVER CORPS REPORTS

Clinton County Board of Commissioners - The meeting agenda included routine business. The administrator's report indicated that at least \$3 million of ARPA funds would be used to upgrade broadband internet access for county residents. Elaine Brown of the Conservation District board gave their annual report. In the past year \$1 million has been paid to farmers for land conservation programs. County Clerk Diane Zuker was retiring after 39 years of service. Friendly, efficient, businesslike, as usual.

Eaton County Board of Commissioners - The Michigan Department of State has federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Election Security Grant funds available to be passed through to local jurisdictions for the reimbursement of expenditures to counties up to \$150 per precinct. The County Clerk has determined these funds can be used to reimburse the cost to purchase and upgrade technology and networks used to support

election administration; \$7,650 in grant funds will be used to reimburse the county to upgrade equipment operating systems that provide additional security. The commission approved the application to request the funds.

A petition to change the Land Development District (zoning) from Low Density Residential to Limited Agricultural was approved. All decisions were unanimous. The commissioners approved the consolidation of construction codes from different townships for consistency and amended the code to be in alignment with the state. The commissioners also approved changes to the Housing Department Emergency Repair Program Guidelines. The county has had a hard time distributing the money to homeowners in need and believe the changes will make it easier to access the money. A proposal to abolish the Parks Commission and Reorganize the Parks Department was approved. Before the vote, a testy discussion took place between two commissioners. A roll call vote was taken and two-thirds of the commissioners approved abolishing the Parks Commission (it was advisory only.) Two parcels were approved under the Michigan Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act. This is a law that works to preserve farmland by offering incentives to farmers who are willing to participate. According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the 1974 law allows a farm landowner to enter into an agreement with the state that ensures the land will remain in agricultural use for a minimum of 10 years and up to 90 years. In return, the farm owner may be entitled to income tax benefits and exemption from special assessments on the land. Today, 3.3 million acres of land in Michigan are protected under this program.

Ingham County Board of Commissioners - The commissioners approved a Resolution Declaring the First Friday in June to Be National Gun Violence Awareness Day. The school shooting today in Texas was mentioned a couple times, both during the moment of prayer/meditation and on the vote regarding the National Gun Violence Awareness Day.

East Lansing City Council - There was an officer involved in a shooting on April 25; the community is asking for clarification. Representatives from Haven House and Meals on Wheels were present. There was discussion of property taxes, the effect of increased property values on assessments, and avenues for appeal. Sidewalk repairs on Michigan Avenue, EL Community Development Block Grants and the East Lansing El Fresco (open air leisure area) on Albert Avenue were also discussed. With three meetings a month it's difficult to keep up with the discussions. The agenda this day was very full, with 16 consent items.

Meridian Township – Low-income residents not being able to afford housing and related costs were discussed, in reference to the new Daniels Drain assessments at The Ponds. Meridian Township is paying 50 percent of the costs. Many of those residents are on fixed incomes. It seems Meridian Township is doing everything it can to make the drain project's assessments affordable but there are some residents who are struggling with the cost. Meridian is trying to move all voting from schools given right-to-carry gun issues, so there are new voting precincts. Trustees are considering virtual meeting access to accommodate anyone on the board or in the public who needs it, based on AG Nessel's decision. The township is trying hard to retain and help employees with an extra paycheck to offset inflation problems. Some citizens objected but it was approved. The township is also working to make Meridian more inclusive.

Meridian Township Environmental Commission – The Environmental Commission is updating their 5-year sustainability plan, originally implemented in 2017. The Energy Team submitted draft updates to the Solar Energy goals and the Food to Composting Group submitted their goals for gleaning, organic recycling and school engagement. Michigan has a Good Food Charter which was recently updated and used as a reference. The many community gardens were discussed as a part of the solution to provide healthy, locally grown food. Meridian Township won the highest recognition for the **Green Community Challenge** underwritten by several state departments, the Michigan Association of Counties, the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Townships Association. Four green grants were funded by the Environmental Commission that included a butterfly garden, a rain garden and a project by the Haslett Community Church. There is a natural shoreline demonstration at Lake Lansing South currently out for bid, wetland brochure being sent out to landscapers about Meridian's wetland ordinances, and a wetland demonstration garden that will be developed at Central Park. Transportation and Recycling (Inorganic) will be discussed next for the updated 5-year plan.

Grand Ledge School Board - The group of parents (7) opposed to mask requirements, policies changed during COVID, acceptance of transgender issues, the theory of evolution, and all progressive attitudes repeated their various opposition phrases during public comment. The board discussed a proposed surveillance camera agreement with the Eaton County Sheriff's Office and the board covering the operation of video cameras in the schools. The focus of the cameras would be protecting children and school personnel from active shooters or other risks. The Sheriff's Office would be responsible for the technical maintenance and operations. The agreement specifies privacy protection issues, among other concerns. The agreement will be voted on at another meeting. The potential budget shortfall for next year was discussed. One board member wanted to call for layoffs now, but the rest of the board wanted to wait for final numbers regarding kindergarten sign up and teacher retirement counts and a detailed plan for reducing costs. Enrollment is declining but by how much is difficult to predict.

They approved changes in curriculum tools that would be implemented in incremental phases in the coming years; the purchase of new video cameras for the exterior of school buses to improve quality and coverage for safety; an agreement with the City of Grand Ledge to continue providing a uniformed police officer for the schools; and their continued relationship with RESA and the Eaton County Intermediate School District and the amount for which GLSD would be responsible. Much time was spent discussing the major construction projects for which costs are rising to the detriment of future plans. At the end of the meeting, they explained that all meetings of the board would be in the board meeting room, which will have improved electronic systems for better transparency. This new policy will assure all future meetings will be recorded (there were complaints about a meeting held in another room in February which was not recorded). Most importantly, the acoustics will be better

In the public comment period, someone asked for the definition of "inclusion." The DEI Committee has not met in some time and at the end of the meeting the Superintendent did not provide a definition but said he would provide an answer in the coming days. The group opposed to the board has made an issue of the board not making public how a commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion would be implemented in the school curriculum. There have been complaints about the Superintendent not providing answers

to the questions raised by the public. The Superintendent said he is making a special effort to answer questions at the meeting end or in the days following. One issue involved a parent's concern that they do not have a policy to request parental permission for a child to be interviewed by non-school agencies or persons. Another question concerned land purchased in the past and the plans for its use. The board recognized the top 25 students in the graduating class, an elementary school reported their accomplishments, and the public library reported on their programs. There was a more positive tone to the meeting overall.

At the next meeting, the board approved the Strategic Plan, developed with the Michigan School Board Association. The development model will be used as a guide for other school districts. The board discussed the School Lunch Policy; since free lunches will no longer be available they want to assure that no child will be denied lunch. The board is also looking at policy to assure that no child is denied their diploma because of outstanding debts. The data provided used abbreviations that needed explanation. The board approved a budget without knowing exactly what the state legislature will approve and without knowing exactly what the student population will be. Public comment concerned school of choice policy cap, how the EDI committee members were selected and what is being reported. Also, there was concern about safety in buildings given two reports of outside doors being unlocked. Some discussion between board members was not audible. The assistant superintendent for operations was leaving and there was no explanation of why, which seemed nontransparent. It was peaceful and fairly professional.

City of Lansing - Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee - The committee considered adopting a Climate Emergency Resolution submitted by Lori Welch, Lansing Sustainability Manager. The budget now includes \$57,000 for an assistant for Welch. Also on the agenda was an update from the Lansing Chief of Police, though he did not appear at the meeting and evidently did not respond to an email inquiry. DEI is a big issue for the police force. The current Sustainability Commission is strictly limited to advising the mayor only. The committee was welcoming and attentive, appearing to listen carefully to the comments offered by Roxanne Case (Ingham Land Bank) and Randy Dykhuis (LEAT), who suggested they work with BWL.

MICRC -The MICRC is concerned that they set good precedents for the next Commission (one every 10-year census cycle), so some of the meeting was about the final reports and litigation. Five main issues: 1) How to disband legally. No rush, because litigation is ongoing, and the current cases will not clear the courts until fall or later. This means there will be no redrawing before the election—and probably not after, either. 2) Two lawsuits still to be decided. Banerian case is about one-person, one-vote, that is, equal numbers in each district. The numbers are close but not exactly the same. However, leeway is allowed with justification, and Communities of Interest will be the justification. Agee case is about VRA. It revolves around the decision by the Commission that drawing districts that are over 50 percent African American is not needed, and in fact was wasteful of AA votes, because AA voters can have an opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice with slightly fewer than 50 percent of voters being African American. 3) Final reports are being held up while lawyers scrutinize them, in case they undermine the litigation ongoing. 4) Maps are now published on the MICRC website in a more user friendly way so a person can find their district(s). 5) Litigation costs means the Commission is over budget. They have asked for more funds from the Legislature and are undergoing a financial audit

(voluntary) to show they have been good stewards of their budget. No concerns. The Commission continues to be completely transparent and responsible. Businesslike, as always. Other states' commissions have fallen apart in disarray and Michigan's is the model many are looking to emulate.

Tri-County Regional Planning Commission - The commission voted to offer a show of support for 14 out of 15 proposed park and trail projects that have applied for various grant funding opportunities through the DNR. The project that was excluded from this was selected to have its support vote delayed until the commission's July meeting. This was due to negative comments about the project made during the opening public comment period. This may be an intergovernmental issue since there was some debate about whether due diligence was done by City of East Lansing and Ingham County, even though representatives of both organizations participate on the commission (and were in attendance). The closing public comment period had comments that were supportive of the project from both members of the public and an audience member who self-presented as being an analyst with the City of East Lansing who had worked on this project planning. No concerns about transparency. The discussion was lively.

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

All committees would welcome new members. Contact the chairs for more information.

VOTER SERVICE: Contact [Joanne Winkelman](#).

K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Contact [Bettie Menchik](#).

ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP: Contact [Ellen Link](#) or [Elaine Fischhoff](#).