

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL VOTER**

JANUARY 2021

LWVLA CALENDAR

Wednesday, January 27, 7 pm. New Member Zoom Meeting. See Membership News below for more information.

Tuesday, February 9, 10 am. LWVLA's Book Discussion Group. Meets on Zoom to discuss *A Promised Land* by Barack Obama. See Program Notes below for more information.

Wednesday, February 10, 12 noon. Webinar featuring Dr. Michael Barbour. "Online Learning: What Does the Research Tell Us? How Should the Research Shape Policy?" See the Education Committee's article below for more information.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It comes as no surprise, but we have plenty of work to do if our democracy will continue to stand. In a country based on law, we must hold people accountable. If accountability turns into revenge and punishment, the fire will grow larger and consume us.

Because I know so many of you, I believe we can meet this challenge. You have given me plenty of evidence that we are steady, compassionate, courageous and persistent. We can get angry, but we do our level best to act out of love. Love of country. Love of principles. Love of family and friends. I have begged myself to act on the love while recognizing the anger. It is easier to do that with a community who feels the same.



Our local League has plans to strengthen our presence in the community by developing an Observer Corps to keep track of local government. We are going to review our local positions for updating and maybe to add to them. (The national, state and local Leagues all take positions. Ours were last seriously reviewed in 2013.)

We are working to make our committees more inclusive and robust. We do not intend to provide mere lip service to diversity, equity and inclusion. There is work to be done, and right here. Got an idea how to make that happen? Let me in on it!

During our full membership meeting in December, those present took a talent and interest poll so they could indicate their interest in becoming more involved. A similar survey will be coming to you via email. One option is that you want to support our activities with your membership but don't have the time to do more. We appreciate your membership. (Don't forget to renew!)

We can't get enough of people who are talented writers and artists. More tech people would be amazing. Interest in our core voter services and government missions is vital. The program, publicity, membership and development committees keep the organization growing and relevant. Our advocacy committees—environment, gun violence prevention, and education—connect with the community, demonstrate how policies and laws affect them personally, and encourage citizen participation. Please read the entire newsletter to learn more about all these committees.

Don't forget that we will be filling several board positions. Are you interested? Let the Nominating Committee know. Heck, email me and ask me what it would mean for you to be a member of the board. [Email me](#) and tell me how we can best fulfill our mission!

Now, for a personal note. I have struggled with how to make things better when I want to hurt the people who damaged something I love. After much thought, I understood that relentless anger is relentlessly corrosive. I want, more than anything, to make things better. I think you all are just the people to do that. With open hearts and strong spines, we can do thousands of little things that will bend the arc toward justice. We can do it.

Together,
Donna

**LWVMI 2021 PLAN FOR
COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST PROJECT
FOR REDISTRICTING
Donna Mullins**



This was sent to me from Christina Schlitt, LWVMI President. I'm quoting because I don't know much about it yet:

“As you may know, ‘respecting Communities of Interest’ is one of the criteria that the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission is required to follow when they draw Michigan's new maps for the state Legislature and the U.S. Congress. The League is uniquely qualified to help identify, educate and support Communities of Interest within our communities across the state.”

Our own Judy Karandjeff is the lead for our area. Judy and I spoke only a few days ago to explain her understanding of the project. I will be learning more soon. We'll start the project with a steering committee to try to get things organized. Once we are sure of our facts and the work that needs to be done, we will be in touch if we need help on the project (very likely!).

A copy of a study on Communities of Interest can be found on our [website](#).

**WELCOME TO THE BOARD, KATE LEIN!
Donna Mullins, President**

We are pleased to announce that Kate Lein will be assuming the position of Development Director for our local League. Former Director Debby Starnes has already generously spent time with Kate to fill her in on past accomplishments and future hopes. We are thrilled to have Kate on board!



Now retired from MSU where she practiced and taught as a Nurse Practitioner, Kate remains dedicated to serving people in myriad ways. She practiced at Care Free, a Lansing clinic which provides health care to people who would otherwise be unable to afford it. She began her involvement in the League in 2016, like so many of us. First becoming involved in the Gun Violence Prevention Committee, she was then inspired to be active in Voter Services, where she found joy registering high school students. (I totally understand!)

Fun fact: she plays the bugle!

While interviewing her for this article, Kate said, "If you're excited about something it's easy to do it." She is excited about the opportunity to help our local League support and defend democracy. She's excited about the opportunity to influence more young people to become involved citizens. She's excited about being a member of a group filled with extraordinary people devoted to progressive ideals.

And we are excited to be working with this kind, intelligent and warm person!
Welcome, Kate!

LWVLA NOMINATING COMMITTEE IS CALLING FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE 2021 – 2023 LWVLA BOARD

Val Lafferty, Chair

LWVLA needs your help in identifying officers and directors for the upcoming term. As you are aware, our mission is nothing short of defending democracy! Your League envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

LWVLA also works very hard to increase understanding of important public policy issues, including influencing policy through education and advocacy. As such, members' interests and skills are extremely helpful to the success of our chapter! Skills needed are varied but include things like administration, development, finance, program, advocacy, voter service, technology, and outreach (public relations, membership). Please consider sharing your own dedication to our shared values by nominating a member you know -- or yourself! You know best how you can contribute. (If nominating someone other than yourself, please confirm first their willingness to serve.)

The open positions for the upcoming term are:

- Vice President/Program Director
- Treasurer
- Parliamentarian/Government Director
- Membership Director
- Preventing Gun Violence Director
- Events Coordinator
- Nominating Committee Chairperson

The 2021 – 2022 Nominating Committee members are [Val Lafferty](#) at 517-349-6660, [Nell Pizzo](#), and [Camilla Davis](#). We welcome your questions/comments and, especially, your nominations!

PROGRAM NOTES....
Dorothy Engelman, Program VP

A huge “Thank You” to the Education Committee for hosting back-to-back programs on virtual schools, which are so important in this pandemic world! The January 13 program, “**Online Schools in the Charter World. How Do They Work?**” can be viewed on the [League of Women Voters Lansing Area Channel](#) on YouTube. Most of the League’s other programs from 2020 are available there, too.

The second webinar on education will be held on **February 10 at noon** and features Dr. Michael Barbour, an expert on online schools. His presentation is titled: “**Online Learning: What Does the Research Tell Us? How Should the Research Shape Policy?**” Please watch your email for the registration information or check out our [website](#). There’s more information on the [LWVLA Facebook](#) page on a variety of topics.

February's Book Discussion is Tuesday, Feb. 9 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. In January, most of the discussion centered on the events of January 6, 2021, and we didn't get around to talking about the *Daughters of Erietown* by Connie Schultz. Soooo..the group will spend part of the February meeting discussing that before moving on to the first half of *A Promised Land* by Barack Obama. All are invited; please contact [Donna Mullins](#) if you are not on the email list for the discussions and she'll add you.

If you volunteered to help with Zoom and webinars, we haven't forgotten you. We are in the process of developing the process that will be utilized and will be in touch soon. Thank you for your offer.

Please stay safe and continue to participate in our virtual activities.

MORE ON VIRTUAL SCHOOLS FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE Bettie Menchik, Co-Chair



The second webinar in the series on virtual schools will take a critical look at the research on the effectiveness of virtual schools. Does it work for all kids? Does it work better for some children than others? Are there successful models that can be replicated in Michigan?

Join us on Wednesday, February 10 at noon for a discussion with Professor Michael Barbour of Touro University, California. Dr Barbour will present research that shows virtual schools are performing terribly with no signs of improvement. Research has consistently found that students enrolled in full-time virtual schools perform at levels well below their counterparts in face-to-face schools.

According to Dr. Barbour, “Legislators and policymakers have consistently failed to pass bills or create regulatory regimes that would provide additional oversight and accountability to online schooling. Policy organizations and advocacy groups that have historically been supportive of virtual schooling have begun to question its effectiveness and are now calling for additional regulation. Nevertheless, at this point virtual schooling continues to expand, largely without effective oversight or regulation, despite the general lack of evidence that it is efficacious in most circumstances” (Barbour, [Virtual Schools in the U.S, 2019](#), National Center for Education Policy, chapter II).

We look forward to Dr. Barbour’s critique of virtual schools in February. There will be plenty of time for questions.

GUN VIOLENCE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE Martha Couretas & Melinda Frame, GVP Committee



Summarizing the year past and planning for a future of fewer firearm deaths.

Data from the Gun Violence Archive indicates the largest one-year increase in homicides occurred in 2020 since the country started keeping such records. The final figures for 2020 will not be available until September 2021, but preliminary data indicates a range of a 21 to 36 percent increase in homicides. Noting that about 30-plus percent of total gun deaths are homicides and 60-plus percent of total gun deaths are suicides, the trend becomes even more alarming.

Experts agree the pandemic has played a role in the rise in killings. Preliminary attempts at understanding this rise include a decreased deterioration in police authority, the thinning of police ranks because of illness in addition to increased need to manage unrest on the streets, and an increase in domestic violence due to pandemic restrictions. The fact that children are not in school puts a financial and emotional strain on families who may be faced with job loss and threat of eviction. Schools provide a critical oversight to child well-being in addition to teaching academics.

Recognizing that gun violence is an increased threat to public health and safety creates an urgency to analyze the causes and take actions that maximize support systems, particularly in this critical environment of pandemic and social unrest. Legislation that decreases the current epidemic of gun ownership is imperative for public welfare. More guns do not make us safer.

PRELIMINARY GUN VIOLENCE STATISTICS FOR 2020

Federal Gun Violence **Statistics** for 2020:

Number of gun violence deaths	
All Causes	43,376
Homicide and murder	19,220
Suicide	24,156
Total number of injuries	39,311
Mass shootings	612
Number of children (age 0-11) killed	292
Number of children (age 0-11) injured	693
Number of teens (age 12-17) killed	1,061
Number of teens (age 12-17) injured	3,046

Michigan Gun Violence **Statistics** for 2018:

Number of gun violence deaths	
All Causes	1,310
Number of children and teens	96
Homicides	485
Suicides	825
Status among 50 states	25th lowest

Michigan Gun Violence Statistics for 2018 are the latest available from Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The number of deaths by gun violence in 2020 is expected to increase, conforming to trends in national data, during the seclusion of families during the pandemic.

Lansing Area Gun Violence Statistics (*Lansing State Journal* 12/18/2020):

Deaths in Greater Lansing Region

: in 2020	27
in 2019	19
in 2018	14
in 2017	15
in 2016	10

Lansing saw a higher number of homicides this past year than in the last three decades.

EAG REVIEWS LAME DUCK LEGISLATION Ellen Link, Chair



As we've learned the hard way, the legislative lame duck sessions that follow elections can produce negative consequences as legislators hurriedly pass bills without giving them proper scrutiny or allowing others to do so. The session which just concluded with the end of 2020 wasn't as bad as feared but still left room for improvement.

Sadly, recycling legislation that had been championed by environmentalists throughout Michigan, including at the League, and which should have been passed months ago died in the House. [HB 5812-5817](#), a package of bills painstakingly put together by numerous stakeholders, would have updated solid waste laws that are now over 25 years old to encourage recycling over landfilling. It addressed the need to provide access to it across the state (Michigan's recycling rate is about 18 percent compared to 35 percent nationally) and sought to sustainably manage solid waste by turning recyclables into resources fueling the creation of jobs. We hope it will be resurrected in 2021.

On the positive side, SB 241, which bans water shut-offs to ensure that all Michigan residents have access to running water in their homes during the pandemic through March 31, passed and became law; it was supported by LWVMI. Also positive were bills that did *not* pass but instead died in the House. Foremost among them was HB 5423, the "Broken Bottle Bill," which would have diverted millions of dollars from unclaimed bottle deposits that are used to clean up the more than 24,000 contaminated sites across Michigan and given them to the beverage industry. Instead, according to the League of Conservation Voters, "Michigan LCV and other environmental groups agreed to a deal dedicating a small, capped portion of these funds to bottle bill fraud study and prevention." The benefits are expected to exceed the costs.

Another contentious bill that died in the Senate was SB 431, aimed at removing local governments' oversight over sand and gravel mining operations in their communities, thereby threatening their drinking water resources and environment. (It's been reported that the industry hasn't given up and will try again to get such legislation passed.) And HB 6233, which would have hampered the sale of electric vehicles directly to consumers in Michigan, died in the House as well, reviving hope that the sale and use of energy efficient vehicles here will continue to expand.

ONE THING

Enjoy listening to podcasts? Check out [Green America's](#) compelling menu of possibilities covering sustainability, climate change, food issues and more.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS
Camilla Davis, Membership Director

DUES ARE DUE!

Have you paid your 2020 - 2021 dues? LWVLA needs your support to continue its mission of Defending Democracy.

If you haven't, there are two ways to pay.

1. Pay online by going to the [LWVLA](#) website and clicking on JOIN. You'll be able to pay using a credit card.
2. [Download the membership form](#), print, complete and mail with your check to LWVLA's PO box listed on the form.

NEW MEMBERS MEETING

Members who joined LWVLA during 2020 are invited to a Zoom meeting on Wednesday, January 27 at 7 pm designed for those new to the League. We'll talk about League organization, opportunities to get involved in the work of the League, League communication, and lots of other things.

New members will receive information by email, including a Zoom link to the event. For more information, contact Camilla at cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com or call 517-668-6156.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Catherine Davis, East Lansing
Linda Burnham, East 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.

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.