

***EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY***



**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

***JUNE  
2021***

***IN THE JUNE CAPITOL VOTER***

- From the President
- LWVLA Program Update
- Board Changes - Goodbye & Hello
- LWVMI Convention Highlights
- New LWVMI Criminal Justice Position
- Voter Service Opportunities
- DEI Plans & An Opportunity to Help
- Two Public Health & Safety Concerns
- Drive Clean with the League

- **The Observer Corps in Action**
- **Make a Climate Commitment**
- **LWVMI Convention Workshop Highlights**
- **Welcome to a New Member!**

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## LWVLA CALENDAR

**Tuesday, July 13** - LWVLA Book Discussion Group. 10 to 11:30 am. See *Program Updates* below for details.

**Thursday, August 26.** Equality Day, 101st Anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

You probably all know the story that Ginger Rogers danced as well as Fred Astaire only backwards and in heels. Times have changed: we just danced our way through a pandemic AND an election wearing sneakers and sweats while on Zoom. Ginger has nothing on us. (Well, she might be a better dancer.) I encourage you to read the entire newsletter, which is filled with information on coming candidate forums, new diversity initiatives, the progress of our new Observer Corps and state convention news.



Redistricting and how to respond to voter bills which may actually suppress voting are very high priorities. On May 27, several members volunteered to help out at the public hearing of the Michigan Independent Citizen's Redistricting Commission. Like other meetings, much of the testimony reflected a point of view that there is a divide between the needs and, more importantly, the values of rural and urban residents. It's pretty clear that the divide will not lead us to the more perfect union that is our goal. It needs to be addressed. All thoughts are welcome!

LWVMI is very much on top of the voter bills and will be calling on members throughout the year to connect with legislators when it is time to do so. Our own Judy Karandjeff is leading the charge for this and she is absolutely the right person for the job. The best thing you can do to respond to this assault on democratic principles is to read everything you receive from the League.

When you work for somewhat impossible dreams, your work is never done. Our work in defending democracy is existential in nature and it always has been. "People power" when rightly understood threatens traditional power. There is no rest for the noble. On the other hand, it's not an unpleasant task when you tackle the challenge in good company.

We'll do it  
Together,

*Donna*

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**PROGRAM UPDATES**  
**Susan R. Chalgian, Program VP**

Here is my first contribution to our Capitol Voter newsletter as I settle into my new role as LWVLA Vice President - Programs Director. I've been a member for about three years but have been interested in empowering voters and defending democracy since before high school. I look forward to learning, and to helping LWVLA members put their ideas into action through our League's thoughtful and vibrant programs. Unfortunately, there's not much program activity this time of year. But it will start up again soon.

The **LWVLA Book Group** will meet on July 13 from 10-11:30 am. They will be discussing *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* by Heather Cox Richardson. It is likely they will meet virtually, but please contact **Donna Mullins** to participate or for more information.

August 26 the LWVLA is hosting an event marking **Equality Day** and celebrating the 101st anniversary of the 19th Amendment. Please look for time, location and more details in our next newsletter.

Please feel free to contact me at [chalgia1@gmail.com](mailto:chalgia1@gmail.com).

Respectfully,

Susan R. Chalgian  
VP-Programs

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**BOARD CHANGES - HELLO AND THANK YOU**  
**Donna Mullins**

Last month the newest slate of board members was formally elected by a virtual vote (plus a few paper ballots). Welcome **Susan R. Chalgian** as our new Vice President and Programs Director. Susan's work on the Centennial Committee, valuable assistance in obtaining speakers for the "Just Mercy" webinar, and commitment to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion make her a perfect fit for the job.

**Kathy Lovell** was appointed to fill the open Publicity Committee position. Kathy has board experience and a willingness to learn the job, and is also committed and experienced in DEI. She's already been a great help in reviewing new communication software.

**Dorothy Engelman** is leaving the position of Vice President and Programs Director after a two-year term marked by a pandemic, broken centennial dreams, and one heck of an

important election. Dorothy was able to obtain a grant from Allegra Printing to support our Centennial Art Contest and, in addition, supply the League with bookmarks to distribute at events. She has also been an active participant in creating the voter guide and sending postcards at any possible opportunity. I am sure Dorothy's creativity and commitment to democratic principles will continue to benefit the League. Thank you for your service, Dorothy!

The new board will be meeting in July to review our progress on the strategic plan we developed last year. We accomplished a great deal last year in the face of great obstacles, a group effort that met the challenges. I'm confident that with your support our new board will meet the challenges of the new year.

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## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2021 LWVMI CONVENTION

The LWVMI Convention was held virtually on May 21 and 22. Our voting delegates included: Donna Mullins, Camilla Davis, Cele Friestater, Beth Moore, Elaine Fischhoff, Marty Couretas, Barb Bidigare, Susan R Chalgian, Val Lafferty, and Melinda Frame. There were also two non-voting attendees. Vaccinations allowed many of the attendees to view the convention as a group, giving us time to discuss what we were learning.



### **Bell Ringer Awards**

Local League leaders are honored at the convention through Bell Ringer Awards in four areas. This year LWVLA honored:

Elaine Fischhoff, whose exemplary and indefatigable efforts include activism on behalf of the environment and extend beyond her efforts with our Environmental Advocacy Group—to her involvement with the Lansing Environmental Action Team and, as a citizen, advocating for actions that will help reverse the policies fueling climate change.

Marilyn Wilson, whose eight years as Voter Service Director brought us close ties with local clerks, MSUVotes and school districts, resulting in student placements with our League, financial assistance as well as other resources from MSU, and the majority of our membership volunteering for voter service activities.

Valerie Lafferty, who made dreams become reality through her longstanding interest in the environment and, recently, her pivotal role in bringing birth to our League's Observer Corps, which is increasing membership as well as community involvement.

Barb Bidigare, who designed a strategic planning session for board members that provided needed direction and resulted in the League creating an Observer Corps and initiating new connections in the community.  
Congratulations to all the Bell Ringers and thank you for all your service to the League.

### **Belle Brotherton Exceptional Leadership Award**

Our own Judy Karandjeff, Lansing Area League, won the League's highest award—the Belle Brotherton Award for outstanding leadership and significant accomplishments. Here is what was read before Judy accepted this award in tearful humility:

This member's career in public service has been an invaluable asset to the LWVMI. Her passion for advocacy and activism was part of her college experience when she marched at Selma, Alabama for civil rights. She brought that passion for civil rights and social justice not only to her career choices but also to the League of Women Voters. Her working career included serving as Executive Director of the Michigan Women's Commission, Executive Director of Planned Parenthood of Michigan, a research analyst with the Michigan House of Representative, and an aide to former State Representative Mary Brown. She was admitted to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 2012.

A League member since 1972, this member's work with the state League began as a volunteer in 1977. She served as the Vice President for Advocacy from 1979-1981 and again from 2011-2015. She served as the LWVMI president from 2015-2019. At the Lansing Area League, she has served on the board in various positions over the years, including as president.

You can probably guess that our Belle Brotherton Award winner is Judy Karandjeff. Thanks to her experience in public service, she has brought an insider's knowledge of the legislative process in Michigan to the League, providing League advocates the tools and skill set to have our voices heard. Her work in the Michigan political arena has given her access to decision makers and advocates who share the League's good government goals, as well as knowledge of pitfalls that should be avoided. She has added beneficial credibility and visibility to the League because of her professional representation of the League's positions.

**READ MORE** about Judy's long list of League accomplishments.

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## NEW STATE POSITION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Every two years prior to state convention, the local leagues review state positions and may submit recommendations for changes or new state study proposals to the LWVMI Board. The board determines whether to pursue updates of existing positions or adopt any proposed new studies in order to meet current or upcoming advocacy needs. This year no revisions were recommended to state positions. However, the Midland League proposed that our Michigan League vote in concurrence to adopt the **California Criminal Justice Position**.

A concurrence is an agreement by League members to adopt a position reached by another state League. Once a position is studied and adopted by one state League, other state Leagues can agree to adopt it in its entirety, or not. Once a position is taken, Leagues can lobby their elected officials to advance these positions. This new position gives us the ability to take a stand locally on criminal justice issues. Keep in mind that only the president can speak for the League; in other words, members may not represent

themselves as speaking for the League unless asked to do so by the president. You may, of course, always advocate personally for positions that you care about.

The LWV California position supports:

- a criminal justice system that is just, effective, equitable, transparent, and that fosters public trust at all stages, including policing practices, pre-trial procedures, sentencing, incarceration, and re-entry;
- the elimination of systemic bias, including the disproportionate policing and incarceration of marginalized communities;
- policing practices that promote safety for both law enforcement officers and the communities they serve;
- collaboration between government and community throughout every stage of the criminal justice system;
- a focus on humane treatment and rehabilitation with the goal of promoting the successful reentry into communities of those who have been incarcerated; and
- reliance on evidence-based research in decision-making about law enforcement programs and policies (including scheduled, periodic audits of program and policy effectiveness).

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## IT'S A BUSY MONTH FOR VOTER SERVICES!

Joanne Winkelman, Voter Service Director

### Voter Guides

Dorothy Engelman is formatting the Lansing City Primary Voter Guide and volunteers are calling locations to see if they are open and can distribute the guides. We are finding that many community centers are still closed, so if you have connections in the Lansing

Area, please ask them if they will distribute the voter guides. Remind people that the guides are nonpartisan, free, and we deliver! They will be available the last week in June. A big thank you to all the volunteers who called and offered to distribute the voter guides. Feel free to contact Joanne Winkelman via [email](#) or at 248-804-7433 if you have ideas for distribution or want to volunteer.



**MAKING**  
DEMOCRACY WORK®

### Forums

The LWVLA will be hosting forums for the Lansing City Council Members on June 23, in the evening. The mayoral forum was cancelled as it conflicted with the Fox 47 forum. More information about the forums will be forthcoming.

### Voter Registration

Voter registration drives will be conducted on June 19 at the Juneteenth Festival in REO Town and the Pinecrest Neighborhood Juneteenth event at Henry Fine Park. Thanks to all who are volunteering to provide this service.

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## OBSERVER CORPS Val Lafferty, Chair



The LWVLA Observer Corps completed its second month of observations. The big take-away is the transparency and civility of the governmental bodies -- our Observers are impressed! Please check out member observations in the [attached report](#). We've also decided additional regional information might be included, not necessarily just League issues, as it could be helpful to all of us as residents of the tri-county area.

The Observer Corps combines many functions, including educating ourselves on how our local governments work, identifying important questions for upcoming candidate interviews, and flagging items important to LWVLA and positions taken—particularly education, gun violence/health safety and our environment. Please consider becoming an Observer. Call or email Val Lafferty a 517-349-6660 or [LaffertyPLLC@gmail.com](mailto:LaffertyPLLC@gmail.com).

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## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION PLANS— AND AN OPPORTUNITY Donna Mullins

We are looking for a few brave members to be part of a new committee. For years now, LWV has been working on becoming a more diverse, more equitable and more inclusive organization with somewhat spotty success. We are now beginning a new effort which we hope will encourage creative strategies to meet this somewhat ambiguous goal.



Step one will be to create an ad hoc committee charged with creating a strategic plan to meet these goals. The first item the committee will study is their own biases (known commonly as “doing the work”). Secondly, they will study how to assess an organization from a DEI perspective. Then they will attempt a SWOT analysis of our organization, looking at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats through a DEI lens. Finally, they will come up with suggestions for the board. Each step could take months, but we are trying to create a solid foundation for a brighter future.

I will be involved with the committee for only the first step. After that I can be consulted, but the committee needs to do their work independently from the president. (How the board does its work might be an issue and the committee will be productive only if free to go where their study takes them.) The committee will consider race but not exclusively, as diversity touches everything that makes us different from each other, including age, ability, culture, religion, stature, gender, sexual orientation, education, health and plenty of other things. To address it well, we need to understand ourselves and the cultures that surround

us. I expect that such a committee will challenge members' understanding of how well they meet their own values. It won't always be comfortable. There will be hard conversations. By looking at our own imperfections, we will become better equipped to advocate for a more perfect union.

To help us prepare for this adventure, the board has agreed to support three members to attend the June 17 Summit on Race and Inclusion organized by the Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance (LEDA). The virtual summit runs from 9 to 4. Attendees will have access to all of the sessions for 6 months after the meeting, giving many others a chance to participate one session at a time. (I am paying for my own attendance, as I have for nearly a decade. It's a good conference.) If you are interested in joining a watch party on the day of the event or participating in mini events that will include a viewing of individual sessions followed by discussion, let me know. Also, if you are interested in participating in this committee that is vital to the future of our organization, let me know. I don't know most of you personally, so *I really need to hear from you* if this is to be a committee that represents the organization. Can't wait to hear from you.

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## FROM THE PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY/FIREARMS GROUP

### SUICIDE: A PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE

Linda Melaragni

In order to make Michigan a safer state when it comes to gun violence, Michigan must develop strategies to help those struggling with thoughts of suicide. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in Michigan. Rates of suicide have been increasing since 2010: between 2009 and 2018 the rate of suicides per 100,000 among Michigan residents increased 28%. In 2018 there were 14,789 homicides and 24,432 suicides nationally ([Gun Violence Archive](#)). In Ingham County that year there were 41 suicides and in Eaton County, 25 ([lifestories.com](#)). So far this year there have been 9,438 suicides in the US (Gun Violence Archive).

The state of Michigan established the Michigan Suicide Prevention Commission in 2019 to collect data, look at existing prevention services, and make recommendations to decrease the incidence in our state. [Their final report](#), with recommendations, was issued in March 2021. The recommendations were contained in 5 priority areas:

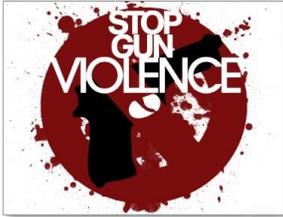
1. Minimizing suicidal behavior by promoting safe environments, resiliency, and connectedness
2. Increasing and expanding access to care to support to those at risk
3. Improving suicide prevention training and education
4. Implementing best practices in suicide prevention for health care systems
5. Enhancing suicide specific data collection and systems

The Public Health and Safety Committee is looking at the intersection of suicide and mental health as a topic for a future League presentation.

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## U. S. SENATE HEARINGS ON GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION, 2021

### Kathleen Crooks



In March of this year, the U.S. Senate began hearings on important legislation to address the prevention of gun violence. Two committees that have conducted hearings are the Senate Judiciary, chaired by Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois, and its Subcommittee on the Judiciary and the Constitution, chaired by Senator Michael Blumenthal of Connecticut. Videos of these hearings may be viewed on [C-SPAN.org](https://www.c-span.org), using the search term “*gun violence prevention, 2021.*”

Key proposals that would address the prevention of gun violence at the federal level include:

H.R. 8 - *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021*

S. 529 - *Background Check Expansion Act*

S. 736 - *Assault Weapons Ban of 2021*

H.R. 1620 - *Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021*

S. 527 - *Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act of 2021*

S. 292 - *Extreme Risk Protection Order and Violence Prevention Act of 2021.*

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If these laws are passed and then implemented, Congressional initiatives would provide greater continuity among the states in laws designed to prevent or reduce gun violence.

[READ MORE](#) about current laws and public support for new legislation.

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## MY CITIZEN CLIMATE COMMITMENT

### Ellen Link, EAG Co-chair

This spring John Sarver (a former EAG member), in his work for Meridian Township, created “[My Citizen Climate Commitment](#)” to help his neighbors better understand how every individual can help reduce fossil fuel emissions to ensure a future for life on this precious planet we all share. Val Lafferty and Elaine Fischhoff brought it to the attention of the LWVLA board, who gave their approval to a lightly edited version. We ask that you read it, take it to heart, and commit yourself to following its lead. It could make all the difference in the world. Below is a brief excerpt:



To address the Climate Emergency, we have to reduce our use of fossil fuels... Since the electric grid will continue to increase its use of renewable energy, many have proposed “electrifying everything” to decrease our use of natural gas and gasoline. Energy efficiency also has a very large role to play in reducing carbon emissions...

We can't wait until 2030, 2040 or 2050 to start eliminating our use of fossil fuels. Many of the decisions we make today, including purchasing vehicles and home appliances and equipment, will still be having an impact 10, 15 or 20 years from now. It makes sense to switch from gas to electric appliances and heating equipment when a replacement is needed, but frequently when equipment fails there is no time to research alternatives. When you're ready to buy a new vehicle, it makes sense to look at the variety of electric vehicles that are now available. The Citizen's Climate Commitment asks League of Women Voters' members to consider electric alternatives and plan ahead for their future purchases. We are asked to consider replacing the following fossil fuel equipment with electric equipment:

- Gasoline vehicles to electric vehicles
- Gas stoves to electric ovens with induction stove tops
- Gas hot water heaters to heat-pump or electric on-demand water heaters
- Gas furnaces to air-source or geothermal heat pumps
- Gas clothes dryers to electric dryers
- Gasoline yard equipment to electric models

We hope you will check out "My Citizen's Climate Commitment" for the more thorough explanation and discussion of the many choices you can make that will reduce your use of fossil fuels and thereby contribute to a sustainable future for us all. Meridian Township also put out a YouTube video on "[Exploring Energy Opportunities](#)" that you may find useful. Remember, the ballot box isn't the only place where your "vote" counts; the things you choose to invest in do as well.

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## LWVUS "DRIVE CLEAN WITH THE LEAGUE" EVENT

LWVUS and the LWV of California have declared a climate emergency, urging all local Leagues to include Climate Action as a high priority in 2021. Consequently, LWV of California, together with Drive Clean California, is co-hosting **Drive Clean with the League**, an educational and inspirational gathering to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.



### About the Event

During the one-hour Zoom event, experts from Drive Clean California, EV drivers and climate and clean air enthusiasts will share their interest in clean air and a cool planet. Highlights:

- EV and e-bike experts and owners will share their experiences, the latest trends, vehicles, costs, and considerations when moving to electric.
- Experts will discuss government incentives, solutions for residents who live in apartments, and additional financial incentives for disadvantaged communities.

- They will debunk common EV myths and answer your questions.

### **Tell-a-Friend**

Invite everyone you know. Just sign up and share through email or post on social media. Your guests can invite their social circle, and so on. Word of mouth is the best way to accelerate EV adoption and Drive Clean is designed with this in mind.

### **EVs for Equity**

LWVC and Drive Clean are committed to climate solutions that benefit everyone. We know that climate justice must include racial justice. Tailpipe emissions negatively impact everyone, and they disproportionately impact people of color. Pollution-free transportation solutions are here — we are here to help everyone learn how to save time, money and the planet.

### **Calling all Electric Drivers and Riders**

If you drive or ride electric, we know you love to talk about it. Here's a chance to EVangelize! Please invite family and friends. Following the main presentation, we could use your help in hosting a Zoom breakout room where attendees can hear your experiences and ask you their questions. If a question has you stumped, guests can return to the main room to ask an expert. We'll provide you with some talking points.

### **Sign up!**

Events will be held Saturday, July 10; Wednesday, July 14; Saturday October. 16; and Wednesday, October 20. Register by clicking [here](#) and scrolling down for the date you would like to attend.

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## **STATE CONVENTION 2021 WORKSHOPS**

As per usual at the LWVMI's biennial convention, held virtually this year due to the pandemic, several workshops were offered for members' edification. Among them were:

**[Making Your Voice Heard in Lansing: LWVMI Advocacy;](#)  
**[Promoting the Truth and Overcoming Myths;](#) and  
**[Building More Diverse, Inclusive and Equitable Leagues.](#)******

For those who were unable to attend or who for some reason couldn't attend two workshops simultaneously, descriptive summaries have been provided by Connie Ferguson, Barb Dircks, and Millie Lambert, members of the Kalamazoo Area League. To find out what you missed, just click on the topic of your choice.

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## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBER!

Kendra Grasseschi, 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 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) or Elaine Fischhoff [ElaineDiFi@gmail.com](mailto:ElaineDiFi@gmail.com).