

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**JUNE
2023**

IN THE JUNE CAPITOL VOTER

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LWVLA CALENDAR

Thursday, June 29, 6:30-8 pm. LWVLA Meet and Greet for Lansing City Council candidates in the Drill Room at 2500 S. Washington Avenue, Lansing.

Tuesday, July 11, 10 am via Zoom, Book Discussion Group, **12 Bytes: How We Got Here, Where We Might Go Next.**

See articles below for more information.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Donna Mullins



Most of the time summer provides a lull in the League, but this year we will have our first in-person meet-and-greet for the Lansing City Council primary. No rest for the protectors of democracy! Be sure to read Joanne's Voter Services article and don't be shy about volunteering!

I just took a long road trip to Portland, Oregon to see my son. On the way, I listened to what would have been this month's choice for the Book Discussion Group, but I was concerned about whether I would have Wi-Fi available. We will definitely be discussing it, because it is stimulating. *12 Bytes* is a series of essays by novelist Jeannette Winterson about artificial intelligence, what it is, its history, and the possible future of AI. I read some of it but listened to most of it in the car. It is GREAT to listen to. A couple of things are worth sharing.

A lot—maybe most—of the beginning of the Computer Age was initiated by women, beginning with Ada Lovelace in the mid-1800s. Huge advances were made during WWII and heavily done by women “computers.” (The movies “Hidden Figures” and “The Imitation Game” illustrate that well.) Women played a significant role in making that progress in the technical field. So, why are there few women in the STEM world now? The men came home and took their jobs. And men did the hiring, the history writing, and the application development from that point. Sure, there are a few women, but it's basically a man's world and most of the men are white. And most of them are good people, but they design things that they like and that they think women and people of color like.

What's my point? It's that diversity counts. We can't help but see things from our own eyes. We can try to listen to others, but in the end you really need diversity to show you the myriad directions possible. It's true in tech and it's true in politics. We need more women in office, but we also need more people of color, people of different faiths, people of no faith, people who were raised in poverty, and people who worked their way to the top. Those people will disagree but, in the end, if they have equal voices they will create a future that might actually fill the promise that is America.

I can see only two ways of getting there: a sudden enlightenment on the part of the wealthy who are in charge of media and tech, or PEOPLE VOTING. If everyone voted, then our elected representatives would listen to the many. **If everyone voted, that would mean that our country's government would serve the people.**

I'm not naïve, we aren't going to get everyone to vote. But we can help get more people to the polls. The way we do that is by connecting with people who have different backgrounds than our own but share the desire to make our country work for all of us. We're making progress in Lansing. Several community groups were invited to our last luncheon. (Thank you, Jacqueline Stewart!) We are working closely with our new friends at the Ingham County Health Department who know that the people they serve would be *better* served if they voted. And we are approaching people outside the League with the attitude that we have something to learn, not just that we have something to offer (and we

do have something to offer). The very best way to get to where all League members want to go is to join other people and do the work

Together,

Donna

VOTER SERVICES UPDATE

Joanne Winkelman, V.P. Voter Services

Meet-and-Greet and Forum

The League of Women Voters Lansing Area will hold a Meet-and-Greet for the thirteen candidates running for Lansing City Council. The event will be held on Thursday, June 29, from 6:30 pm to 8 pm in the Drill Room at 2500 S. Washington Avenue, Lansing. (This is the building that houses the Lansing Public Media Center and the Elections Bureau.) Candidates for at-large seats and two wards will be given three minutes each to share with the audience who they are and why they are running for city council. After the short speeches, the candidates will be able to go to assigned tables where they can meet with constituents and share their campaign material. The introduction speeches will be recorded and shared with the public.

The East Lansing City Council will have an election in November; we will consider holding a forum. Petitions to run are due on July 25, so at this time we do not know how many candidates there will be in the race. Volunteers will be needed at these events.

Speaking of volunteers....

A list of volunteering opportunities was recently circulated to volunteers on the voter services list. More opportunities will be available in July as the City of Lansing Clerk continues to hold registration and information events around the city. If you want to be on the list, contact [Joanne Winkelman](#). Thanks to all who volunteered!

Implementation of Proposal 2 and National Popular Vote Bills

Bills are flying around the Capitol regarding new laws to implement Proposal 2. As soon as bills are signed by the governor, we'll know more about how clerks are to implement early voting, drop boxes and other mandates that were in Proposal 2. Stay tuned to see how these changes will affect how you can vote in the future.

Also, the National Popular Vote passed the Michigan Senate this week. If it makes it to the governor's desk and she signs it, it will change how Michigan electors vote in the Electoral College. Watch for updates next month in the *Capitol Voter*.

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins

We never did get around to discussing *12 Bytes* by Jeannette Winterson because, as explained earlier, I was on the road and it became clear that I couldn't count on Wi-Fi. It's all good because the book is provocative and I may have to read it again. Here's a [video](#) of the author talking about the book. It's about artificial intelligence, something that

Winterson says is basically creating a new life form. But it is so much more than that. We'll be discussing it on Tuesday, July 11 at 10 am. [Contact me](#) if you'd like to join us.

JUNE 9 LUNCHEON EVENT: A HISTORY OF WOMEN'S CLUBS

Jacqueline Stewart, V.P. Program

On June 9, LWVLA hosted representatives from several other women's organizations in the area at the MSUFCU Community Room on Mt. Hope Road. An audience of 50 enjoyed hearing Dr. Sharon Carlson discuss her research into the history of women's clubs and other women's organizations. It was interesting to see the overlap in interests from healthcare to education to libraries.



The groups represented were UAW Local 602, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Lansing Women's Club, Zonta and South Asian Women's Association. The hope is that this event will encourage future sharing and collaboration.

STATE CONVENTION

Donna Mullins, President

May brought the LWVLA convention to our door at the Kellogg Center. As hosts, we were charged with helping to create a welcoming experience. The Planning Committee, which met several months in advance of the convention, included Camilla Davis and myself. Camilla volunteered to organize the "dine-around" where delegates enjoy local restaurants before attending the opening plenary on Friday. Rain dampened hair but not spirits as League members dined at some of the best restaurants in town. At the plenary, members were welcomed to the area by myself and the now matriculated Spartan LWV's president Hannah Richardson. We told the story of Brody Hall on election day and how it was an example of the League in action. It was likely the last time Hannah and I would work together, our own commencement exercise. I felt very proud standing next to her, and it thrilled me to see how delegates warmly appreciated her work for the League. In the end, we did not welcome delegates to MSU and the Lansing area, we welcomed them home.

With the help of Debbie Starnes and Marty Couretas, Camilla created a "photo booth" with fun costume items and a beautiful suffragette quilt created by Marty as a backdrop. No booth was needed as EVERYONE has a smart phone handy to make memories. Volunteers from our League and others helped throughout the convention from signing in to giving directions. Sheila Wiitala brought representation from the Girl Scout Heart of Michigan Troops 3011, 30487 and 30485 to bring in the colors. Everyone in the auditorium was charmed by the hope that young people bring. Beginning the convention with the generation for whom we hope to ensure lives in a democracy brought purpose and joy to all.

Volunteers included Lynn Wilson, Barb Bidigare, Bettie Menchik and Elaine Fischhoff. LWVLA delegates included Jacqueline Stewart, Barbara Bidigare, Joanne Winkelman,

Linda Melaragni, Elaine Fischhoff, Lisa Moore, Beth Moore, Ellen Link and myself. We were encouraged to mingle with other delegates, so the only time we got together was for a final picture, and I'm not sure that we all made it then! (Several more of our members attended as representatives of LWVMI...there were a lot of us!) Marty Couretas generously donated a lake cottage-themed quilt to the silent auction. (It now hangs in my house!)

The convention was about gathering members together, learning new things in workshops and making changes to the bylaws and programs. Members approved a change in the bylaws that makes it possible to remove a member from the state board who is not "carrying out applicable laws and regulations as well as League bylaws, mission, policies, principles, positions, standards and procedures." Membership supported, using concurrence, language from the Grosse Pointe League concerning the effort to ban books from public libraries. While many members (including myself) had issues with the wording of the statement, concurrence does not allow editing; it's an up or down vote. The motion was approved, giving members a tool with which to fight the frequent efforts to ban books in Michigan.

A request to study the "Right to Die" issue was rejected after much discussion. Emotions were high but discussions were civil. It was recommended that an attempt be made to find another state that had studied the issue and consider offering its recommendation for adoption through concurrence. Additionally, a number of non-controversial items that were mostly procedural were passed without discussion.

By noonish on Sunday, the convention ended with all in good spirits. There is something about being in the company of people who share the same values that lifts the spirits. We were all inspired by the generosity and good will of our colleagues from around the state.



RING MY BELL

One of the best parts of the state convention is the opportunity to highlight some of our outstanding members. Bell Ringer awards are given in four categories:

Advocacy: In addition to being co-chair of the Environmental Advocacy Group and the League's event coordinator, **Elaine Fischhoff** is known throughout the community and our League for her efforts to encourage sustainable energy sources and a healthy environment.

Voter Services: **Joanne Winkelman**, VP of Voter Services, does it all but in particular,

Joanne's collaboration with the Lansing City Clerk's Souls to the Polls event has expanded the Lansing League's reach into the community.

Member Recruitment or Engagement: Hannah Richardson came to the League originally as a placement through MSU. As the first President of the Spartan League of Women Voters, Hannah relentlessly worked to find successful ways to engage students in the League's work.

Financial Management or Fundraising: Barbara Bidigare just finished four years as League treasurer and took the Lansing League's accounting from pencil to computer, adding efficiency and effectiveness to our financial management.

Congratulations, and more importantly, thank you to these outstanding members who are always there to help.

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY IN MICHIGAN

Jacqueline Stewart, V.P. Program

Through the efforts of Donna Mullins, LWVLA has made a connection with the Ingham County Health Department's Maternal and Child Health Division. Later in the summer we hope a team from Ingham County Health Dept. will make a presentation to our members about poverty in Ingham County. It would be helpful to separate myth from fact and to understand who is poor, how they became poor, and why it is so difficult to climb out of poverty. We need to be informed citizens when it comes to facts about and policies addressing poverty.

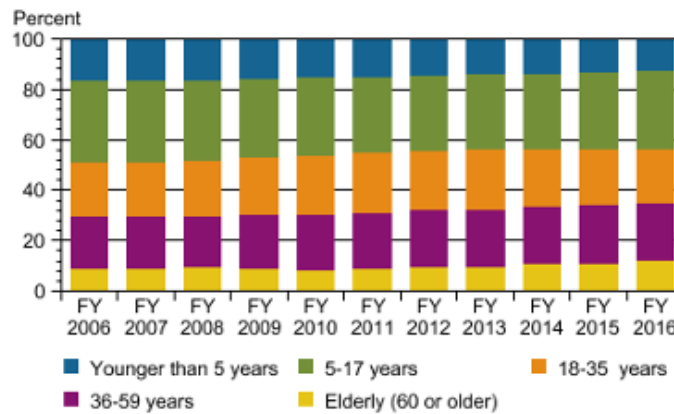
To put this in the context of the mission of the League of Women Voters, you will recall that LWVLA members learned from Dr. Christian Houle, in a January presentation, that extreme levels of inequality are harmful to democracy. So, the topic of poverty fits within our mission of "Defending Democracy," and because the poor are in the news, this seems like a good time to explore that topic.

Recent legislation, passed to stave off a debt ceiling crisis, included work requirements for recipients of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program aka Food Stamps.) Here is what will change:

Under the current law, able-bodied adults without dependents who are between ages 18 and 49 can only receive food stamps for three months out of every three years unless they work or participate in other activities at least 20 hours a week. **Under the new legislation** the number of people subject to the mandate will be broadened in phases so that, by 2025, it will apply to those between the ages of 18 and 54. [Politicians stress](#) that work requirements will help end people's dependency on the government and lift them out of poverty. "A job provides financial stability, a rising income and, most importantly, an opportunity to pursue the American dream," said New York Rep. Elise Stefanik. A recent [HHS report](#) says that 60% of SNAP recipients are in *families* where someone is working. Does that mean that 40% of SNAP recipients are in *families* who are lazing around at home?

Who are the people receiving food stamps? An examination of the demographics of individual SNAP recipients reveals that those under the age of 18 account for over 40% of all SNAP users (green and blue on this graph). Seniors (65 and older) account for about 15% of the population on welfare (yellow on this graph). Notice this is increasing rapidly. Thus, work requirements are not relevant to about 55% of SNAP recipients.

Distribution of SNAP/FSP participants by age and year
Children comprise the largest number of program participants but their share has declined from 2006 to 2016



Note: SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and FSP is the Food Stamp Program.

Source: Prepared by USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from annual reports in the series, "Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households," USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

Data as of November 2017.

That leaves about 40-45% of SNAP recipients who are of working age. But it turns out that many of these people are disabled. About 10 percent of SNAP recipients are non-elderly adults with disabilities. In the U.S. about 20% of SNAP *households* have members who are non-elderly disabled, 30% in Michigan. Picture that for a moment: 30% of families receiving SNAP in Michigan have disabled members, along with their caregivers, of course. Is it the intention of the new legislation that the disabled and their caregivers go out and find work? I don't think so.

In fact, about 32% of SNAP participants are non-disabled, non-elderly adults. These are the folks targeted by the changes in SNAP. They may be caregivers, of course, if they are in the 30% of Michigan families with disabled members receiving SNAP; or they may live where there are no jobs; or they may not have enough education to qualify for a job; or they may not be able to find and/or afford childcare.

Will this legislation help solve our debt crisis? Unlikely. "Research, however, shows that work requirements don't increase labor force participation among safety net recipients, according to [Katherine Hempstead](#), a senior policy adviser with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who recently authored a research brief on the economic and health consequences of work mandates."

Much might be written about poverty in America. How has it changed over time? Continue reading [here](#).

SEPTIC REGULATIONS AND WHY THEY MATTER

Ellen Link, EAG Co-chair

Not that many people are aware that Michigan is the only state in the union without statewide laws governing septic systems—even though 35 percent of Michigan residents depend on them. According to the [Watershed Council](#), "This means there are between

1.3 and 1.4 million on-site septic systems throughout the state, and each system generates an average of 300-400 gallons of sewage daily. That means on-site systems in Michigan must treat and dispose of more than 455 million gallons of wastewater each day.” With MSU estimating that at least a third of those systems—many of which are old and/or do not get pumped on any regular basis—do not function properly, the probability is great that nutrients, bacteria, viruses, pharmaceuticals and other pollutants are constantly being introduced into our lakes, streams and wetlands.

The pollutants found in septic leachate can also contaminate groundwater. “A 2015 study conducted by MSU used microbial source tracking tools, markers for *E. coli* and the human fecal bacteria B-theta, to show that pollution arising from septic system discharges is likely more severe than previously realized. Results suggest human fecal contamination is affecting 100% of the 64 studied river systems in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula” (ibid). So, whether your household relies on a septic system or not, the health of our waters affects us all. In an earlier, excellent report by [Michigan Radio](#), one of the state’s leading water experts said even a new septic system can have problems. Unlike a sewer system, septic systems do not disinfect, allowing bacteria and viruses to escape into the environment. “Anytime anybody gets sick, these organisms are going into our septic tanks. These are small enough to get through the soil in many cases, so they can reach groundwater. They could also reach surface water,” said Michigan State University microbiologist Joan Rose.

Thankfully, the health departments of some townships and counties in Michigan *do* have their own regulations, but while some of them are effective, most only take place upon installation or failure and only come into play upon “point of sale,” i.e., inspections that take place when the home is being sold. Hence, houses that remain with the same owner for many years may never be inspected. Requiring periodic inspections of septic systems sounds like a logical solution until one realizes that the cost of installing a new system can well exceed \$10,000, a hard pill to swallow.

Legislators have tried in the past to introduce legislation to fix this dilemma and now are trying again. House bills [4479](#) and [4480](#) and Senate bills [299](#) and [300](#), tie-barred together and introduced on April 27, would require inspections of residential septic wastewater systems every five years. Doubtless one of the sticking points is that there is as yet no funding, though there is a funding mechanism. If it doesn’t get done in this legislative session, its future success is questionable, regardless of how much the health of our water depends on it. Voicing your support with your legislators is crucial.

For more perspectives on Michigan’s septic system problem, check out [GreatLakesNow](#) and *The Bridge’s* [Michigan Environmental Watch](#); to learn more about the problem overall and its intersection with the climate crisis, see this [Washington Post](#) article.

ONE THING

According to the [Carbon Almanac](#), the convenient “pods” we use for dishwashers and washing machines that contain premeasured detergents are made from [plastic film](#) which, rather than biodegrading, breaks down into little pieces—microplastics---that enter our water streams. Not good. To learn more about microplastics, stay tuned for a

presentation on Aug. 17 at 7 pm; EAG will send out the Zoom link.

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE UPDATE

Linda Melaragni, PHS Member

This year's biennial LWVMI state convention held a break-out session on the issue of gun violence. An ongoing forum was proposed to allow League members to meet over Zoom and talk about state issues. The first meeting was held June 15. Attendees discussed areas of concern and began to form a structure for the group. Michigan has seen progress this spring with the passage of legislation—[SB 83](#) and [HB 4146, 4147, and 4148](#)—mandating universal background checks, safe gun storage, and “red flag” or ERPO (Extreme Risk Protection Order) legislation. The forum will be developing priorities identifying where we go from here.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Camilla Davis, Membership Chair

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Marylou Nagy, East Lansing

SHARE YOUR TALENTS & INTERESTS WITH LWVLA

LWVLA is planning ahead to make sure we are ready for the 2024 elections. As you know, the League is a grassroots organization that depends on its members. Member support can take many forms, like registering voters, distributing voting information, joining an advocacy group, or sharing talents and skills—the list goes on and on. For some members, they can only support the League financially due to other responsibilities. Whatever form members' support takes, it is welcome.

To learn more about our members and their interests and talents, LWVLA will be conducting a survey. Each member with an email address will receive a survey electronically. Those without email will receive a paper copy. It's designed to give the board insight into what types of activities members enjoy and what their areas of interest are, plus how much time they can give to the League so when help is needed, we can call those who can fill the need. (It's OK to say that your schedule is already too full to take on another responsibility!)

The survey is short and will only take a few minutes to complete. When you find it in your inbox, please complete it right away and send it as a Reply. Questions? Email Camilla at cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com.

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 Landauer-Menchik](#)

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE: Contact [Linda Melaragni](#)

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

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