

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

NOVEMBER 2020

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Thank you all for supporting voting rights in this no good, awful, terrible year. You did have the option of curling up into a ball in mid-March and just staying there. (Most of us spent at least some of the time doing that.) Your dedication to democracy and determination made a difference. None of us can claim that we made *the* difference but all of us can claim being part of the coalition that helped bring more people to the polls than ever. The loser in the presidential contest amassed the second highest number of votes ever recorded.

Among other things, the League is extraordinary for being a progressive, nonpartisan political organization. We take stands on issues, none being more important than that citizens have the right to vote. And we are committed to fighting for those issues with strength and civility. We encourage citizens to be active in their communities. Through education we demonstrate that the most powerful tool available to promote change is the vote.

This is a divided country. Because of what our League has represented for 100 years, we are in a unique position to join with others to heal our fractured country. Now what?

Protecting Democracy

Job one is to defend the integrity of the election. The League created a Board of Canvassers Observer Corps to observe and report. Well over 200 volunteers statewide volunteered to document their observations as Boards of Canvassers looked at the results of local

jurisdictions. (We had 17 volunteers.) While we were doing this sometimes interesting and sometimes tedious job, there were allegations that the count was suspect. Those allegations held less weight because there was up-to-date documentation that the count was done in a nonpartisan and legal manner. Even those who are suspicious of the League's progressive stands on issues know that we encourage all to vote and insist their vote is counted. We protect the integrity of the vote even in those times the vote does not agree with our own.

Promoting Democracy

Beyond protecting democracy, we promote it. Traditionally we do this through education and voter registration. Faced with the challenge of a mid-term election that usually has dramatically less engagement than a presidential election, what are our plans? Here are a few:

- Address the challenge strategically
- Become more aligned with our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Interact with local government with an energy unknown to mankind (maybe a slight exaggeration)
- Observe local governmental activities and follow local issues
- Bring issues to the attention of local governments (as we have with Climate Change Resolutions)
- Increase membership
- Increase issue-related forums
- Build the capacity of every committee
- Increase outreach to other organizations, either to partner with us or just to get to know us
- Increase the effectiveness of Voter Services (we are not content with excellence)
- Use publicity to increase our presence in the community
- Have fun doing all of the above

That's just an overview. We need your involvement to achieve these goals. Your membership helps. Your willingness to help in the work of committees helps. Your feedback helps. Your kind words help. The century-old League of Women Voters continues to stand for the highest principles of democracy. That is the result of an extraordinary membership who always acts with integrity and grit. We will meet our challenges as we always do...

Together,

Donna

NOTES FROM THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE **Dorothy Engelman, Program VP**

Thank you to all who attended the *Virtual Post-Election Celebration* on Tuesday, November 17. I hope you were able to get a deeper understanding of the wonderful opportunities the League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area has to offer and the amazing work we did on the election.

One of the greatest immediate needs we have is for members to step up and assist with ZOOM technology. Programs, meetings and forums will all be conducted virtually for the foreseeable future; we **must** have additional resources (i.e., people) for us to do a good job of reaching out to our members and the community. **ZOOM tutorials are available on YouTube** to get you started. Please contact me at [LWVLA100years@gmail](mailto:LWVLA100years@gmail.com) if you're able to assist with this important task.



Details for the December meeting have not been finalized, so watch your email for information and check the [League's website](#). It's chock full of information! The tentative topic will be "Just What Does the Canvassing Board Do???"

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

Dorothy Engelman
lwvla100years@gmail.com

THE EAG ADDRESSES ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Ellen Link Environmental Advocacy Group

One of the issues the Environment Advocacy Group wants to address over the coming year is environmental justice, an issue that has received renewed interest and discussion in 2020 given the disparity of COVID-related suffering and death in minority and underserved neighborhoods. What is meant by environmental justice?

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to choose where we live may not fully understand the plight of those who have not been so lucky. The victims of environmental injustice have generally been the poor and/or people of color, forced to live in areas and neighborhoods disdained by the rest of us. Why would anyone *choose* to live next to a refinery, or smelter, or any other manufacturing plant the emissions from which pollute the air, water and soil? Yet one should also ask, why are manufacturers allowed to freely contaminate the environment in which too many people must live?

Some of those who live in these stricken neighborhoods do so because their homes were handed down to them and they cannot afford to move away from the community in which they were raised. For years Blacks were "redlined," essentially muscled into living in areas where white people did not want to live, a practice often abetted by the government. This helped establish the vulnerable communities that are increasingly threatened today by a sick environment. This injustice is finally being called out as more and more people demand governmental action to reverse the tide of environmental degradation that is feeding climate change.

According to [Detroit Environmental Justice](#), Detroit is home to five of the top 25 most polluted zip codes in the state, including 48271 at #1; and Detroiters pay twice as much of their household income on energy as other Michigan residents. Greatly increased rates of asthma, obesity, lead poisoning, lung cancer, diabetes, mental health and developmental problems and more afflict those who live in such spots. But Detroit and other large cities aren't the only places where victims of environmental injustice can be found.

A recent study done by University of Michigan students identified "hot spots" of environmental injustice across the state that included Lansing, Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. And a study done by the United Church of Christ, "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United

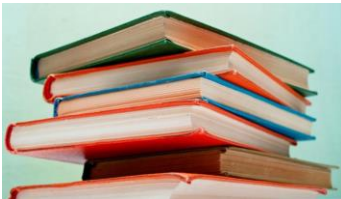
States report in 1987," mentioned in the U of M study, showed that "the percent of minority population in each zip code was the best predictor of the location of hazardous waste facilities in the country."

Dr. Robert Bullard of Texas Southern University, known as the "father of environmental justice," [summed it up](#) well: "Reducing environmental, health, economic and racial disparities is a major priority of the Environmental Justice Movement." The EAG hopes to learn more and contribute to this movement in any way we can. Stay tuned.

ONE THING

Reduce your footprint by conserving energy. Get a free energy analysis from your utility company, be it [Consumers Energy](#) or [Lansing BWL](#).

REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE Bettie Menchik, Co-Chair



We met on November 10 to discuss our role during this strange time, when so much is in flux, site visits are impossible, and officials are too stressed to talk. We also had a Zoom meeting with Michigan Virtual University on November 12, and have kept informed by sharing readings and watching Zoom presentations. Following is a summary of one of the best we've seen.

["K-12 Education During a Pandemic,"](#) a recent forum by MSU's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) and the Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC), featured three panelists: **Dr. Katharine Strunk**, Professor of Education and Faculty Director of EPIC; **Dr. Keith Smith**, Superintendent, Kingsley Area Schools; and **Dr. Nikolai Vitti**, Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools Community District.

Dr. Strunk highlighted key issues which EPIC is following in its research.

1. The pandemic is widening disparities in K-12 education.
2. Most states (47) left decisions about re-opening in fall 2020 to local control, resulting in a patchwork of plans across the country. Michigan's Return to Learn Roadmap is one of the most comprehensive guides, largely providing suggestions rather than requirements. Michigan waived instructional hours for the 2020-21 academic year, and attendance requirements for funding have been waived if two-way interactions occur between each student and their teacher once a month. Benchmark assessments must be given within the first nine weeks.

A new method of funding will be developed based on the number of students "attending" school" on one of the two count days (90% of funding is usually based on the count day in September; a second count day is at the end of January). Michigan's education budget was level funded, i.e. the same amount of per-pupil funding as last year.

3. Teachers and principals surveyed by EPIC expressed most concern about students missing instructional time, students returning to school behind in literacy and math, long-term economic impact for students, supporting students through grief and trauma,

and barriers preventing students from accessing e-learning. (For additional concerns, see the program [slides](#).)

[READ MORE](#)

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT **Valerie Lafferty, Committee Chair**

The LWVLA would like to fill the current opening for a Development Director as part of the leadership team for the LWVLA Board. If you are interested or would like to recommend someone, please contact the 2021 LWVLA Nominating Committee at LaffertyPLLC@gmail.com or 517-349-6660 to share your interests/thoughts.



LWVLA Development Director Job Description: Provide Leadership for Raising Funds from Individuals, Businesses and Grantors

1. Develop and lead a committee to plan and implement diverse funding projects.
 2. Work with the LWVLA Board to ascertain financial need:
 - When requested, work with the Budget Committee on the Education Fund (LWVEF) and LWVMI fundraising, as well as keep up to date on LWVUS fundraising approaches.
 - Collaborate with the LWVLA Membership Chairperson to address fundraising and development with membership, as our prime funding resource is members.
 - Work with the Publicity Chairperson when promoting fundraising activities.
 3. Maintain records of fundraising, contributors and potential contributors.
 4. Update the LWVLA Board and its members on fundraising progress and programs.
 5. Ensure contributors are acknowledged.
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ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY FOR GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION **Martha Couretas**



Following are examples of organizations that support efforts to reduce firearm deaths and injuries. Three levels of participation are described: Be Informed, Be Supportive, and Be Actively Engaged. The descriptions are extracted from the websites for brevity. The commentary and recommendations are those of the author.

I. Be informed:

[Gun Violence Archive](#) is an online archive of gun violence incidents collected daily from over 7,500 law enforcement, media, government and commercial sources. An independent data collection and research group, it has no affiliation with any advocacy organization. GVA provides free online public access to its comprehensive, verified information with the hope that it will inform and assist those engaged in research, advocacy, or writing concerning gun-related violence in the United States, including analysis of proposed regulations or legislation relating to gun safety usage.

II. Be supportive:

The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV), a 501(c)(4) organization founded in 1974, is the nation's oldest gun violence prevention organization. Guided by the principle that gun violence should be rare and abnormal, resources are allotted for policy development, advocacy, community engagement, and effective training. CSGV is a thought leader in the modern gun violence prevention movement. Drafting, passing, and implementing evidence-based legislation is their number one priority. While legislative gridlock has largely stymied gun legislation at the federal level, CSGV has worked hard to secure major victories in the states. In recent years, they worked with scientific experts to develop the Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO) — now known as an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO), a law that allows law enforcement and family members to temporarily remove firearms from a loved one in crisis. The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence operates through a combination of evidence-based policy development and aggressive lobbying. See also the **Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence**.

III. Be Actively Engaged with candidates, legislators, and the public:

MOMS DEMAND ACTION is a grassroots movement of Americans fighting for public safety measures that protect people from gun violence. With a motto of "Take Action," MOMS works in their communities to encourage a culture of responsible gun ownership. Knowing that gun violence is preventable, the focus of MOMS' efforts includes responsible gun storage, electing gun-sense candidates, disarming domestic abusers, and updating background checks.

One of their most useful web postings for those working for safer communities is *Debunking Gun Myths at the Dinner Table*. MOMS is an extension of **Everytown for Gun Safety**. See also **Everytown Research and Policy**.

**NEED SOME HOLIDAY GIFTS?
GIVE A LEAGUE MEMBERSHIP**
Camilla Davis, Membership Director

LWVLA offers three ideas for holiday giving:

#1. **LWVLA MEMBERSHIP** - Give a year's membership to League of Women Voters. The recipient will become a member of LWV–Lansing Area, LWV–Michigan, and LWV–U.S. for one fee. Members receive communications from all three levels of the League, plus opportunities for local involvement in advocacy committees, voter service and information about local programs. Cost: \$67.50 (individual) or \$97.50 (household). **Go to the LWVLA website** for more information, including how to pay online.



#2. **STUDENT MEMBERSHIP** - Give a year-long membership to current full or part-time students for only \$5. Student memberships are ordinarily \$32.50 but are available for only \$5 from now until January 2121. Student members receive all the benefits of League membership listed above. Go to the **LWVLA website** for more information, including how to pay online.

#3. **"A TASTE OF THE LEAGUE" TRIAL MEMBERSHIP** - Give a trial membership to those you know who might be interested in the League. Individuals will receive LWVLA information for a period of three months at no charge and may participate in advocacy groups, voter service and all League programs and events. Names will not be entered in the LWVLA database and they will not receive LWVMI or LWVUS information during a trial membership. At the end of three months, they will be personally contacted about becoming a member. Contact Camilla Davis, Membership Director, at **cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com** for more information.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Shelagh Ferguson-Miller, East Lansing
Clair Webb, Haslett

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.