

A GUIDE TO ISSUES & ADVOCACY FOR LOCAL LEAGUES

HISTORY OF LEAGUE ADVOCACY

Advocacy has been an important focus for the League of Women Voters since its inception. Founder Carrie Chapman Catt noted that the purpose of the League was “to combine voices for legislation which will protect coming movements from suffering the untoward conditions which have hindered for so long the coming of equal suffrage.”

The first issues addressed in 1920 focused on child welfare, education, the home and high prices, women in gainful occupations, public health and morals, independent citizenship for married women. One of the US League’s first major legislative successes was the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act providing federal aid for maternal and child care programs.

Read more about the League’s historical formation and advocacy, in [League History](#) and [LWV Through the Decades](#) from the League of Women Voters of the US.

LEAGUE ADVOCACY STARTS WITH LEAGUE POSITIONS

The League supports or opposes legislation based on positions that are studied extensively and approved by the members.

- *Impact on Issues* is the LWVUS guide to public policy positions
- *Where We Stand* is LWVIL’s guide to positions

These two fundamental advocacy documents are found on the LWVIL website in two places: [Issues & Advocacy>Where We Stand](#) and [For Members>League Resources](#).

HOW DOES THE LEAGUE ARRIVE AT ITS POSITIONS?

Positions are developed based on member study and consensus, and approved at biennial conventions.

Member Study

The most recent study done in Illinois was on criminal justice. An LWVIL committee conducted a criminal justice issues study in order to update the League’s Criminal Justice position. Local Leagues were presented with the study results and reached consensus about a variety of statements. These statements became the basis of the Criminal Justice Position Update that was presented and adopted at the LWVIL 2021 convention.

Read more on the LWVIL website at [For Members>League Resources](#), scroll down to Issues & Advocacy, Program Planning:

- Dimensions of a Local League Study
- Program Planning: From Choice Through Action
- LWVIL Criminal Justice Position Update Study

Program Planning

Conducting a study is part of the League’s Program Planning process. Program refers to issues chosen by members at the local, state and national levels for study and action. Find Program Planning resources on the LWVIL website at [For Members > League Resources](#), scroll down to Issues & Advocacy.

- The Program Planning Process: 2023-25
- Program Planning: 2023 Issue Specialist Status Report (video)
- LWVIL: Where We Stand 2021-2023
- LWVUS: Impact on Issues 2020-2022
- Positions in Brief 2021-2023: Summary of LWVIL Positions
- Dimensions of a Local League Study
- Program Planning: From Choice Through Action

Approval of Positions and Program at Conventions

During each League Convention, members vote on current and proposed positions as well as a program of actions which the League will take based on the positions. At the 2021 LWVIL Convention, members approved the updated Criminal Justice position as well as all other positions listed in *Where We Stand*. In addition, members approved three program pillars for action during the biennium. Read the program pillars on the LWVIL website, [Issues & Advocacy > Our Positions](#).

Programs

As opposed to “Program”, programs are League meeting activities. Find resources for programs on the LWVIL website at [For Members > League Resources](#), scroll down to Issues & Advocacy, Program Planning:

- Speakers available for local League programs
- 2022 Suggested Resources for League Meetings & Discussion: Books, Movies, etc.

To request a program describing the role of issues and advocacy or on a specific issue, contact issues@lwwil.org.

LWVIL ISSUES AND ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

WATCH: [LWVIL Issues and Advocacy video](#)

The LWVIL Issues and Advocacy Committee is made up of Issue Specialists who are well-versed in specific issues and up-to-date with the League’s state and national positions on those issues.

Issues currently addressed by Issue Specialists can be found on the LWVIL website, [Issues & Advocacy > Our Positions](#).

What do LWVIL Issue Specialists Do?

- Track legislation and recommend Action Alerts [lwwil.org > Issues & Advocacy > Action Alerts](#)
- Serve as LWVIL liaisons to various coalitions listed at [lwwil.org > Issues & Advocacy > Where We Stand](#)
- Provide biennial updates for *Where We Stand* [lwwil.org > Issues & Advocacy > Where We Stand](#)
- Plan LWVIL’s annual Issues Briefing event
- Recommend questions for annual Legislative Interviews
- Make recommendations for Program Planning
- Assume a lead role in studies which lead to new or revised positions
- Provide resources for local League programs
- Recommend questions for Candidate Forums and the [Illinois Voter Guide](#)

Issue Specialists communicate with local Leagues and the public through:

- Google groups (to join, contact issues@lwwil.org)
- LWVIL Newsletters: *Member Bulletin* and *News You Can Use*

Action Alerts – action based on League positions

LWVIL Issue Specialists analyze legislation proposed during the Illinois General Assembly and recommend that the League support or oppose certain bills, based on League positions. LWVIL produces Action Alerts for email and social media, encouraging people to lobby for/against legislation. Find Action Alerts and the current status of relevant bills on the LWVIL website at [Issues & Advocacy > Action Alerts](#) .

REMEMBER, THE LEAGUE “SPEAKS WITH ONE VOICE”

Only the President of the League or someone designated by the President is able to speak on behalf of the League. League members lobby and advocate as individuals; they do not identify themselves as members of the League.

Unless an Action Alert has been issued by LWVIL or LWVUS, local Leagues must get permission before asking their members to contact state or national officials. Find the necessary request forms on the LWVIL website, [For Members>League Resources](#), scroll down to Issues & Advocacy.

- For contacting federal officials:
 - LWVUS Request for Action Policy (at the end of this document, find a link to the Federal Action Request Form).
- For contacting state officials
 - LWVIL Request for Action Policy
 - email issues@lwwil.org.