

News You Can Use

DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

August 2023

At the League of Women Voters of Illinois' July 2023 board meeting, LWV of Illinois created a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, chaired by the very capable Diane Hodges (LWV of Park Forest). A few weeks later, going through old files in the office, I found a copy of the LWV of Illinois 1997-98 Annual Report with an article on a new LWV of Illinois Diversity Task Force!

Just three years ago, in 2020, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were added to our national LWV bylaws. At that LWV Convention, delegates voted to amend the LWV bylaws to include the League's commitment to its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy in Article II as one of the foundational policies of the organization. Just how important is this? This bylaws amendment elevated the DEI Policy to the same organizational importance as the LWV Nonpartisan Policy.

And now, Diane Hodges will be working to move DEI from theory into action for LWV of Illinois. The concept of DEI has been part of LWV of Illinois for at least 26 years now, and I am confident that Diane is the right leader to take us forward.

LWV DEI Policy: *"LWV is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.*



There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, language, accent, ability status, mental health, educational level or background, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role function, thinking style, personality type, physical appearance, political perspective or affiliation and/or any other characteristic that can be identified as recognizing or illustrating diversity."



Becky Simon, president
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Meet Our New Board

LWV of Illinois elected a new Board of Directors on Sunday, June 11. [Learn more about our Board members.](#)

FREEDOM TO VOTE



Freedom to Vote Act Reintroduced in US Congress

In Illinois, the right to vote is a priority —and we have laws to prove it. Illinois laws provide some of the strongest voting rights protections in the country. And yet, until there are ***national*** voter protections and standards, federal elections are open to partisan manipulation. Which means the rights of all voters are at risk, even those in Illinois.

The Freedom to Vote Act was reintroduced in both the US Senate and US House of Representatives on July 18 to set national voting standards and expand Americans' access to the ballot box.

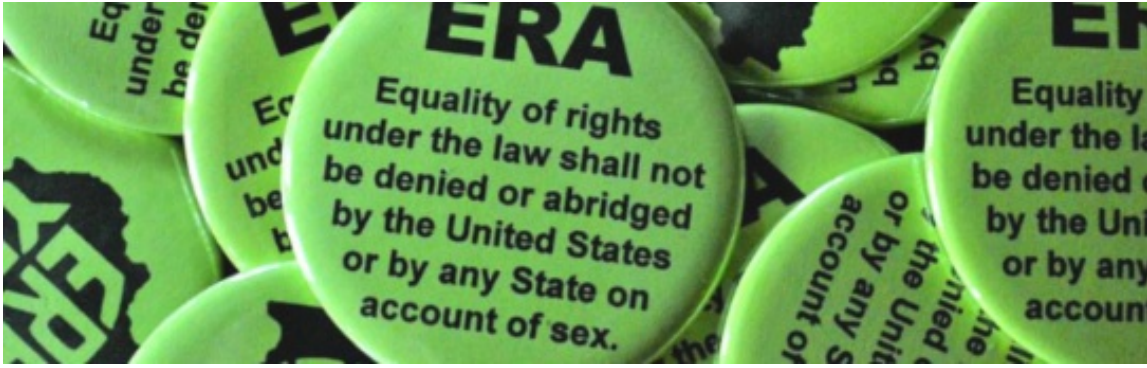
The 2023 re-introduction of the Freedom to Vote Act is “a strong step toward enacting pro-voter reforms,” according to [League of Women Voters of the United States CEO Virginia Kase Solomón](#), though she added that “while the League of Women Voters is pleased to see this bill introduced again, we are disappointed it is not introduced with bipartisan support.”

Bipartisan support from our polarized congress is crucial for the passage of the Freedom to Vote Act. Voting is the foundation of our democracy—our government is built on the premise of representation. Voices that are not heard are not represented.

In 2023, more than 320 bills restricting voting access were introduced in state legislatures nationwide. Many of these appear harmless on their face, yet [make voting harder](#) for specific communities.

According to the [Brennan Center for Democracy](#), “the Freedom to Vote Act would establish baseline national standards that protect the ballot and fortify our elections against sabotage. It would ban partisan gerrymandering and counter big money in politics, and it would protect voters of color.”

Federal primary elections begin in half a year. Let your congresspersons know that you expect action today. The voting rights of every voter must be protected. [Contact your representatives with this quick and easy form.](#)



Take Action: Equal Rights Amendment

More than 100 years after some women gained the right to vote, we continue to witness women's rights being stripped away. The US Constitution simply does not ensure that all genders have the same rights and protections under the laws of our nation.

It is time. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has met all ratification requirements and must be published as part of the US Constitution.

Here in Illinois, the General Assembly adopted Joint Resolution HJR20 this spring, calling on the US Congress to affirm the ratification of the ERA. Joint resolutions have been introduced in the US Congress that will both affirm that the ERA is a valid part of the Constitution and address the question of a ratification time limit.

The ERA was first drafted in 1923 by suffragist Alice Paul, and was introduced in every session of Congress for the next 49 years. In 1972, it was approved by overwhelming majorities in both House and Senate, and sent to the states for ratification. The 38-state threshold needed to become part of the US Constitution proved elusive until in 2018, when Illinois became the 37th state to ratify, and Virginia became the 38th in 2020.

It is time for all genders to be protected equally by the US Constitution.

Speak up! Urge Congress to act now to assert that the ERA is part of the Constitution. [Use this quick and easy form to contact your representatives.](#)



Success! League-supported legislation passes

Thanks in part to the advocacy of League supporters, important legislation supported by LWV of Illinois was passed by both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly this term.

These bills were sent to Governor J.B. Pritzker, who has signed many of them into law. The governor has 60 days to sign bills into law. The count starts the day the bill is delivered to him, not the day it passes. Any vetoed legislation is returned to the General Assembly. Any bill not vetoed or signed by the governor within 60 calendar days after it is presented to him shall become law.

To advocate for the governor to sign the remaining bills, call 217-782-6830 or 217-782-6731 (for hearing impaired: 888-340-1009).

Voting Rights

SB2123 Election Omnibus Bill (Sent to governor June 7)

- Young citizens will be able to pre-register to vote when they turn 16, with their registration held in abeyance until they reach voting age.
- Creates a task force to study ranked choice voting (we had hoped that the election system would be approved for municipalities with the appropriate equipment).

Reproductive Health

SB1909 Deceptive Practices Of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers Act (Signed into law July 27)

- Limited Services Pregnancy Centers are prohibited from engaging in deceptive acts or practices which mislead patients seeking abortions.

Environment

SB58 Polystyrene Reduction (Sent to governor June 16)

- State agencies and departments may not procure disposable food service containers that are composed in whole or in part from polystyrene foam (we had hoped the ban would extend to all retail establishments).

Education

HB2789 Right to Read (Signed into law June 12)

- Imposes fines for banning books.

SB90 Racism-Free Schools (Sent to governor June 22)

- Requires school districts to adopt and communicate a policy on harassment based on race, color, or national origin, in addition to the existing requirement for sexual harassment policies.

Criminal Justice

SB1886 Fair Probation Drug Testing (Signed into law July 28)

- Eliminates drug testing fees.

HB1268 Fully Free Act (Signed into law July 28)

- Individuals who have been released from prison can serve as executors of a relative's will. This eliminates a barrier to fully re-entering society after incarceration.

HB1496 Implementing the Ban on Prison Gerrymandering (Signed into law June 9)

- Ensures that Corrections records contain home addresses for people who are incarcerated so that they can vote in their home district.

ERA

HJR20 Affirm Equal Rights Amendment (Resolution adopted)

- This resolution affirms that the Illinois Legislature believes requirements have been met for passing the Equal Rights Amendment.

Budget

SB250 Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (Signed into law June 7)

- Evidence-based funding for Education was increased by \$350 Million (we had hoped for more).
- Invest in Kids was NOT in the budget, so it is possible that program, which uses public tax dollars to fund private schools, will be allowed to sunset in 2024.



Are you ready for the next election?

Illinois' Primary Election will take place on March 19, 2024. Are you registered to vote? Is everyone else you know? You'd be surprised!

You can [double-check your voter registration status online](#). Check in with your friends, family, and colleagues—do they need help registering? Be a resource for them. We've got [everything you need to know about registering to vote](#).

Check in especially with the young people in your life. 17-year-olds are eligible to register for and vote in the Primary Election if they will be 18 by the General Election on November 5, 2024.

DONATE NOW

Your dollars go directly to LWV of Illinois' work to educate, advocate and activate—empowering people to use their voices in our democracy.

Join us on the path toward an equitable future.
Support the League.

Thank you for supporting our work to defend democracy and empower voters.



Donate

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