



NEWS you can use

Democracy is not a spectator sport

September 2023

Summer is ending, and new backpacks are inspiring dreams of success for our neighborhood kids. Most of those eager students, 1.9 million of them in Illinois, will be welcomed at one of the local K-12 public schools. About ten percent of children nationwide will attend private schools, which charge tuition, and are not subject to most state education code requirements, including accountability and transparency. Private schools may exclude children with disabilities, or whose English skills are still developing, or families who identify as LGBTQ, or whose religious beliefs differ from the school's doctrine. Public education, open to all, is a fundamental bedrock of our democracy.

Your taxpayer dollars, \$56 million last year, were used to support private schools, most of which are religious, through a tax credit program misleadingly called "Invest in Kids" (IIK). The League of Women Voters of Illinois, a long-time advocate for public education, was relieved that the legislature did not extend the IIK voucher program in the spring session. But we worry that an extension will be attempted in the veto session in September in Springfield.

With no IIK extension, starting in the fall of 2024, private school scholarships for low-income children can be funded by the same generous donors, who may receive federal tax deductions rather than IIK's state tax credits. There is no need for any child to have to transfer. Our opposition to extending "Invest in Kids" state tax credits is wholly consistent with our positions on racial equity, civil rights, sound fiscal policy, and full funding for public education.

The IIK program last year served only 9,600 students. It cost \$56 million in state revenues that could have been distributed to the public school districts that serve 874,000 low-income children in public schools in Illinois, or used for other state responsibilities like health care for children. The League of Women Voters of Illinois believes that all children deserve access to a good public education.

Our bottom line: Public funds should be used for public schools.



Becky Simon, president
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For more on the League's opposition to IIK, [read Becky's Op-Ed](#), published in the *Daily Herald* on August 31.



Elimination of cash bail effective September 18

Pre-trial detention in Illinois will now be based on community safety, not on the financial fitness of a defendant.

On July 19, 2023, the Illinois Supreme Court lifted an injunction on the no cash bail provision in the Safety Accountability Fairness and Equity Today (SAFE-T) Act making Illinois the first state in the nation to end cash bail. Implementation of the no cash bail system begins on September 18, 2023.

The Illinois General Assembly passed the SAFE-T Act in 2020, in order to reshape Illinois' criminal justice system in three main areas: policing, pretrial fairness, and corrections (prisons and jails). Among the pretrial fairness reforms, the elimination of cash bail immediately faced pushback, including lawsuits questioning the constitutionality of the provision to eliminate cash bail. The Illinois Supreme Court issued an injunction, holding up implementation of the no cash bail system until they reached a decision this July.

Beginning on September 18, the transition to a no cash bail system will be implemented in stages, according to provisions in the SAFE-T Act. The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice is training court observers to help track and ensure appropriate implementation of the new law. Contact issues@lwvil.org for more information.

LWV of Illinois is a strong supporter of the SAFE-T Act and recently joined other members of the Illinois Network for PreTrial Justice on this [thank you letter](#) to Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul for his courageous support of the elimination of cash bail.

[Read more from the ACLU about the end of cash bail in Illinois.](#)

League Action in August

Representing 3600 members across the state, the League teams up with other organizations so that all of our voices are amplified.

- LWV of Illinois [signed onto a letter](#) authored by the Illinois Environmental Council, of which LWV of Illinois is an affiliate. The letter urged the EPA to expand the scope of its triennial efforts to comply with state requirements and better protect our waterways for citizens and our wildlife.
- LWV of Illinois [signed onto a letter](#) authored by the Metropolitan Planning Council advocating on behalf of universal lead pipe replacement.



Who represents your interests?

Civic engagement doesn't stop at the ballot box. Using your voice year round is crucial to a functioning democracy. Pay attention to how your legislators are advocating for your interests—let them know how you feel now, and be prepared for the next time you have an opportunity to vote.

Know your legislators



[Find your legislators](#), check out their websites, sign up for their newsletters and follow them on social media.

What policies do they support or oppose? Which issues do they prioritize? Do they “reach across the aisle” for solutions—are they open to compromise?

Use the Illinois General Assembly (ILGA) website to learn what committees your state [senator](#) and [house member](#) sit on and what actions they've taken on bills.

Go visit them in their office—have a conversation!

Keep up with legislation

Follow along with current legislation on [ILGA's website](#)—you can search for bills by number or keyword.

Follow organizations, including LWV of Illinois, that are doing work on the issues you care about—keep in touch with their newsletters and social media accounts.

After legislation passes, watch for news about how it is



enacted. For example, the Cook County Forest Preserves provides an [update](#) of what they are doing with the increased funding granted by last year's referendum.

Speak up!



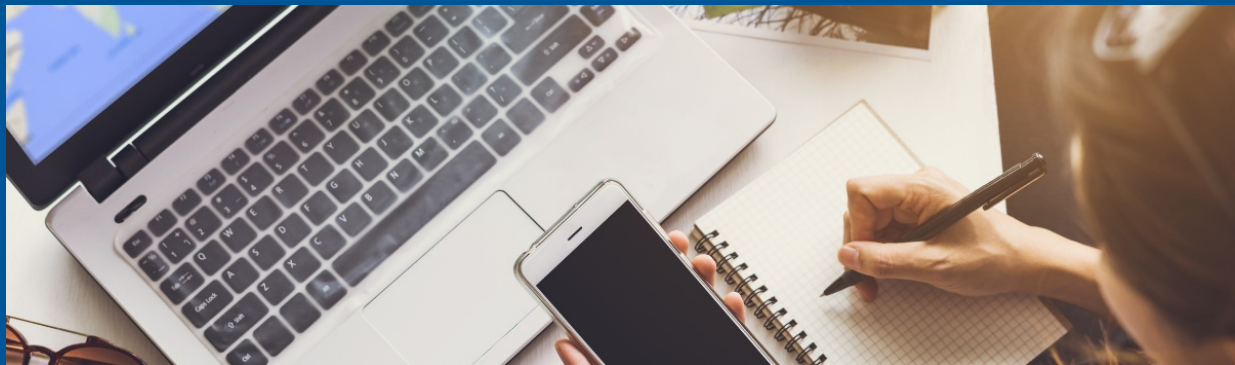
Comment on legislators' social media posts, email or call their office, pay a visit to their home office to meet them and their staffers. They work for you, so let them know what you think about the job they are doing.

Engage others! Talk to people in your networks about issues and give them actions to take. Be a trusted resource!



National Voter Registration Day Tuesday, September 18

Since National Voter Registration Day's 2012 inception, NVRD partners have registered tens of thousands of new voters. This day is a great reminder to [check up on your own voter registration status](#) or [register yourself online](#)!



How information literate are you?

In today's information-rich world, finding information we can trust can require constant diligence. Read this quick review and make sure you know how to recognize what you can, and cannot, believe.

Start with the basics

Misinformation: Inadvertently sharing false information without intending to cause harm.

Disinformation: Intentionally sharing false information, in order to cause harm

Learn how to spot mis- and disinformation

Research the source. Who's sharing this information? If it's online, does the website

sound familiar or have any political affiliations? Cross-check—are reliable news sources reporting the same information?

Check the date. It's easy to get incensed over an article online...only to realize it was published years ago and no longer applies.

Read past the headline. It may be a dramatic snippet used as a headline followed by a relatively mundane article.

Question emotionally charged content. Emotionally manipulative language may be used to get you upset or excited. That's a red flag. Reliable sources let the facts fuel your response, not emotional language.

Check your bias. Disinformation thrives on confirmation bias. Avoid the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of your existing beliefs or theories. We all have our bias and effective disinformation uses that to bypass our critical thinking.

What should you do when you spot disinformation?

Don't engage: Every like, click, share, and comment contributes to the piece's rate of engagement, which tells whatever website you're on that it's good content that they should show to more people.

Share correct information: For every incorrect piece of information you see or hear, try to share one that's correct. You want people to talk about what you know is correct, not about what you know is false or misleading.

Report it: Whenever you see disinformation online, report it to ReportDisinfo.org. You can also report most social media posts to the platforms themselves.

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

Join the League!

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