



League of Women Voters[®] of Virginia

Positioned For Action

Complete LWV-VA Positions
With History

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501 East Franklin Street, Suite 624
Richmond, VA 23219
www.LWV-VA.org

Positioned For Action

FOREWORD

This title describes very succinctly the purpose of program position items--those that have been adopted and studied by League members resulting in a point of view that can be used for League action. Just as program adoption and study involves all levels of League, action also may take place at any level and may involve various positions.

The basis for action may come from local, state or national positions. *Positioned for Action* is designed to help League leaders use the national and state program effectively at the state and local levels. This edition of *Positioned for Action* reflects the state program adopted at Convention 2013 and Council 2014.

Positioned for Action is a resource for League leaders. It is important for local Leagues to be familiar with state and national positions in order to utilize them effectively. The positions of the League of Women Voters of the United States are detailed in the national publication *Impact on Issues*. It can be downloaded from the LWVUS website (www.lwv.org).

In applying national, state and local positions, it is the responsibility of the appropriate board – depending on the level of action – to determine whether member understanding and agreement exist and whether the action makes sense in terms of timing, need and effectiveness. While local Leagues should consider using national and state positions for action at the local level, they are requested to inform state or national boards if using these positions. Official testimony or “speaking for the League” is only done by a League President or a designated representative.

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The League of Women Voters of Virginia Positioned for Action

Updated July 2014

GOVERNMENT

DELEGATION OF POWER

Position in Brief:

Support for a balanced partnership between state and local government, including laws, policies and incentives that promote regional coordination and local action; and establishment of uniform powers and responsibilities of local governments by eliminating any out-dated and unnecessary distinctions between cities, counties and towns.

The League's History

The General Assembly's 1968 approval of the Virginia Area Development Act created the regional districting of the state. In 1971, consensus was sought on "regional bodies" as "agencies for coordinating activities and programs of local jurisdictions" and as "instrumentalities for solving problems which cross jurisdictional lines and for acting on them."

An update and questionnaire to determine attitudes toward planning districts around the state, distributed to local Leagues at the 1979 LWV-VA convention, resulted in League support for legislation in 1980 calling for a study of the planning district structure in Virginia. The legislation was not passed by the General Assembly.

In 1989, Convention delegates approved a two-year study of the "Delegation of Power from the Virginia Legislature to the Localities". The study highlighted the fact that Virginia operates under a strict interpretation of the so-called Dillon's Rule which states that localities may exercise only those powers specifically granted to them by the General Assembly.

The following position resulted from combining the "Intergovernmental Relations" and "Delegation of Powers" to local government positions during the LWV-VA board's review of the state positions during the 1999-2001 bienniums.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia strongly believes that the powers and responsibilities of local Government should be established and defined to achieve a more balanced partnership with state government.

The League supports:

- The articulation of statewide goals and policies to enhance the partnership and shared responsibilities of state and local government, including regional coordination and incentives for innovative local action.
- The concept of regional bodies as agencies for coordinating activities and programs of local jurisdictions and as instrumentalities for solving problems which cross jurisdictional boundaries and acting on them.
- Establishing broad categories of responsibility and uniform powers by eliminating outdated and unnecessary distinctions between cities, counties and towns.

Additionally, the League supports use of coordinating bodies to:

- Provide economies by avoiding duplication of under utilized services where needs are region-wide and where there is an agreement of the need and type of service;
- Make uniform or compatible methods of data collection available to aid planning agencies and where actions of one locality have significant impact on its neighbors; and
- Benefit localities by exchanging knowledge of actions of other jurisdictions.

The League believes that local governments should follow similar procedures and should:

- Strive to avoid proliferation of political subdivisions;

- Ensure that the structure of governing boards is accountable and responsible to the citizenry. (1972 & 1991)

ELECTION LAWS

Position in Brief: The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens; that voting is a right and responsibility; and that election laws, regulations and administrative procedures should be uniformly designed and applied, and adequately funded to facilitate and increase voter participation throughout Virginia.

Specifically, the League supports measures to ensure the availability of voter registration and to encourage and facilitate increased voter participation in elections, including: absentee voting by mail and in-person without a reason; an adequate number of voting machines and trained election officers; the use of satellite voting; split shifts for election officers when needed; and measures that take advantage of technological advances such as online voter registration and the use of electronic poll books. The League also supports the shared funding of statewide registration and voting systems by the localities and the Commonwealth; providing adequate authority and resources to the State Board of Elections for oversight and enforcement of laws and standards for registration and elections uniformly throughout the Commonwealth; and the use of secure electronic means to facilitate voter registration and absentee voting for Virginia's military and overseas voters.

The League's History

When it was reestablished as a state League in 1947, the LWV-VA adopted as its first study, "simplification and improvement of election laws to facilitate and increase registration and voting". Virginia required a poll tax as a prerequisite for voting at that time. During the 1940s, the League opposed the poll tax and other restrictive voting procedures.

In 1965, the League arrived at a position in opposition to the Freeholder Amendment to the Virginia Constitution, which would have limited voting on bond issues to property owners. Virginia had come under Section 5 of the Federal Voting Rights Act in 1965 because the state had a literacy requirement and less than 50% of its voting age

population had voted in the 1964 presidential election. The League modified its position in 1967 to seek elimination of the literacy requirement, calling instead for some other means of identification for those unable to sign.

LWV-VA decided to restudy election laws in 1973. The study considered both voter registration and absentee voting (position adopted in 1975). Arguing against the notion that expanding registration opportunities constituted an illegal "solicitation" of voters, the League asked that Virginia law require election officials to make available and publicize expanded voter registration opportunities throughout their communities and the state. It also asked that election officials carry out a voter outreach program, consider other systems of voter registration, and administer election laws uniformly across the state, including the interpretation of domicile and abode for voter registration. The League stated that the emphasis of absentee voting provisions should be the expansion of opportunities to vote and supported what was later called "no-excuse absentee voting". Although the League recognized the need to prevent fraud, it believed it is best prevented by proper administration of the law rather than by tightening the law to restrict voting opportunities. Later in the decade, concurrence was taken on two topics: party identification of all candidates on the ballot (1977), and payment by the state of the costs of a recount in a close election (1979). Legislation was subsequently adopted by the Virginia General Assembly on these two issues, and League members did not indicate a need for further change during the 2009-11 study.

In May 1993, Early Voting was adopted as a state study to determine the feasibility of extending the voting period in Virginia. With the imminent introduction of the National Voter Registration Act, popularly known as "motor voter", it seemed an opportune time to consider other methods to make voting easier. Early voting was defined as a procedure used to permit voting by mail or in person on days other than Election Day. As a result of the study, the League adopted positions supporting the extension of the voting period up to one month, the ability of qualified voters to vote on Saturdays and Sundays, and early voting in person without specifying a reason. The State Board recommended a review of current state positions during the 1999-2001 biennium, at which time it combined the Election Laws and Early Voting positions.

The 2009 Convention adopted a restudy of election laws, particularly because of the enactment of national legislation, such as the National Voting Rights Act (NVRA), Help America Vote Act (HAVA), Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE), since the League's earlier studies. The study was handled in two parts, with voter registration and management considered during the first year and elections during the second year. Two lengthy studies were prepared and posted on the League's web site so that the same information would be available to all League members in Virginia. Due to confusion about the relationship of "early voting" to "absentee voting" and the Virginia Code and General Assembly's use of the latter term, it was used in the study's consensus questions and materials. The LWVUS has national positions on issues such as opposition to requirements for photo identification and other measures that restrict access to registration and voting, and support of voting systems that are secure, accurate, re-countable, accessible, and provide a voter verifiable paper trail. Therefore, those topics are not covered in the study and are not specifically addressed in the current LWV-VA positions. In 2013, the LWVFA proposed a concurrence to add text regarding vote centers.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens; that voting is a right and responsibility; and that election laws, regulations and administrative procedures should be uniformly designed and applied, and adequately funded to facilitate and increase voter participation throughout Virginia.

Role of the Commonwealth

Funding the cost of maintaining a statewide system of voter registration, and providing equal and easy access for voting throughout Virginia, are responsibilities shared by the Commonwealth and local governments. The Commonwealth should provide additional funding where localities are financially unable to support an accessible and well-managed election system.

The State Board of Elections must be given adequate authority and resources to: enforce election laws and mandatory standards for local election offices; encourage best practices in registration and elections management, especially in training election officers

and officials; provide adequate oversight of registration and elections at locality and precinct levels; and oversee implementation of election laws, regulations and policies to ensure their consistent application across the Commonwealth.

Registration

Because the system of voter registration affects voter turnout, and because federal legislation has extended the availability and ease of voter registration in Virginia,

- Voter registration opportunities must be available, by mail and in person, consistently throughout the Commonwealth;
- A uniform system of voter registration is required to facilitate voting and prevent fraud; and
- Additional measures should be adopted to increase the availability of voter registration, especially those that utilize technological advances or provide cost savings, including:
 - Online voter registration,
 - Reducing the interval between the registration deadline and Election Day to the smallest number of days consistent with effective elections management, and
 - Same-day registration at county and city central election offices.

In defining domicile and abode to determine residency for purposes of registration, a statewide policy should be applied and enforced to ensure:

- Uniform interpretation
- Broad construction
- Presumption of intent
- Consistent application.

Voter registration by political party should not be adopted in the Commonwealth.

Elections

Election laws must be designed to facilitate voting and encourage participation of a large percentage of citizens in all elections. To this end, laws, policies and procedures affecting the voting process should be applied consistently in all parts of the Commonwealth, both prior to the election and at the polls on Election Day.

Prior to the Election

The LWV-VA supports:

- Legislation to allow all registered voters to vote absentee prior to Election Day without specifying a reason. Both choices— voting in person or by

mail-- should be offered. (This no-excuse absentee voting is sometimes called “early voting”.)

- The use of satellite voting facilities, in areas where distance or inadequate transportation make it difficult for voters to reach a central election office for in-person absentee voting;
- The provision by all localities of evening and weekend voting hours at central and satellite offices, for several weeks before general elections;
- The use of electronic means for submitting absentee ballots by military and overseas voters if it can be accomplished while maintaining ballot security and integrity; and
- A pilot program of all-mail voting to test its use in some elections.

At the Polls

The following should be required throughout Virginia to ensure an efficient voting process:

- Electronic poll books, with back-up paper copies for emergencies;
- Appropriate precinct sizes and numbers of voting machines to minimize voting delays;
- Well-trained officers of election; and
- Polling places selected to maximize voter participation and near public transportation, wherever possible.

The LWV-VA is concerned that Virginia’s polling hours might not be optimal for all areas of the Commonwealth, especially those close to adjacent states, and is concerned about the effect of long hours on officers of election. Split shifts and poll closing specialists should be used in all localities to ease the burden on officers of election, help in their recruitment, and ensure well-managed elections.

Legislation should be enacted to provide authority to the Courts to extend the polling hours in case of disasters and other emergencies that prevent the voters from getting to the polls, and include the provisions needed to ensure fair access to the polls throughout the Commonwealth. (2011)

The LWV-VA supports pilot programs authorizing Virginia’s local governing bodies to use vote centers in conducting local (not statewide) primary, special, and May elections when warranted and implemented pursuant to

regulations and policies established by the State Board of Elections, especially those requiring a determination that using vote centers will not serve to restrict access to the polls or further decrease voter turnout. If proven efficient and effective, the League would support their authorization for continued use at the option of local governing bodies. (2013)

FISCAL POLICY

Position in Brief:

Support for a responsible state fiscal policy that includes: a flexible and diverse tax structure that is based on a progressive income tax; continuous evaluation of all programs for need, effectiveness, efficiency, and economy; flexibility in developing local sources of revenue; state commitment to funding of state-mandated programs; and opposition to constitutional or statutory limits on state/local government spending or revenue sources.

The League’s History

The first fiscal program item, adopted at the 1949 convention, called for an analysis of Virginia taxes and expenditures. The study was largely informational and resulted in a publication. In 1961, a new fiscal study led to a consensus in favor of income tax withholding. A continuation of this study item in 1963 resulted in additional positions in support of: a statewide minimum assessment ratio for all localities to strengthen the property tax structure; borrowing for long term capital improvements, and a constitutional change to establish more flexible borrowing limitations.

The 1965 LWV-VA convention voted to conduct more research of the state’s fiscal policies by agreeing to a new study about the uniform statewide sales tax. This resulted in a consensus in support of: a local option to levy additional sales taxes; a formula for distributing state revenues, and exemption of food and drugs from sales tax. After being placed on the inactive list in 1966, the LWV-VA convention voted to drop the fiscal item in 1971, except the position in support of exemption of food from sales tax.

In 1975, a study and evaluation of the budget making process and sources of revenue of the state government was adopted. The first year was devoted to an overview of state finances, including revenues, expenditures and the budget process, and a consensus was reached. The second year concentrated on an in-depth study of Virginia’s tax structure with a view to

proposed changes that would make the system more equitable and revenue producing. These studies resulted in new positions being developed in January of 1977.

At the 1977 LWV-VA convention a two year study of state/local finances with emphasis on state/local fiscal relations was adopted, which concentrated on understanding the fiscal interrelationship and on state and local tax and spending limitations. Subsequent League legislative action has concentrated on opposing limitations on taxation and expenditures, support of indexing the income tax, and supporting localities in developing their own sources of revenue.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia advocates tax increases when necessary and believes that any changes in the tax structure should be progressive. The League supports continuing evaluation of all government programs for need and effectiveness as well as for efficient and economical government operation.

Tax Structure

The League supports:

- A more progressive state income tax, with an increase in the number of income brackets and a raise in the rates in higher brackets;
- The use of progressive income taxes to meet additional needed revenue, with smaller amounts derived from a tax on soft drinks (crown tax), and an increase in the present taxes on alcoholic beverages and tobacco;
- A systematic review of earmarked funds with less reliance on long term earmarking of funds such as revolving funds, trust funds, bonds, or any sources of revenues designated for specific purposes;
- The designation of highway funds to include all means of transportation and loosely related activities; and
- The use of general obligation bonds as needed to finance capital projects
- Keeping the corporate income tax structure competitive with neighboring states, and opposing any increase in the sales tax unless food is excluded from the increase.

Accountability and Responsibility

The League believes that the growth of state/local government spending can be contained through positive rather than restrictive procedures. Therefore we are opposed to statutory or constitutional limitations on state/local government spending or revenue sources.

We believe that elected officials should be accountable for laws enacted and taxes levied and that elected representatives have a responsibility to continually evaluate all government programs to determine public needs as well as real and long range costs.

State/Local Fiscal Relationship

Since localities in Virginia have only the limited fiscal powers delegated to them by the state which uses a strict interpretation of Dillon's Rule, the League advocates the following changes in the state/local fiscal relationship:

- Increased commitment by the state to fund its mandated programs
- The state should set basic standards for providing services to all citizens.
- The need for mandated programs should be continuously evaluated and their true and eventual costs should be considered. There is a great variation in the economic strength of different sections of the state so the state itself must assume a larger share of the financial burden.
- Increased flexibility for local governments to choose the ways in which they raise revenues. Setting of minimum standards by the state should not preclude the setting of higher standards by localities willing to meet additional costs. Localities should have more freedom to decide how to raise the money for these costs.
- Increased standardization of assessment procedures by the state as well as regulation of local tax administration with allowances for local control to respond to local conditions.
- Increased protection of local tax base. Exemptions from the property tax should be kept to a minimum, with service charges being imposed whenever practical. Relief given to special classes of taxpayers should be confined to those truly in need; the decision to offer such relief should be at local discretion.

(1964, 1977 & 1979)

REAPPORTIONMENT & REDISTRICTING

Position in Brief:

Support for a decennial redistricting plan approved by the General Assembly, including establishment of a bipartisan commission to prepare a plan for legislative approval, and consideration of natural geographic boundaries, jurisdictional boundaries, communities of interest, and competitiveness in addition to the constitutional requirements.

The League's History

Reapportionment and redistricting are an integral part of our system of representative government. As a result of the problems encountered in the reapportionment and redistricting process in Virginia in 1981, the League adopted a study at its convention in 1983 on the methods and criteria for redistricting.

Members agreed that a reapportionment commission should be established to prepare a plan for legislative approval because such a commission could be objective, devote its full attention to the task, and expedite the redistricting process. The criterion of competitiveness was added in 2007 after an update to this position was adopted as a two year study at LWV-VA convention in 2005.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports the establishment, in law, of a politically balanced and independent Reapportionment Commission for each decennial redistricting to prepare, with the Virginia Department of Legislative Services, a plan for submission to the legislature as specified by the Virginia Constitution. The Commission should be bi-partisan and be composed of individuals who are not elected officials; they should represent the geographical distribution and demographic diversity of the state, and consist of an uneven number of members.

In addition to the Virginia constitutional requirement of equal population, contiguous and compact districts and the Voting Rights Act requirements for protecting the voting strength of minority groups, the League supports the following considerations in redistricting:

- Natural geographic boundaries;
- Jurisdictional boundaries;
- Communities of interest; and
- Competitiveness

The League believes that the Virginia constitution should be amended to provide that redistricting will occur on a decennial basis only. (1985, 2007)

TRANSPORTATION

Position in Brief:

Support for regionally balanced transportation systems which efficiently and economically meet regional needs without adversely affecting planned growth or the environment. Regional organizations, that set policy for a multi-modal public transportation program, that plan, coordinate, and are the designated recipients of federal and state funds, that operate or contract for services, and that could have taxing power; a mixture of public and private funding for public transportation; increased local participation with some public funds utilized to encourage private support and the use of innovative financing methods, such as tax incentives, to encourage private sector participation; and the use of a variety of incentives to increase the use of public transportation.

The League's History

In May of 1995, the state convention delegates voted to approve the League of Women Voters of the Richmond Metropolitan Area's request for concurrence by local Leagues with their transportation position. The position was reached after study of mass transit focused on the Richmond Metropolitan Area in 1987.

In August 1995, a copy of the original study, plus material on legislation at the national and state level, that had been enacted since the study, including the 1991 federal transportation law, the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), was sent to all local Leagues in Virginia. Twelve local Leagues concurred by the end of 1995. 2013 Note: Task Force recommends including land use concepts such as transit oriented development (TOD) and other planning practices as they relate to transportation when this position is updated.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports regionally balanced transportation systems which efficiently and economically meet regional needs without adversely affecting planned growth of the environment.

The League supports:

- Regional organizations that set policy for a multi-modal public transportation program,

that plan, coordinate, and are the designated recipients of federal and state funds, that operate or contract for services, and that could have taxing power.

- A mixture of public (federal, state and local) and private funding for public transportation.
- Increased local participation with some public funds utilized to encourage private support and the use of innovative financing methods, such as tax incentives to encourage private sector participation.
- The use of a variety of incentives to increase the use of public transportation. (1996)

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN VIRGINIA LAW

Position in Brief:

Support for the legal recognition of marriage as an equal partnership, including policies that recognize non-monetary as well as monetary contributions to a marriage by each partner; surviving spouse policies that specify that if one spouse dies without a will, the surviving spouse should inherit all property; divorce policies that recognize separately acquired property before marriage and during marriage through gifts or inheritance; elimination of the concept of "fault" in the court's division of marital property; and legal recognition of valid pre-nuptial contracts.

The League's History

A study of women's rights and Virginia law, adopted by a large majority at the 1979 convention, through the not-recommended program process, was an outgrowth of interest in the Equal Rights Amendment and legal rights seminars held statewide by local Leagues the preceding year. The 1981 convention expanded the study to include divorce laws in Virginia because at that time, Virginia laws governing women's rights in the event of death of the husband or divorce were disadvantageous to women in the state. This position was moved from the "Social Policy" category when the LWV-VA positions were reviewed and reorganized in the 1999-2001 biennium.

Since 1981, many of the League's recommendations outlined in this position have been accomplished through legislation. In 2012, society's definition of marriage, divorce and property rights has expanded to encompass the definition of marriage and civil unions between same sex couples, alimony for the partner earning less money (whether male or female), inheritance for children of previous marriages, etc. Notwithstanding Virginia amending its constitution

to ban same-sex marriages in the Commonwealth in 2006 and the effort nationally to limit marriage to those between a man and a woman by passing an act called the "Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)," the League recognizes that the intent of its earlier positions have been accomplished and the item should be expanded to include a review of current trends.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that marriage is a partnership, that the principles of fairness, equity, and equality should govern the legal rights and responsibilities of each partner in a marriage. To carry out the concept that marriage should be given legal recognition as an equal partnership, we believe that all contributions to a marriage should be recognized, non-monetary as well as monetary.

Until such time as the principle of equally shared marital property is obtained in Virginia Law, we believe that:

- In case of death, if one spouse dies without a will, the surviving spouse should inherit all the property.
- If a spouse renounces a will, statutes regarding augmented estate should provide for the share of the surviving spouse to be at least one half.

In divorce:

- Marital property should be defined as all real and personal property excluding all real and personal property acquired before marriage, all property acquired during the marriage through inheritance and/or gifts from someone (other than the other party), and property exchanged for separate property if it has been retained as separate property and not commingled.
- Fault should not enter into the court's division of marital property.
- Prenuptial contracts that fulfill all requirements of contract law should be recognized as valid. (1980 & 1983)

NATURAL RESOURCES

AIR QUALITY

Position in Brief:

Support for achieving and maintaining acceptable air quality through: adoption of strict vehicle emission standards, development of alternative fuels, and programs and regulations that foster efficient transportation modes.

The League's History

Following adoption of this local position in 1992, the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area prepared and sent information packages to all the local Leagues in Virginia, to allow for concurrence to be taken at the 1993 State Convention. The delegates concurred with the following position on Air Quality. 2013 Note: The California standards have been superseded by stricter national standards and the Clean Air Act of 1990 has also been superseded by stricter regulations. Most of these recommendations have been accomplished (or exceeded) legislatively in Virginia and in the United States.

The League's Position

In order to achieve and maintain acceptable air quality the League of Women Voters of Virginia believes Virginia should:

- Adopt the California Standards for low emission vehicles to achieve and maintain compliance with the Clean Air Act of 1990.
- Develop less polluting alternative fuels, a high priority with preference for compressed natural gas, reformulated gasoline, electricity and hydrogen. The State should consider total environmental impact of a fuel, including tail pipe emissions and pollution produced during manufacture and disposal.
- Change parking subsidies away from those favoring low occupancy vehicles to those favoring efficient transportation modes. Place greater emphasis on local program and regulations that encourage employers to institute transportation management systems which foster efficient transportation modes. (1993)

AIR QUALITY - Smoking in Public (Archived 2013)

LAND USE

Position in Brief:

Support state policies that include creating state long-range comprehensive land use plan coordinated with local and regional plans, protecting of critical environmental areas through some land use controls, and assisting to and increasing flexibility for localities in land use planning and control.

The League's History

In 1972, in response to a growing desire on the part of Leagues for a national focus on land, LWVUS convention delegates adopted land use as a new study. During the last year of the two-year study, the national League gave state Leagues the opportunity to add state land use study to their program agenda without going through the convention adoption method. Local Leagues used consensus questions formulated by the national board to reach consensus on state land use, some at the same meetings where they reached consensus on national land use, others had additional meetings to reach state consensus or mailed questionnaires to their members.

Action has focused on coastal resource preservation and planning, preservation of prime agricultural land and strip mining legislation. 2013 Note: Again, many of the recommendations of this position have been accomplished through legislation, nationally and in Virginia. Also, today's land use processes have become a function of government comprehensive planning. Thus, this position would be more appropriate in the Government positions' category with cross-reference to the Natural Resources' positions category.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the Commonwealth should have a long range comprehensive plan reflecting the needs and interests of citizens and flexible enough to meet future needs. The plan should be a coordinated one including plans and policies of local, regional and state governments. Implementation should maximize local decision-making with some provisions subject to state established standards and review.

State Control of Land Use:

We believe that the state should reassume certain elements of its legal authority to control the use of land. Stronger state control, with impact statements

required as deemed necessary, is needed for land use activities of more than local impact (including the siting of energy facilities, large scale public or private development, major transportation facilities, and waste disposal facilities).

Increased state control is needed for certain land areas of statewide concern such as:

- Wetlands
- Crucial watersheds
- Flood plains
- Productive agricultural and forest lands
- Unique scenic and historic areas
- Shorelines of major waters and
- Unique wildlife habitats.

Regional Planning

The League believes that the state should support increased regional planning on matters of regional concern.

State Assistance to Localities

The League believes that the state should give assistance to localities for land use planning and control by:

- Increasing financial aid for research and technical assistance;
- Collecting, analyzing and disseminating economic, environmental and social data;
- Authorizing and encouraging innovative land use planning and regulatory techniques such as land banking, planned unit development, transfer of development rights, and timed development ordinances. (1975)

WATER SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION

Position in Brief:

Support for a comprehensive state effort to protect the water supplies, including recognition of the connection between ground and surface water, sharing in the use of ground water, state collection of information on water resources and planning for future use, and land use policies that guarantee protection of water resources.

The League's History

In 1981, the League adopted a study of water supply and distribution in Virginia. Leagues were concerned about the ability of the state laws, regulations, and procedures to protect the water supply. There were also problems and conflicts between "water rich" and "water poor" users and concerns about whether

Virginia had sufficient information and adequate laws and procedures to settle these issues.

Local Leagues studied the situation in their localities and then statewide. At the end of the study, the state League published a prize-winning publication explaining in clear layman's language the doctrines governing Virginia's water laws and the complexities involved in finding solutions to the problems of supply and distribution. Consensus was reached in November 1983.

In April 2014, delegates to the Council approved through concurrence a policy on uranium mining.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that modifications should be made to Virginia's water laws, based on the riparian doctrine and the Ground Water Act of 1973.

Specifically we believe that:

- The law should recognize the connection between ground and surface water;
- Decisions about reasonable use of ground water should include the concept of sharing, as in the riparian doctrine;
- Exemptions in the Ground Water Act of 1973 should be tightened; and
- If the resolution of conflicts is in the Courts, expert technical advice should be provided.

The League believes that the state must fulfill its responsibility for gathering information about Virginia's water resources, planning for future supply, and giving assistance to localities about their water supplies; and that:

- The designated agency must be strengthened and adequately funded;
- The state should have a strong land use policy that recognizes that water and land-use planning are indivisible; and
- The state should take the lead, both by education and by legislation, in promoting water conservation. (1983)

The League supports the moratorium on uranium mining. The Commonwealth must establish modern, enforceable, and proven effective best practices to protect the health and safety of workers, the public, and the environment before uranium mining, processing, and reclamation occurs. The Commonwealth must ensure that tangible economic

benefits exists even if industry can develop modern best practices specific to the unique environment of Virginia. Further, if the Commonwealth adopts best practices approved by an independent assessment team such as the National Academy of Science (NAS) or other independent scientific organization, it must also provide the staff and funds needed by the Department of mines, Minerals, and Energy, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Health, and other state agencies to thoroughly monitor and regulate uranium mining.

According to the December 2012 NAS report “the waste form mining and milling if not adequately controlled may contaminate the local environment by seeping into water sources.” Some high population centers would most likely be affected if contaminants were inadequately isolated. Further, because Virginia is at risk of hurricanes and intense rainfall, concern exists about the effectiveness of the uranium tailings repositories to prevent surface and groundwater contamination. Tourism and agriculture, important economic drivers for the Commonwealth, depend on clean water which could be compromised by uranium mining. (2014)

SOCIAL POLICY

ADULT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Position in Brief:

Address the crime of adult domestic violence through uniform law enforcement, including mandatory arrest and reporting; educational and training programs for medical, clerical, law enforcement personnel, and the public on the problem of adult domestic violence as well as conflict resolution; and assistance and training programs for victims.

The League's History

Because League positions did not address legislation that might evolve from the Governor's Task Force on Adult Domestic Violence, the state Convention adopted a one-year study on adult domestic violence in 1991. The scope, which included the elderly and adult children living at home, uniform law enforcement, intervention before and after violence occurs, education of all persons involved in domestic violence, including victims, abusers, law enforcement personnel, court personnel, and the community in general. Local Leagues used a questionnaire to determine local and state roles in policy and procedure by interviewing shelter and service personnel who deal with adult domestic violence.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that Adult Domestic Violence should be addressed as a crime by state and local law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with an increase in state funding for support services.

The League supports:

- A written, mandatory arrest policy as a uniform procedure used by law enforcement agencies, with reporting of adult domestic violence calls; mandatory.
- Training related to domestic violence and conflict resolution curriculum for all sectors of government involved with treatment;
- Expansion of the Family Life Education curriculum to include topics about domestic violence and conflict resolution;
- Expansion of the current Police Academy curriculum to better address the problems of adult domestic violence;
- Public education through use of public service announcements;

- Funding for job training programs for victims;
- Training for doctors and clergy in causes and issues of adult domestic violence; and
- Monitoring at local government level policies regarding shelter maintenance and services. (1992)

CHILD CARE

Position in Brief:

Support for state policies that promote quality child care that is affordable, accessible, and available, including minimum comprehensive state license standards for care facilities, incentives for development of programs, financial assistance for low income families, coordinated resource and referral systems, and training for care givers and parents.

The League's History

With the increase in the number of employed mothers and single parent families and the reported difficulties parents have in finding good, available and affordable child care, many Leaguers thought the time had come for the League of Women Voters to study what role, if any, the state should have in child care. At the 1985 state convention, delegates adopted a two year study of the issue. The final report along with consensus questions was sent to the local Leagues early in the fall of 1986. Consensus reports were returned by mid December of 1986 with 17 of 19 local Leagues reporting. The board developed and approved complete consensus in February 1987 with modifications for clarity approved the following April.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia strongly believes that the state has a role to play in child care in the Commonwealth to ensure that children in these services receive the quality of care consistent with their developmental needs. The state's role should include licensing all of the following care facilities:

- Child care homes for more than five, and up to ten children;
- Child care centers of ten or more children;
- Family child care systems;
- Church-sponsored child care;
- Facilities run by hospitals for their own

- employees;
- Facilities run by universities/colleges for staff and students;
- Facilities run by governmental units;
- Drop in centers;
- Before and after school programs; and
- Nursery schools (no more than four hours per day per child).

The state should have a role in monitoring an up-to-date listing of child care facilities.

The following minimum standards should be required for licensing and should cover:

- Space and physical facilities, including equipment;
- Health and sanitation;
- Staff/child ratios;
- Qualifications of staff (training, experience, absence of criminal record);
- Admissions policy (health and immunization records);
- Identifier and locator information; and
- Written statements to parents (on operations policies and procedures).

Minimum standards should be required for licensing for group size in:

- Centers of ten or more children;
- Family child care systems; and
- Nursery schools.

The state should provide:

- Some form of financial assistance to increase the affordability and availability of child care. Such assistance could include direct subsidies to low income parents; direct subsidies to providers to allow enrollment of low income families; start up or improvement loans to providers; tax relief to parents; incentives to employers offering child care benefits to employees; and matching local funds for those jurisdictions which help fund child care;
- Free training to care givers and other staff to improve the quality of child care;
- Education to parents about quality child care, and
- Assistance to child care facilities in dealing with liability insurance.

The General Assembly should authorize local school boards and governments to provide before- and after-school child care for school-aged children. We

support central coordination of child care policies in an existing agency of the state government which is adequately funded and staffed. (1988)

Further, the state shall ensure that all professionals involved in providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular basis or persons associated with or employed by and private (profit or non-profit) or public organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children report child abuse or neglect. (2013)

CHILDREN AT RISK

Position in Brief:

Support for state and local policies that recognize the basic needs of all children, including shelter, family/community support, health care, food, education, and personal safety, including funding of preventive services, rehabilitative programs, family support programs, crises services, court costs and detention; evaluation of programs and services; state mandated case planning and management systems; and internal and judicial grievance procedures.

The League's History

As stated by Virginia Governor Gerald L. Baliles, at-risk children are often conceived in poverty and are delivered into a world of hunger, inadequate health care, poor housing, and even homelessness. As these children struggle through adolescence, they begin to feel alienated from their communities. Many become underachievers in school, substance abusers, teen parents, and delinquents. As at-risk youth grow into adulthood, they may pose political, economic, and social threats to society.

The 1987 LWV-VA convention delegates adopted this issue for a two year study. The committee began their work with three regional workshops in the fall. Local Leagues interviewed caregivers of the children at risk. The reports from the local Leagues, together with information gathered from state agencies, congress and other states, provided the background information used. A 1988 fall workshop and leaders guide were provided for our local League leaders in early October to prepare them for their consensus meetings. The board adopted the following position in February 1989.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the state government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to meet the basic needs of at-risk children. The state government should

establish a policy defining and supporting a minimum quality of life, with the legislators defining standards to meet the basic needs of these children.

We believe the basic needs to be: shelter, family/community support, health care (including mental health care), food, education (including vocational training) and physical safety.

The League supports:

- Funding priorities in the following order of importance: preventive services (including rehabilitative programs), family support services, crises services, court costs and detention (secure and other);
- Evaluation of services and program effectiveness, determination of overlapping services, gaps in services, or unmet needs of children by citizens committees/task forces;
- A state mandate directing communities to develop case planning and case management systems to assure timely access to services. The case management process should include representatives of local and state agencies, guardian/ parent, court intake officers, court child advocates, and the non-profit sector; and
- The continued use of internal grievance procedures for persons who feel mistreated by agency decisions or judicial remedies. (1989)

Further, the state shall ensure that all professionals involved in providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular basis or persons associated with or employed by and private (profit or non-profit) or public organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children report child abuse or neglect. (2013)

EDUCATION

Position in Brief:

Support for state funding for public schools that insures a high quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children, including:

- Full funding for the Standards of Quality and state mandates
- increasing the state's share of education costs;
- funding for half-day pre-kindergarten

programs for at-risk children, and full-day kindergarten programs;

- funding some portion of capital costs; and
- improving the funding formula for determining local ability to pay, using it as a basis for distribution of state education funds.

Support a challenging curriculum, high expectations of students and teachers in mastering that curriculum, and appropriate assessments of student achievement for a quality education in the public school system K-12. Essential curriculum elements include:

- core disciplines (English, Math, Science, History and Social Studies);
- Art, Music, Physical Education, Health, and Foreign Languages;
- analytical skills;
- integrated technology; strong remedial programs;
- programs for at-risk, gifted and special needs students;
- education for students with limited English proficiency, in which emphasis is placed on teaching English; and
- career and technical education.

Support professional education for principals and teachers and on-going staff development; class size appropriate to instructional goals; a safe environment for students and staff; and discipline, preventative programs and a consistently enforced, well-defined system of rules; guidance counseling for academics and support services; and parental and community support and involvement. Support opportunities to select a specific program or school. These opportunities should be based on a system of equity so that all qualified students have equal access.

Elements of a quality education also include: school-based teamwork, goal-setting and decision making, and application of learning to life experiences.

The League's History

According to the 1970 Virginia Constitution, the state must provide quality public school (K-12) education, set Standards of Quality (SOQ), and share the cost with the local governments. As local Leagues studied their own school systems, they questioned whether the formulas to distribute the state monies were fair. In 1979, a state study of financing education in Virginia was adopted. The 1991 Convention adopted a new statewide study on Financing Public Education.

The 1997 Convention approved a study “of the essentials of quality education, including alternatives, initiatives, vouchers, charters, contracts, etc., in the public schools.” The study coincided with new state legislative and administrative initiatives to improve the quality of public schools in Virginia.

In the 1999-2001 bienniums, the LWV-VA Board recommended a review of current state positions. The following position was derived from combining Financing Public Education and the Education positions.

The League’s Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that state funding for elementary and secondary public schools should insure a high quality education with equal educational opportunities for all children.

PART I: Funding

In order to accomplish this goal, the League supports the following:

Funding for Standards of Quality (SOQ)

- Funding the SOQ by including all actual costs to localities;
- Establishing the SOQ to exceed the average level of practices in school divisions when evidence exists that the average level is inadequate; and
- Adopting a per-pupil cost figure which represents actual costs per pupil for school systems in Virginia.

Local Effort

- Improving the formula for determining the measure of local ability to pay and using it in the distribution of all state school funds;
- Increasing the state’s share of the costs of education;
- Providing state funds to local school divisions for capital outlay, using an improved measure of local ability to pay and priorities of educational need; and
- Requiring at least a minimum local effort in funding school costs.

Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten Funding

- Providing state funding for half-day pre-kindergarten programs for all at-risk-children; and
- Providing funding for full-day kindergarten programs provided at the option of localities.

Other Funding

- Funding fully the actual costs to local school division of state and federal mandates which are not included in the SOQ;
- Continuing the current methods of financing capital costs by low-interest loans and bonds;
- Continuing state funding of a share of the employer costs in local school budgets for Social Security, retirement, and group life insurance.

We oppose placing a limit on the amount of local education funding which exceeds the cost of state requirements. (1993)

PART II: Quality Education

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes the following elements are essential to quality education in the public school system, K-12:

A challenging curriculum, high expectations of students and teachers in mastering that curriculum, and appropriate assessments of student achievement. The following elements of the curriculum are essential:

- Four core disciplines: English, Mathematics, Science, History and Social Studies;
- Art, Music, Physical Education, Health and Foreign Languages;
- Analytical skills, application of knowledge and decision-making;
- Technology integrated throughout the curriculum;
- Strong remedial programs implemented at the earliest indication of a student’s academic weakness;
- Special offerings for at-risk and gifted students and educational programs for students with special needs, using specified minimum standards;
- Education for students with limited English proficiency, in which emphasis is placed on teaching English, while other course content is presented in English;
- Career and Technical Education. Professional education of principals and teachers, and on-going staff development; Class size appropriate to instructional goals; A safe environment for students and staff; and
- discipline, providing preventative programs and a well-defined system of rules, consistently enforced;
- Guidance Counselors for academics and

- support services; and
- Parental and community support and involvement.
- Opportunities to select a specific program or school. These opportunities should be based on a system of equity so that all qualified students have equal access. (2003)

The LWV-VA believes that the following are important elements of quality education in the public system, K-12:

- School-based teamwork, goal-setting and decision-making;
- Application of learning to life experiences in further education, work, and leisure activities; and
- Incentives, recognition, and awards for both students and teachers. (1999)

ADULT JUSTICE (FORMERLY JUSTICE)

Position in Brief:

Support for an adequately funded judicial and corrections system that serves all people without discrimination and incorporates restorative justice practices; provides judicial selection by the General Assembly with the use of a nominating commission of lay persons and lawyers; sentencing by judges; an effectively administered corrections system that protects society and rehabilitates offenders; professionally administered local jails and community-based corrections; and policies that include alternatives to incarceration and use of community volunteers.

The League's History

In 1971, we adopted "Study and Evaluation of the System of Justice in Virginia," a study which led to consensus on court reform. In 1972, the study was of judicial selection and jury sentencing in Virginia. In 1973, reorganization and consolidation of the Courts of Record passed the General Assembly, and a unified district court system with full time judges was phased in; justices of the peace became salaried magistrates. (At the 1978 state convention, when these changes were nearly all in place, it was decided to drop those portions of the consensus that had been accomplished. The rest remain as part of the justice position.)

The 1974 scope read, "To study the Virginia state correction system, including all facilities, practices, standards, programs, philosophy, financing, and related programs." In that year the Department of

Corrections was separated from the Division of Welfare and Institutions, becoming an independent department answerable to the Secretary of Public Safety instead of the Secretary of Human Resources. The second part of the study concerned local jails and community-based corrections facilities and diversion from the state system, with consensus following.

Through the years the League has supported a commitment to community needs and worked for adequate funding and improvement of the state correctional system. In 1984, the General Assembly passed legislation setting up an Intermediate Court of Appeals. At the 2013 LWV-VA convention, the delegates approved the integration of restorative justice practices into the adult justice position.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the system of justice within the Commonwealth should be conducted in a just and dignified manner, incorporate effective restorative justice practices, and minister to all people without legal, economic or administration discrimination. It requires efficient administration, competent personnel who are given a clear assignment of responsibility and compensation reflecting their training and responsibilities, adequate financing and facilities, and coordination among levels of government and components of the justice system; and the active and informed participation of citizens.

Courts

The League believes that transparency within our court system fosters the active and informed participation of citizens who should be served without discrimination. We support mandatory training programs and minimum qualification requirements for state magistrates. All courts in the Commonwealth should have sufficient personnel to provide efficient disposition of cases. (2013)

Judicial Selection

The League believes that to maintain the objectivity and independence of the judiciary, the judicial selection and reappointment process should:

- Include opportunities for participation by laymen as well as lawyers;
- Consider the review of qualifications and endorsements from State and Local Bar Associations;
- Minimize politically partisan decision-making;

- Provide broad geographical representation for Statewide appointments;
- Reflect the ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity of the citizenry; and
- Provide timely and thorough information to the public.

We support the present system of election and re-election of judges by the General Assembly with a nominating commission to present a slate of names for each judicial office. (2013)

Sentencing

The League believes that judges, rather than juries, should have the power of sentencing. Judges should have discretion in choosing punishment appropriate for the crime. LWV-VA recognizes the importance of keeping citizens safe but urges discretion in legislating more mandatory minimum sentences. Mandatory minimum sentences usually lead to longer periods of incarceration which can have negative economic effects on state budgets and negative societal effects on the families of incarcerated individuals. LWV-VA supports alternatives to prison for non-violent crimes. A pre-sentencing report, including a victim impact statement and the opportunity for presentation of testimony and argument should be available to the judge or jury charged with sentencing. Restorative justice practices should also be available to the court prior to sentencing. (2013)

Corrections

The League believes that the goals of Virginia's corrections system should be to protect society and to punish and rehabilitate offenders. To achieve these goals, the League believes that an effective correctional system requires adequate financing; effective administration, planning and coordination among related agencies; an adequate number of trained, fairly-paid and competent staff to provide the appropriate programs, services and safety for the community, prison personnel and inmates; humane, non-discriminatory, dignified treatment of inmates and personnel; and the participation of citizen volunteers in its programs.

The League believes that corrections systems at all levels in the Commonwealth – state, regional and local – should include deterrence, re-entry, restitution, and diversion, programs, including

community-based alternative and probation programs;

- reflect and implement restorative justice principles and practices;
- use a classification system to place the offender in the most effective treatment programs at the proper level of security;
- provide appropriate alternatives to incarceration, both before and after the trial, for the accused and convicted offender—especially for first-time offenders, misdemeanants, and those charged with offenses classified as victimless crimes;
- use all available community resources in the rehabilitation and treatment of inmates, including pre-trial, alternative, and work release programs; and
- provide the number and types of effective vocational, educational, counseling, mental health, and rehabilitative programs to meet the needs of the inmates. Programs should periodically be evaluated for effectiveness.

The League believes that the Commonwealth should meet all national standards and maintain and enforce regulations establishing minimum standards for facilities, inmate care, personnel, training, operations and programs for corrections systems at all levels and ensure full funding to meet these standards, paying all state costs and allowing localities to supplement with local monies

The League believes that the Commonwealth and local communities should educate the public to the merits and needs of alternatives to incarceration, the financing and other needs of local jails, and the use of trained community volunteers. (2013)

JUVENILE JUSTICE (FORMERLY JUVENILES)

Position in Brief:

Support for an adequately funded and separate Department of Juvenile Justice that emphasizes prevention and rehabilitation, to include: individualized treatment and training programs, with vocational and alternative education opportunities, family planning support, mental health and substance

abuse counseling, community education and recreation programs for young children, alternatives to incarceration such as community service and residence in small group homes, and the removal of juveniles from adult jails and their placement in a juvenile detention facility as necessary.

The League's History

The 1975-76 Justice study looked at the Department of Corrections and Division of Youth Services, its philosophy, organization, function and all levels of state administration of programs; state facilities; financing; the Juvenile Code; and the predisposition and post-disposition handling of juvenile cases. The second part of the study covered local programs, including alternatives to institutionalization (such as community based programs) and diversion from the state system. In 1976, a major revision of the Juvenile Code passed, which removed status offenders from court jurisdiction.

The primary legislative focus in 1978 was passage of the Delinquency Prevention and Youth Development Act, which provides 75% state funding for local youth service boards and offices on youth to administer prevention efforts. The League also worked for passage of the Comprehensive Service Act for At-Risk Youth and Families in 1993 and the Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act in 1995, to increase services for juveniles. At its 1995 Convention, LWV-VA delegates voted to examine current issues in the (juvenile) justice system and new positions were established. At the 2013 LWV-VA convention, the delegates approved the integration of restorative justice practices into the juvenile justice position.

The League's Position

The League believes that responsible government shares in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare. Accordingly, LWV-VA supports a separate Department of Juvenile Justice with sufficient funding to meet the unique needs of this age group. The League believes that the juvenile justice system must emphasize prevention and rehabilitation as well as those general goals of the corrections system. Juvenile delinquency cases are cases involving a minor under the age of 18 who has been accused of committing an offense that would be considered criminal if committed by an adult.

Prevention programs should be provided for children identified with certain risk factors such as: parent incarceration, household history of sexual or drug abuse, child history of behavioral difficulties at an early age. Rehabilitation programs at juvenile facilities should be designed to provide treatment and training specific to the needs of each child and should include counseling, vocational training and accredited academic programs. LWV-VA also urges the Commonwealth to develop activities, programming and training consistent with the values and principles of restorative justice in responding to crime. (2013)

Courts

LWV-VA supports having all cases involving juvenile defendants assigned to Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, where such cases are heard by a judge rather than a jury. (2013)

Sentencing

Sentencing should take in account a youth's age, maturity, family circumstances, and potential for rehabilitation. When ever feasible, juveniles sentenced to a period of incarceration should serve their sentences in a juvenile detention facility, rather than an adult jail. Judges rather than juries should have the power of sentencing. LWV-VA believes that a mandatory life sentence without parole for a juvenile is cruel and unusual punishment, even when the crime is violent. (See U.S. Supreme Court Decision – Miller vs. Alabama – June 2012). (2013)

Corrections-Incarceration

LWV-VA supports:

- Assignment of juveniles to juvenile detention facilities whenever possible and their removal from adult jails
- Banning and/or minimizing solitary confinement of juveniles

Corrections-Alternatives to Incarceration

- Community delinquency prevention programs
- Adequately staffed and structured alternative education programs or community service for all juveniles who have been expelled or suspended from school or paroled from correctional facilities;

- Mental health and substance abuse programs (in and out patient) oriented to the special needs of juveniles for those identified as needing services. They should include early assessment, evaluation, treatment, and follow-up by qualified personnel;
- A variety of pre and post dispositional community based services as mandated by the Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act;
- Establishment of small therapeutic group or foster homes for juveniles (2013)

CIVIL RIGHTS OF FELONS IN VIRGINIA

Position in Brief:

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the civil rights of felons, regardless of the nature of their crime, should be restored automatically upon their release from incarceration or upon completion of probation or parole and that the process should be easy to understand, accessible, transparent and fair with information about the process made available to all.

The League's History

In 2005, the Voters Service Committee of the LWV of Lynchburg held a series of informational meetings to better understand the process by which felons could regain their civil right to register to vote. The process was neither predictable, consistent, nor transparent. Some members were concerned about the large number of citizens ineligible to register and its depression of voting, others were concerned with the unfairness of someone who had "paid their debt to society" not being allowed to participate. It became apparent that it was a state-wide problem and those changes could only be made at the direction of the Governor or by a constitutional amendment.

At the 2007 LWV-VA Convention delegates voted to adopt a "Study of the Restoration of Civil Rights of Felons in Virginia as a state study.

The state study committee met in Charlottesville. The core group consisted of about 8-10 members although over 20 members participated at one time or another. Fourteen local Leagues participated in the study. Thirteen versions of an informational brochure were written that could be distributed to the general public with information specific to each area where there was a local LWV. The LWV-VA Board approved the consensus statement early in 2009.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that:

- The civil rights of felons in Virginia should be restored automatically either upon their release from incarceration or upon completion of probation and parole.
- The procedure should be identical for all felons, regardless of the nature of their crime.
- The process should be easy to understand, accessible, transparent and fair
- Information about the process should be available to felons, the justice and correction system and the general public. (2009)

MENTAL HEALTH

Position in Brief:

Support for a comprehensive state public mental health care system of quality, statewide and community based services that meets the mental health needs of all Virginians, including long-range planning, coordination among agencies and established criteria for allocation of funds; adequate and appropriate housing; comprehensive and consistent service delivery in all local communities; and advocacy programs that ensure patients' rights at all levels.

The League's History

At its 1985 convention, the LWV-VA adopted a two year study of mental health services in Virginia. As a first step, in March 1986, the League prepared a document describing the public mental health care system in Virginia its history, organization, financing, and clients. A second resource document was distributed in December 1986 dealing with goals for the mental health system, whom the system should serve, factors for use in allocating state funds to communities, and a statewide comprehensive management information system.

Additional issues warranting study, identified during the first two years, resulted in a two-year extension by the 1987 convention delegates. In March 1988 a resource document on involuntary civil commitment and patients' rights was issued. Issues of the 1988 and 1989 *Virginia Voter* provided resource material on housing for the mentally ill and on organization, management, personnel and hospitalization issues.

The League's Position

Organization and Management

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that the goals of the state's mental health care system should:

- Provide quality mental health care which utilized the most current knowledge and which respects the dignity and human rights of each individual;
- Enable the mentally ill to attain their highest level of functioning to lead lives as normal as possible;
- Meet mental health needs of all Virginians regardless of mental disorder, race, creed, age, sex, or ethnic origin;
- Endeavor to prevent mental illness and to reduce its incidence and severity. (June 1987)

A public mental health care system should include:

- Commitment to quality community-based services;
- A long-range comprehensive plan for meeting clients needs;
- Clear lines of authority and accountability;
- Coordination among the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) and other agencies providing services to mental health clients;
- Evaluation of program effectiveness and administrative efficiency; and
- Sufficient number of qualified and well trained staff. (June 1989)

In allocating state funds among community services boards, it is essential to maintain current programs and fill identified service gaps.

It is important to use additional factors in allocating state funds as follows:

- Total population of area served;
- Encouragement of local support;
- Economic resources of the community;
- Local tax effort; and
- Number of mental health clinics in the system.

The state should institute a data gathering and analysis system that provides uniform statewide data for planning and evaluating the mental health care system in Virginia. (June 1987)

The state should review the organization and structure for delivery of mental health services at the local level. (June 1989)

In order to recruit and retain qualified staff in the mental health care system, the DMHMRSAS should:

- Increase pay and improve work environment;
- Form linkages with universities;
- Provide stipends to students, in return for services, in fields for which there are demonstrated recruitment and retention difficulties; and
- Provide in service training. (June 1989)

Housing

LWV-VA believes that in order to obtain adequate and appropriate housing for the mentally ill, the government of Virginia should:

- Provide funding; technical assistance to housing providers and public education;
- Enact statutes to affirm state responsibility;
- Encourage private/public sector cooperation to obtain housing for the mentally ill. (January 1989)

Clients

League of Women Voters believes that it is essential that the state's mental health system serve:

- The chronically mentally ill--those suffering from a severe and persistent mental or emotional impairment that seriously impairs their functioning; and
- People suffering from an acute mental disturbance which produces serious impairment and distress in social relations and vocational functioning.

It is important to provide needed services to people under major stress and/or at risk of developing mental or emotional disorders. (June 1987)

The state's mental health care system should provide the specialized services and specially trained staff required to meet the mental health needs of special populations such as children and adolescents, the elderly, people under the purview of the courts, the dual diagnosed (mentally ill/mentally retarded and mentally ill/substance abusers), and immigrants. (June 1987)

The DMHMRSAS should study the characteristics and needs of clients in state hospitals, especially those who are either frequently readmitted or have long term hospital stays, and should institute suitable changes to deal with identified problems. (June 1989)

Patients' Rights

LWV-VA supports the rights of mentally ill persons as defined by the Supreme Court, federal and state court rulings, laws, rules and regulations; internal and external advocacy programs to ensure patients' rights, and the appointment of persons who are mentally ill to the State Human Rights Committee, to local human rights committees for facilities and for community services boards. (September 1988)

Civil Commitment

The League of Women Voters believes that the state's civil commitment procedures should provide:

- Counsel be appointed for the patient as soon as possible to allow time to confer and consider options;
- An individual detained pending commitment hearings should be offered non-emergency treatment; and
- Training about the nature and treatment of mental illness and related issues should be provided to justice system personnel involved in civil commitment in Virginia. (September 1988)

LEAGUE PRINCIPLES

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the Individual Liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that the development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

WHERE DO THE PRINCIPLES COME FROM?

The Principles are “concepts of government” to which the League subscribes. These concepts are a direct descendant of the Platform, which served the League from 1942 to 1956 as the national repository for “principles supported and positions taken by the League as a whole in fields of government to which it had given sustained attention.” By 1956, the Platform had disappeared from the League vocabulary, but the principles survived as “The Principles.” Since that time, the Principles have served two functions, according to the LWVUS Bylaws: (1) authorization for adoption of national, state and local program (Article XII), and (2) as a basis for taking action at the national, state and local levels (Article XII).

As for action to implement the Principles, the appropriate board authorizes action once it determines that member understanding and agreement do exist and that action is appropriate. As with other action, when there are ramifications beyond a League's own government jurisdiction, that League should consult other Leagues affected.

The national board suggests that any action on the Principles be taken in conjunction with current League positions to which they apply and on which member agreement and understanding are known to exist. The Principles are rather broad when standing alone, so it is necessary to exercise caution when considering using them as a basis for action.