
PRE-BUDGET LEGISLATIVE LOBBYING 2015

TO: Local League Presidents/Action Chairs
FROM: Sally Robinson, President, E-mail: robintwins@gmail.com
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For the second consecutive year, Governor Cuomo has included proposals in his Executive Budget affecting issues of great importance to the League. These issues include ethics reform, campaign finance reform and the Educational Tax Investment Credit. This means that we are asking you to lobby our legislators twice again this year: once during the budget process (from now until the end of March) and then, again, later in the spring.

If you are a local League President or Advocacy Chair please make an appointment with your local state representatives to advocate in **favor** of campaign finance reform, in **favor** of ethics reforms and **against** the ETIC. Please complete and return to the state office the Response Form at the end of this packet after your lobby visits.

Attached are talking points for each of the topics we would like you to address. These are formatted with League letterhead so that you can leave one or more with your Legislator. You do not have to cover all three topics in your meeting; cover whichever ones you are comfortable with. You can also use the 2015 Legislative Agenda brochures in your advocacy efforts and leave a copy (or several) with your legislator.

After the state budget is done, we will make available a packet of information addressing any these issues which remain unresolved after the budget process is complete and other issues included in our Legislative Agenda and we will ask you to lobby your state legislators again.

2015 TIPS FOR LOBBY VISITS

PREPARATION

1. **Making the appointment:** Contact the Legislator's district office. Ask for a ½ hour's time, but accept less if necessary, and do not overstay your welcome. Notify the Legislator of the number in your group as well as their names, if possible. Send a letter or e-mail confirming the appointment, mentioning the issues you will discuss. **If you cannot meet with the legislator, ask to meet with senior staff.**

Try to arrange for three to five League members to attend. If your League meets with several assembly members or senators, be sure to have a League member who is a constituent present. At least one person should be experienced in League. League members well versed on the issues to be lobbied should be included when possible. A new member can be included in this exciting action if accompanied by experienced League members. When more than one local League is involved, try to have representatives from as many of the constituent Leagues as possible.

2. **Assigning roles:** Each member of the lobby team should be assigned a specific role. The following are possible assignments:
 - Researching the Legislator. Someone should be prepared to brief the other members of the lobby team on the Legislator's relationship with the League and his/her voting record (if the legislator is a re-elected incumbent). What are his/her committee assignments and/or leadership positions in the Legislature? Is this Legislator a member of the League? If this legislator sponsored bills that League supported, you may want to take a moment to express League's appreciation.
 - Moderator/leader. This person should be certain that each League member introduces himself/herself. The leader must also watch the clock. Knowing ahead how much time the legislator has agreed to spend with you, the leader must allot an appropriate amount of time for each issue. It is the leader's responsibility to "pace" the visit and tactfully keep everyone (including the Legislator) on the subject. **Remember, opinions expressed should be those of the League, not of individuals.**
 - Researching the issue or issues to be discussed. Look to the materials on this subject on the league website.
 - Recording and reporting the legislator's response. The leader should not be the recorder.

NOTE: If you anticipate printing any part of the interview in a League bulletin or newspaper, the recorder is obligated to get the legislator's permission and specific conditions under which you may print.

Write a follow-up thank you after the visit. This is not only a gesture of politeness, but it also allows you to underscore some points made during the visit, answer any questions you were not sure about, or send a League publication to which you may have referred during the course of the visit.

2015 LWVNYS LOBBY REPORT FORM PRE-BUDGET LOBBY VISITS

THANK YOU!

Local League: _____ League Member Name: _____

Senator: _____ Assemblymember: _____

What did the legislator say about each issue?

1. *Ethics Reform*

2. *Campaign Finance Reform*

3. *Education Investment Tax Credit*

Please return completed form to LWVNY, 62 Grand Street, Albany NY 12207
or fax 518-465-0812 or save as a pdf and attach to an email to lwny@lwny.org

by March 25, 2015



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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

Ethics Reform Budget Provisions: Seize the Opportunity for Reform!

On February 20th, Governor Cuomo released his 30 day amendments to the 2015-2016 Executive Budget and as promised, they contain several significant reforms to New York State's ethics laws. These reforms are in addition to the campaign finance reforms contained in the Executive Budget.

The League supports the following ethics reforms in the Governor's budget:

- More complete disclosure of the outside earned income of legislators, and the actual services performed to receive the income, including services performed by those working as attorneys. All clients and services should be disclosed if the matter involves business before the state, whether or not the legislator personally performed services or referred the client
- A ban on legislators and legislative employees receiving income in connection with services or referrals for legislative matters.
- Per Diem reform-requiring receipts and only reimbursing legislators reasonable and necessary travel expenses that are actually incurred while in the performance of their duties at the same rate as otherwise allowed state employees.
- Pension forfeiture for elected officials convicted of public corruption who entered the retirement system before 2011. However, the League feels that the forfeiture of any public official's right to a pension should be subject to judicial discretion.

Ethics Enforcement

We believe that now, after years of scandals involving state legislators of both parties, is the time to strengthen our state's existing ethics laws and in particular to reform and empower the agency that enforces them. Ethics laws are only as good as the agency that enforces them. It is clear that significant improvements to JCOPE's structure and powers are necessary to restore public faith in the commitment of our state government to true ethics reform.

We believe that the Governor and the Legislature should act immediately to strengthen JCOPE in order to show their real commitment to ethics reform. With the significant increase in proposed disclosure required of outside income, more resources should be devoted to the agencies interpreting, reviewing and enforcing the new statutory requirements. Resources should also be allocated to make all disclosure filings fully electronic and available to the public in easily accessible form on the Internet as well as in downloadable format.



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Campaign Finance Reform Budget Provisions: Seize the Opportunity for Reform!

As was the case last year, the Governor's 2015-2016 Executive Budget contains a package of campaign finance reforms long sought by the League. Since the inclusion of these proposals in the budget process has once again moved consideration of these critical reforms forward in the legislative session, the League believes that there is an opportunity during this budget process to fix a broken system.

Specifically, the League has repeatedly advocated for the following reforms proposed by the Governor and strongly supports their inclusion in the budget

Contribution Limits, Loopholes, and Personal Use

All contribution limits should be reduced, contributions to housekeeping accounts restricted, restrictions on transfers from party committees to candidates imposed, and loopholes, particularly the LLC loophole closed. The ban on personal use of campaign funds should be clarified.

Public Financing

The League has supported public financing in New York state elections for many years. Last year a very limited pilot program of public financing for Comptroller was passed, and the Governor's Budget seeks to cover all state offices in 2018

The League further believes that campaign contribution limits should be reduced to levels more consistent with federal limits and those of other states, limits on those doing business with the state further reduced, and the LLC loophole fully closed, including affiliated LLCs and corporations being subject to one limit. All candidates should be limited to one campaign committee and committees should be closed after an election.

Strong enforcement is critical to reform. While we support the powers given last year to the Chief Enforcement counsel heading the new enforcement unit in the State Board of Elections, we still believe in the importance of the Attorney General having concurrent jurisdiction to prosecute criminal violations of campaign finance laws. We urge that a steady stream of funding be provided for the new enforcement unit to ensure its effectiveness in years to come as well. Effectiveness of the enforcement unit will only be as good as the political will in Albany.

The League of Women Voters of New York State urges the Legislature to make sure that all of these reform component are in the budget and seize this opportunity to finally make comprehensive campaign finance reform a reality.



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The “Education Investment Incentives Act”

A.2551 (not same as); S.1976; S. 2003-A.3003 Executive Budget Article VII 12572-01-5

Since the 1950s the League of Women Voters of New York State (the “League”) has taken action on issues involving education funding. The League has continuously reiterated its strong belief that public dollars should go to public education and has opposed efforts to divert that funding. In 2002, the League submitted two amicus briefs in support of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity 1993-2006 litigation, which ultimately ruled that the Legislature should address inadequate public school funding, an obligation they have yet to fulfill.

In his 2015-16 Executive Budget, the Governor proposed the Education Investment Incentives Act, which favors taxpayers who desire to support private and public schools of *their* choice, through a first-come, first-serve process with no restriction on geographic distribution or the target institution’s need. Depending upon which version above-named, it initially allocates either \$100 or \$150 million at a minimum to provide tax credits to individuals and corporations, reducing their tax liability by 90% in the Senate version and 75% in the Assembly and Governor’s version. The League strongly opposes this budget initiative because:

- **The League of Women Voters of New York State believes that education aid should to be allocated through a democratic and transparent legislative process.** This measure thwarts the Legislature’s collective decision-making to target to high-need schools, school districts and legislative districts. Given the structure of all three versions of the bill, there is no guaranty that any given elected representative’s district would benefit from the blind-pool donation process.
- **The League believes that these bills are inconsistent with our position in favor of progressive taxation.** Tax policy as a means of encouraging giving for educational purposes should be limited to the availability of charitable deductions, not tax credits of the magnitude of \$1 million. Tax credits represent a much greater loss of revenue to the state than do deductions and up to an unprecedented \$1 million *each* could be saved in tax liability by individuals or corporations.
- **In light of the Legislature’s ongoing failure to fulfill the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit’s aims, the League supports the direction of taxpayer dollars primarily toward students attending public schools in high-needs school districts.** This tax credit will siphon \$100 or \$150 million from the general fund, leaving less money for education and other programs. Parochial and private schools would receive half of these funds, and there is no guarantee that high-needs public schools would benefit at all.