

## **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability. (LWVUS *Impact on Issues, 2014-2016, pp. 58*).

### **Recent League Activity**

For employment opportunity, please refer to the **Pay Equity** section of this document.

At the LWVUS Convention in June, 2010, this national position was amended to include marriage equality, the ability of two people of the same sex to marry.

When in 2011 Governor Cuomo came out in favor of legislation granting individuals of the same sex the ability to enter into civil marriages in New York State, the League actively worked to help pass the Marriage Equality Act. Individual members of the legislature were identified as important to the passage of the legislation, and members of the League, equipped with talking points provided by state, lobbied those legislators in an effort to win their support. The New York legislation passed in 2011.

LWVNYS continues to work for passage of the Gender Expression Nondiscrimination Act (GENDA). This act would prohibit discrimination in housing, education, and public accommodation based on gender expression or identification and add crimes against transgender individuals to a list of hate crimes. Although the positions of both the state and national Leagues interpret gender equality to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or expression, SONDA (see below) did not so define gender. Consequently, discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodation (like restaurants and movies) based on gender identity or expression is still legal in New York State, except where prohibited under local law, as is the case in many jurisdictions.

In his January 2013 State of the State, Governor Cuomo introduced his 10-point Women's Equality Agenda, later the Women's Equality Act (WEA), which included a provision to address discrimination in housing based on domestic victim status and on source of income, discrimination closing tied to gender. The WEA would:

- Prohibit building owners, managers and leasing agents from refusing to lease or sell, or evicting a tenant because of their status as a domestic violence victim
- Create a task force to study the impact of discrimination based on source of income in housing, in particular discrimination against tenants receiving Section 8 rental assistance, with focus on any sex-based impact

Following the State of the State, LWVNY joined the NY Women's Equality Coalition to lobby for passage of Governor Cuomo's 10-point Women's Equality Agenda/Act (WEA). The League

lobbied extensively for passage of the WEA, but it did not pass during the 2013 legislative session. For a complete narrative on the League's advocacy on WEA, please see the *Women's Issues* section

### **Past League Activity**

The League actively supported the "Private Clubs" Bill to prohibit discrimination in evaluation application for membership in places of public accommodation, resorts, or amusement (except in distinctly private clubs). In the 1994 legislative session, this legislation passed both houses and was signed into law.

The LWVNYS lobbied for passage of SONDA, the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act. It was successful in 2002, when discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodation on the basis of sexual orientation became a prohibited activity under the New York State Human Rights Law.