

STATE VOTER

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy
February 2023



President's Message

Judie Gorenstein, judieL728@aol.com

February was a busy month for our Leagues. Many of you celebrated LWV's 103rd birthday with a Day of Action. Thanks to all the leagues that not only planned events but shared pictures with us. Where was the LWVNY on Feb. 14th? We were out all over the state.

Where will we be on June 3rd and 4th? We will be in Albany at our LWVNYS convention. This will be the 60th convention of LWVNYS and our first in person LWVNYS convention since 2019. Hurray, it will be so good to all be together again in person.

Of course we were glad to have been able to hold a virtual convention in 2019 when COVID made it impossible to hold otherwise. Yes, our virtual convention was well attended and attendees did give us positive feedback. However, an in person convention offers the excitement, stimulation and energy when leaders from leagues all over our state come together for two days to not only do the work of convention but also have time to engage and form bonds with league members from all over the state. This convention will give you more opportunities to network, more time to share experiences and brainstorm, and the opportunity to be part of this wonderful organization, the LWVNYS. Those who have attended in person conventions I am sure will agree. Those who will be attending for the first time will see for themselves. I remember my first LWVNYS convention. I came away more enthused and committed to the LWV than ever, eager to learn and do more, never thinking that one day I would be the proud president of the LWVNYS. I hope that each one of you is a proud member of the League.

I hope that all of you will consider attending the 60th convention and that many of you will register and attend.

Empowering Voters and Protecting our Democracy is no easy mission but attainable when we all work together.

Upcoming Events

Public Campaign Finance Presentation

Date and Time: March 9, 2023 from 12:00pm – 1:30pm

Where: Rockefeller Institute, 411 State Street, Albany NY 12210 or join us virtually via Zoom

Registration Link: Coming soon!

In partnership with the Rockefeller Institute and the Brennan Center for Justice, LWVNYS will host a presentation on the new Public Campaign Finance Program. The NYS Public Campaign Finance Program provides candidates running for statewide or state legislative office the ability to qualify for

public matching funds based on small donations from residents in their district. This will be a hybrid event and those who are interested can either attend in person or virtually via Zoom. If you live in the Capital Region, we encourage you to come join us in person at the Rockefeller Institute in Albany. Parking will be provided in Washington Park.

The program will be presented by the Brennan Center for Justice's Joanna Zdanys, Senior Counsel, Elections and Government and Hazel Millard, an advocacy campaign strategist in the Democracy project. They will provide an overview of how elections are currently funded, issues and controversies around money in politics nationally and the issues that current practices raise particularly in NYS and then share the reforms that the Brennan Center is supporting.

LWVNYS Advocacy Day

Date and Time: May 2, 2023 from 9:30am-4:00pm

Where: The Blake Annex, 1 Steuben St, Albany NY 12203

Register: [Register online here](#) or mail a check made out to the League of Women Voters of New York State to 1 Steuben St, Albany NY 12207

Cost: \$20 per person (includes lunch)

LWVNYS will host an advocacy day on May 2nd in Albany, NY. Join us!

- Learn about important legislative issues and how to advocate for them
- Meet new League members from across the state
- Lobby your state legislators at the Capitol
- Enjoy lunch provided by LWVNYS

League members are asked to make their own appointments with legislators and schedule them for 1:30 pm at the earliest. We will walk up to the Capitol after lunch. Those without appointments may try to visit their legislators or join the state League staff in the galleries watching session.



State Convention is Coming!

The LWVNYS Biennial Convention will be held on **June 2-4, 2023** at the Crowne Plaza Albany – Desmond Hotel (yes, it'll be an in-person Convention). We have started to make plans for the Convention and your local League should, too. The Registration Kit will be emailed next week so start thinking

about who might represent your League.

If you have any suggested **amendments to the League's bylaws** (<https://lwny.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Bylaws-as-Amended-June-2021-Convention.pdf>), email laura@lwny.org.

If you have ideas for **new positions, updates to positions**, etc, contact your local League board to see how and where you can provide input. [See the program planning packet here](#) but talk with your local League Board about providing input.

Boast about an event, activity or accomplishment that your local League did this year by submitting an application for an **Award** at the state Convention. There are seven categories of awards and you can submit applications to as many as you want. Let's hear about your great project and honor those who made it all happen in your local League. Submit the application ([click here](#)) **by May 1**. Any member can nominate their League or a Committee for an award. Winners will be announced at the Saturday evening banquet at the state Convention.

Categories for Awards are (see more in Awards packet [here](#)):

- Educating Voters to Action Award (Citizen Education)
- Mobilizing Democracy into Action Award (Get Out the Vote)
- Lighting the Way Award (Membership and Leadership)

- Building Bridges to Excellence Award (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)
- Thinking Out of the Box
- Shaping Our Future Award (Youth Award)
- Inspiring Citizens into Action Award (Citizen Engagement)

Issues and Advocacy

Sally Robinson, VP for Issues and Advocacy,

Sally.s.robinson@gmail.com

Erica Smitka, Deputy Director, Erica@lwvny.org



Budget Testimony

The League testified at the Public Protection hearing on February 7th. Here is what we asked for:

- \$20M in funding for county boards of elections
- \$5M to support the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act Database bill
- An additional \$75M to fully fund the matching portion of the new Public Campaign Finance Board

Read our full testimony [here](#). In addition to orally testifying at the Public Protection hearing we also submitted written testimony to the Elementary and Secondary Education hearing, which you can find [here](#), and the Environmental Conservation hearing, which you can find [here](#). We will also be submitting testimony for the healthcare hearing next week.

Legislative Priorities

We asked that all local Leagues submit their top three legislative priorities to the state League by February 1st. In total we had responses from 28 of our local Leagues. The feedback Leagues provided helps the state League decide which issues we will focus on in this legislative session. The results were tallied and weighted. The results are below:

1. Elections
2. Environment
3. Equality of Opportunity (for example, pay equity, reproductive choice, ERA)

Healthcare and good government came in as a close fourth and fifth respectively and will continue to be monitored for action by the state League. Other issues also identified in the survey were education, criminal justice reform, rural issues, judicial reforms and medical aid in dying (MAID). Elections and Environment both received overwhelming support.

Pre-Budget Legislative Packet

Last week we sent out the pre-budget advocacy packet to local League Presidents and Advocacy chairs. You can find a copy of the packet [here](#).

This year we are again providing members key information on issues of interest to us in the 2023-2024 state budget and asking you all to lobby your legislators on these issues. Pre-budget legislative lobbying in legislators' district offices should be **scheduled between February 20th and March 3rd or as soon as possible after that**. This year our legislative packet covers funding for county boards of elections, the passage and implementation of the companion database bill for the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act, funding for the public campaign finance board, an expansion of the bottle bill, and digital equity. If you're interested in meeting with your legislators on these topics, contact your local League President or Advocacy Chair and join the group for the meeting. You cannot lobby your legislators in the name of the League without your President's permission.

Though we are continuing to work on our other priority issues related to good government, healthcare, women's issues, and other environmental issues, we are not acting on these with relation to the state budget. Should these issues be advanced before the April 1st budget deadline, we will issue action alerts to all members through our social media and email. We expect that our

legislative priorities not directly impacted by the budget will be the primary focus of our post-budget lobbying.

Clean Slate: What Does It Mean?

Vivione Marshall, Co-Chair, LWVNYS Criminal Justice Reform Committee

If Clean Slate legislation is enacted, those with a criminal record who have served their period of incarceration and lived for a fixed period of time without interaction with the criminal justice system will have their record of conviction automatically sealed. It would mean that a conviction, even if imposed at a young age, would no longer cause an individual seeking to live a constructive life be faced with restrictions often imposed on those with a record.

The impact of criminal conviction does not end upon the release from incarceration. The formerly incarcerated face significant difficulties in obtaining housing, healthcare and most importantly employment. For example, one incarcerated person studied and became proficient at barbering while in prison. Having learned and used these skills, he was denied a barber's license and unable to get employment as a barber when released from prison. This is the type of restrictions more than two million New Yorkers currently face in trying to put their criminal activities behind them.

The bill provides for automatic expungement of records of those convicted of a misdemeanor after three years and have had no further interactions with the criminal justice system. For those convicted of felonies the period is seven years. There are exceptions that allow certain entities to have access to the sealed records in defined circumstances. These include law enforcement agencies, the courts, the New York Department of Education and government entities that issue licenses. The exceptions also include where an individual applies for a gun permit.

Clean Slate legislation passed the Senate in 2022 but was not passed in the Assembly. The New York State League of Women Voters is a strong supporter of the Clean Slate legislation and will work to have those who have served their sentences and struggle to rebuild their lives be relieved of what are burdensome and unnecessary limitations for successful re-entry into their communities.



Voter Services
Nancy Rosenthal, VP for
Voter Services,

nancyrosenthal9@gmail.com

Vote 411 Training

Want to learn something new and help educate voters? Training on Vote 411 will be held virtually on **April 12 at 5:30 pm**. Come learn how the program works and start creating your page for the upcoming June primary. It's time now to set up the races, etc – come see how.

This training will also be a great refresher for any who have used Vote 411 in the past and will be creating it again this election season. As the elections are all local this year, the local Leagues are responsible for creating the Vote 411 pages for their races. Come remind yourself how to do that!

To register for the training, [click here](#).

The Tompkins and Cortland County Chapters of
 The League of Women Voters
 present a virtual program

FOOD FOR ALL:
Environmental Justice and
Food Security



Thursday, March 2, 2023
at 7pm



Discuss our food system from production to access to waste. Address challenges and sustainable solutions at the local and state level. Ensure a food system that is equitable, and protects our ecosystems.

Speakers:

- Don Barber: Chair of the Food Policy Council of Tompkins County
- Beth Radow: LWV-NY Issues Specialist, LWV-NY Energy, Agriculture & Environment Committee Chair

Co-sponsored by:

Campaign for Renewable Energy,
 Fossil Free Tompkins, Mothers Out
 Front – Tompkins, Sustainable Finger Lakes,
 and People for a Healthy Environment



For the event link, go to <https://lwvtompkins.org>



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

Regina Tillman, 3rd Vice President for DEI, rmt370@gmail.com, and
Crystal Joseph, DEI Task Force Co-Chair, campus@lwnyc.org

It is gratifying to hear from some of our local Leagues that they are actively preparing themselves to review, discuss, and come to consensus on the **LWVNYS DEI Assessment Survey**, emailed to everyone on February 17th. And the membership has begun responding as well by submitting individual member

surveys!

However, if anyone missed the email blast containing the links to the PDF version and to the Google Forms (used for final submission) of the LWVNYS DEI Assessment Survey, here they are for your retrieval:

[PDF of DEI Survey](#)

[LINK for DEI Survey via Google Form](#)

The DEI Survey submission deadline is April 1st. Your entire State DEI Task Force is looking for a good volume of feedback submitted, through Survey responses, to assess the impact of the past three years of DEI related workshops, discussions, readings, policy changes, programmatic efforts, and attention to behaviors. Again, there are no wrong answers! We only need your honest assessment and impressions to allow the formulation of next steps.

DEI Virtual Drop-In Meeting: On Wednesday, March 8th at 7:00pm. Discussion and sharing of what was learned in February, fielding questions about the LWVNYS DEI Assessment Survey, and more. **No registration required. Link and enter passcode.**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6200239891?pwd=THlIWmV6WmozMWY1Z2tCNFQvV2tYQT09>

Pass Code: FUqNK5

And we come to the end of another Black History Month (understanding, of course, that Black History is American History.) Although our office did not organize any particular event or program, I had urged the membership to take advantage of programs being offered during January and February as hosted by local community groups, online, or on national TV. Many programs provided continuous learning and uplifted the history of Black individuals, both in this country and pre-enslavement.

I personally recommend for viewing one of these programs that aired on January 17th and was entitled, "National Day of Racial Healing: An MSNBC Town Hall." MSNBC journalists Chris Hayes and Joy Reid talked with wide variety of individuals - activists, artists, and experts - to "explore the harm racism has caused in our society, and to consider how we might heal from it."

Available for viewing, this fast paced, one hour program can be seen on YouTube at this link: <https://youtu.be/SR-1DjygYQU>

Questions about DEI in the League or our activities, please feel free to connect with Regina Tillman: rmt370@gmail.com.



Civic Learning Week

DemocracyReady NY will host a series of virtual events to celebrate New York Civic Learning Week, which will take place this year from March 6 – 10, 2023. All events will be accessible to the public, and participants will include students, parents, school and district leaders, educators, and youth-serving organizations. To register for any or all of the webinars, [click here](#).

DemocracyReady NY is a multigenerational, statewide, nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals committed to preparing all students for civic participation. The Coalition is convened by the

Center for Educational Equity. The League of Women Voters of NYS and the LWV of NYC are members of the coalition.

New York Civic Learning Week will help raise awareness of New York students' right under the state constitution to an education that prepares them for engaged civic lives and to lend their voice to decision-making in their communities. The statewide celebration builds on the New York City Department of Education's successful annual Civics Week, which has been going on since 2019.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) includes "civic readiness" as a graduation measure under its ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) plan. The Center's Michael Rebell served as chairman of NYSED's Civic Readiness Task Force. The task force's recommendations led to the development of the Seal of Civic Readiness graduation pathway, which was rolled out in 2021. To date, about 350 schools throughout the state offer civic learning opportunities and civic experiences under the Seal.

On Monday, **March 6**, Michael Rebell will host a conversation with Dr. Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and a foreign policy adviser to four presidents, about his deep commitment to civic education, as reflected in his current New York Times best-selling book, *The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*.

DemocracyReady NY will host the inaugural virtual statewide Summit on Civic Readiness on **Tuesday, March 7**, as a centerpiece of the New York Civic Learning Week convenings. The Summit will feature Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner of the NYS Education Department, and NYS Regent Dr. Catherine Collins.

On Wednesday, **March 8**, the Coalition will host a webinar on civic learning in elementary education.

Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr., Chancellor of the NYS Board of Regents, will join a virtual youth-led event on Thursday, **March 9**. A special event on strategies to develop media literacy in the classroom, hosted by Chris Sperry of Project Look Sharp, will be available throughout Civic Learning Week. The week's events will showcase the importance of civic education in sustaining and strengthening constitutional democracy in the United States.

In addition to these scheduled events, Civic Learning Week will be an opportunity for schools, districts, and the Coalition's member organizations to plan community-based civic learning activities that week to celebrate. Stay tuned for updates!

To register for any or all of these events, [click here](#).

If you'd like to support New York Civic Learning Week, host an event, or learn more, please contact Nan Eileen Mead at nem2137@tc.columbia.edu.



United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women

The United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) ([link](#)) will take place from March 6 to 17. Since 1945, at the invitation of President Truman, LWV has had a standing committee of UN Observers, <https://www.lwv.org/united-nations-observers>. This year's delegation will be led by Dr. Connie Sobon Sensor, LWV's Chief Observer to the UN. The CSW is a combination of meetings with official proceedings at the UN as well as parallel and side events sponsored by NGOs and other

organizations to be held at on UN grounds, off-site, or online.

The priority theme of CSW67 is, "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls."

Aside from leading the delegation, Dr. Sensor, along with **Jane Colvin, LWV Observer to the UN and member of LWWNYS Board of Directors**, organized a virtual panel presentation to be held on March 15, 2-4PM, "Technology: Friend or Foe of Free, Fair and Accessible Elections?" League members are invited to join this webinar and others by registering at the NGO CSW/NY Forum Website. ([link](#)) You will be asked to register for free for Whova which is a tool to communicate and to host and attend events. You are also invited to watch the UN proceedings on YouTube ([link](#)). Once you are registered you can search for panels by keyword or simply scroll the calendar by date. You can also register directly for the webinar using this link: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8F38HOUUTsytwTfU9UInSA

FYI, there are many acronyms used at the CSW. NGOs are nongovernmental organizations. NGO CSW/NY is a convener of global civil society for the annual UN CSW and global gender equality advocacy. CSW NY brings together a coalition of NGOs, civil society organizations, and individuals concerned with gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women and girls.

Local League News

Saratoga County

The Saratoga County League hosted an educational event titled *The Roots and Rise of White Nationalism in the USA*. The program traced both little-known and obvious events along our nation's path to current challenges with the white supremacy movement. Presenter Mark Long led a

discussion that attempted to answer why systemic racism continues to thrive in our culture, and how we can expose and defeat it as a nation.

New York City

The New York City League was recently joined by Reverend Dr. Al Sharpton for their monthly *Lunch with the League* series. An internationally renowned civil rights leader and founder and President of the National Action Network (NAN), Reverend Sharpton has been a major leader in this movement starting as an activist in his teens. Reverend Sharpton discussed the evolution of the civil rights movement and offered insight into the evolution, growth, and challenges he has experienced over time, as well as his thoughts for the opportunities now and in the future.

Albany County

Albany County board member and Moms Out Front Organizer Alÿcia Bacon held a virtual presentation centered on preserving the Albany Pine Bush. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is home to a unique variety of rare plants and animals, including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly, and the battle to save the preservation has lasted 45 years. Of the 6000 acres of Pine Bush ecosystem remaining, 2500 acres are still privately owned and could be developed at any time. Bacon's presentation focused on creating an effective lobbying campaign that would ask lawmakers to buy the remaining privately-owned land.

North East Westchester

The North East Westchester League hosted a screening of *Song of the Suffragists*. The documentary explored the intersection of music and politics in the Women's movement with an emphasis on discussing the cultural battle fought by the suffragettes for America's hearts and minds. The screening was followed by a discussion led by author Laura Engelhardt, who wrote the book the documentary was based on.

Mid-Hudson

Four members of the Mid-Hudson League engaged with Bard first-year students via Zoom, on the subject of Civic Engagement and Voter Advocacy. They were joined by approximately 90 students with backgrounds from all over the country, as well as a number of students who came from countries around the globe.

President Dare Thompson moderated the meeting and explained the role of our local League of Women voters with regard to advocacy. Rebecca Edwards, a former City of Poughkeepsie Council member, spoke of her experience in the local political arena, and how important it was for her to hear from any of her constituents as to what mattered to them. Jennifer Clark, League Vice President, briefly explained the varying roles of local officials. And Kathy O'Connor brought up issues for which the students might consider advocating for in the Hudson Valley. The League members emphasized how important it was for each student to ensure that they were registered to vote.

DONATE TO LWWNYS

DONATE TO LWWNYS
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

**The League of Women Voters of
New York State
NEW ADDRESS
The Blake
1 Steuben Place
Albany, NY 12207
Tel: 518-465-4162
website: lwny.org
email: lwny@lwny.org**

