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STATE BOARD LETTER

May-June 2020

LWVMD Calendar

June

- 2 - Primary Election – primarily mail-in ballots
- 6 - LWVMD Virtual State Council – via Zoom
- 25 - LWV National 54th Biennial Convention – see below for more info
- 29 - LWVMD State Board Meeting – via Zoom

Planning your local league calendar? Click [here](#) to see the whole calendar.

LWVMD Operations & Continuity of Service

Reminder: Due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, LWVMD's office in Annapolis closed to the public March 16th and will remain closed until health officials declare it is safe to reopen. You can access the most up-to-date information at the Maryland Health Department's dedicated COVID-19 Outbreak Website here: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>

During this time, our State Director, Ashley Oleson, is working from home and will still be available to answer emails and conduct League business. You can also reach her by phone at our office number 410-269-0232 with any questions during this time.

Presidents' Message

Conducting League business while observing social distancing has led us into a series of virtual social experiences using software like Google Meet and Zoom. I know I am not alone in feeling strangely drained after a round of online meetings. I have long had the sense that I could hear others better when I could see their faces and I have learned that this is not a matter of failing hearing but very much the fact that 70% of the meaning we convey in conversation is

communicated by a multitude of nonverbal cues, such as that slight nudge of the head in disagreement or sideways glance, a vocal pause of confusion, or quick uptake of air to interrupt.

So, take this and bless me with a whole bunch of faces in little 2” squares of gallery view in an online meeting or fuzzy video and audio transmission that doesn’t match lip movements and you have an unmatched formula for brain overload! The sad bottom line is that we tire more quickly in our online meetings.

On the other hand online meetings have provided the League with valuable tools to continue our vital work. On Thursday, May 14th LWVMD was able to use Zoom to bring constituents right into the offices of our two Senators and also with the staff from seven Congressional offices and then on Wednesday the 20th we were able to meet in person with the newly elected member of Congress from the 7th District, Mr. Kweisi Mfume. You’ll find Jacqueline Coolidge’s meeting summaries elsewhere in this issue of the State Board Letter.

On Thursday the 21st the Washington and Frederick chapters held a 6th Congressional District primary forum using Zoom. Their partner in this adventure, Antietam Broadband (a local cable provider), has cleaned up some of the production hiccups and has posted the forum to their [YouTube channel](#).

The things we are learning now will build a platform for even more effective civic involvement in months and years to come. Encourage your members who are not comfortable with computers and smartphones to connect to your online meetings by telephone and take advantage of both old and newer technologies at the same time. Celebrate the work you are able to do without meeting in person, build your skill set and dispel Zoom fatigue by strictly observing a self-imposed break at least once every hour. If you are planning an online event, build hourly breaks into the agenda for everyone!

Virtually yours, Richard Willson, Co-President

May State Board Meeting Highlights

- The State Council meeting is moving ahead nicely. Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins is the guest speaker. Her book, *The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters*, proves to be an interesting subject and will be available for purchase by attendees. There are also 2 Workshops planned for the day. Remember to register for this June 6, 2020 event.
- Due to COVID19, many Local Leagues will be having their Annual Meetings via Zoom Conferencing. The LWVUS Convention will also be virtual this year. Registration is \$50.00 if you are interested in attending.
- Forums that are planned for the coming weeks will be aired on the LWVMD Facebook page. Richard Willson will give a detailed account on how to manage a ZOOM Forum.
- Remember that VOTE411.org is up and running. It is a valuable asset for the Voters of Maryland.

LWVMD Virtual Day On Capitol Hill



The LWVMD successfully hosted a “Virtual Day on Capitol Hill” on Thursday, May 14, hosted by Co-Presidents Richard Willson and Lois Hybl, making use of Zoom. The topic was the need for appropriations for states to handle elections in the face of the national Covid-19 pandemic emergency. Participants were able to converse with Senators Cardin and Van Hollen, Representative Sarbanes (MD-3), and knowledgeable staffers from the offices of

Representatives Harris (MD-1), Ruppertsberger (MD-2), Brown (MD-4), Hoyer (MD-5), Trone (MD-6), and Raskin (MD-8). Representative Mfume (MD-7) met with us on Wednesday, May 20.

At the beginning of each session, Richard made an introduction, including reference to LWV’s 100 th anniversary. Jackie Coolidge then pitched the LWV’s position in favor of an additional \$3.6 billion in federal appropriations for state and local boards of election across the country to pay for expanded vote-by-mail, equipment and sanitation for physical polling locations, and related costs. She referenced the [LWV’s memo on the topic](#), and (in the majority of cases) noted that our representatives’ positions were already known to be in line with ours, so our question was for advice about how best we could help with the effort.

All of our representatives and staffers made a point of thanking LWV for our years of work in voter empowerment and education. All agreed that the pandemic is creating more challenging conditions for voters and may indeed still be a problem in the fall, for which federal funding would probably be necessary. But there were concerns about the cost of the proposals, and whether the federal government should place any requirements on states related to the conduct of elections. Some representatives stressed the need for pressure to be brought to bear on Senators to ensure that voters across the country can request mail-in ballots without needing an “excuse” or notarization. Others stressed the need for compromise between the “HEROES Act” (which passed the U.S. House of Representatives on May 15, including the \$3.6 billion for election assistance) and the concerns of many Senators regarding cost and election process mandates on states. Many expressed the hope that the LWV (the entire network across the U.S.) could help facilitate the upcoming negotiations and weigh in on the most critical priorities for the upcoming election, taking into account the time needed for states to place orders for printing ballots and envelopes, and for new equipment.

Participants were able to raise a number of questions directly during the meetings, and we had extended discussions about a variety of issues related to voting and to broader health and economic concerns of people weathering the pandemic.

The “virtual” meetings went off very well, on schedule, and without any serious technical problems. It was encouraging that many LWVMD members participated (some with a video link and some dialing in with only an audio connection) and were able to engage with their representatives in Congress again this year. Given the likelihood that “social distancing” may be necessary for months, at least, into the future, the meetings were proof that we can adjust our advocacy tactics nimbly and remain effective.

Women Power the Vote for 100 years: Call to the 54th Biennial League of Women Voters (US) Convention



As LWVUS President, Chris Carson said, “Our foremothers worked through a pandemic—the 1918 flu pandemic—to get the vote over 100 years ago, so it almost feels fitting that we honor them a century later by moving the work forward through the COVID-19 pandemic.” So, we call you to celebrate and persist by participating in our 54th biennial convention ONLINE. You will be electing new officers, adopting program and priorities for the next two years, approving a budget, voting on resolutions and considering changes to the by-laws (including no PMP for students).

On the [LWVUS convention page](#) scroll down to “Convention Business Materials” for links to the schedule and items to be voted on.

- The PRECONVENTION events will be held **Thursday, June 25, from 6:30 to 9:00 pm**
- The PLENARY sessions on **Friday and Saturday (June 26 and 27) from 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm.**
- There will be CAUCUSES in one-hour blocks on **Monday, June 22 to Wednesday, June 24, from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

CBS Evening News anchor and managing editor, Norah O’Donnell, will deliver the keynote address on Friday, June 26. Norah O’Donnell has covered American elections and won multiple prestigious journalism awards, including Emmys for her sexual assault investigation as well as her Election Night coverage.

It is time for local Leagues to choose their delegates. The number of delegates for each League is based on membership reported on January 31. Each local League is entitled to at least one delegate; when local League membership reaches 50 voting members, the local League is entitled to one additional delegate; thereafter one additional delegate is authorized for each additional 50 voting members; For example:

1–49 members = 1 delegate
50–99 members = 2 delegates
100–149 members = 3 delegates

Registration is currently available for voting delegates only. The cost of registration is \$50 per person.

Registration is now open to observers:

- Observers will be able to view plenary via a livestream from Zoom to YouTube. Observer status is offered only to current League members. There is no cost to register.
- Observers are not permitted to submit motions, amendments to motions, participate in debates, or vote. Observers will not have access to any of these functions.
- Registrants will receive access instructions to the YouTube stream by the morning of June 26.
- Streaming access:
 - Observers will be able to stream the Friday and Saturday plenary sessions on YouTube.
 - Thursday's panel event is open to everyone and will be streamed on Facebook.
 - The plenary training session on Thursday will not be streamed.

For details on all aspects of the convention including recommended and non-recommended program, the resolution process and to register, go to <https://www.lwv.org/2020convention>. We look forward to joining many of your delegates online.

Voter Services

Voter Registration: Voter registration of new citizens is still on hold as the offices at US Citizenship and Immigration Services is not open to the public. For 2020, Leagues were required to do follow-up to encourage voter registration. We now have sign-up sheets for newly registered individuals to request voting information. We will be sending three reminders to vote, along with information about voting by mail and limited in-person voting on Election Day.

VOTE411 and Voters' Guides: *Voters' Guides* from each county and Baltimore City are available at LWVMD.org. These represent an enormous amount of work by local leagues and by the volunteers who cover the eight counties without local leagues. We owe a big debt to Ashley Oleson, who has taken care of sending electronic and hard copies of the *Guides* to those who have requested them.

Special Meeting of State Board of Elections on May 14: Ralph Watkins has provided a detailed report on last week's special meeting to review the Special General Election, which was Maryland's first vote-by-mail election, as well as to discuss certain aspects of the plans for the recent June 2 primary.

LWV Maryland Statement on Primary Election

In the June 2nd primary, Maryland took the bold step of enabling all registered voters to cast a ballot by mail. However, we saw many issues related to voter access and transparency in the election system that could undermine voters' trust. LWVMD calls upon the Governor and our election administrators to take the necessary steps to prevent the same issues from recurring in November and maintain voters' confidence in our democratic system.

Planning for the November general election needs to start immediately, and resources must be allocated to do it right. LWVMD is advocating for the following:

- **Declare without delay that the General Election be conducted principally by mail.** It is not clear that the current health and safety concerns will be resolved by November.

Voters must have this safe option and election officials need to know *now* what kind of election they will be implementing.

- **Improve ballot delivery and confirm accuracy for all Maryland voters.** No voter should sit out an election because the wrong ballot was mailed to them or it was received too late. Election administrators must conduct a thorough analysis of the Primary and improve the mailing process and verify the accurate ballot for every voter.
- **Establish a reliable cure process for ballots marked for rejection.** If election administrators find a mistake or discrepancy in a voter's ballot, that voter must be notified and given an accessible opportunity to cure it.
- **Engage a community-based task force with connections to hard to reach populations.** Use them to provide guidance on alternative means to educate voters who were not reached during the primary election and provide feedback on such issues as ballot drop-box placement.
- **Ensure transparency in the ballot counting process.** Voters must have assurance that their ballot is counted securely and fairly.
- **Implement a robust staffing plan for election board call centers and email support centers.** LWVMD and other partners reported people were experiencing sometimes hours-long wait times on the phone or waiting days for email responses when reaching out with questions. All citizens should be able to gain quick and easy access to the information they need to cast their ballot.



"No voter should be disenfranchised by a problem-ridden election. By implementing these changes, Maryland officials can re-establish voters' confidence in our electoral system."