

State Board Letter

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Co-Presidents: Deborah Mitchell
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LWVMD Calendar

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Aug | 26 Women's Equality Day |
| | 31 DEI Book Club
virtual, 4pm - 5pm
contact State Director Nikki Tyree for details |
| Sept | 6 Labor Day |
| | 17 Constitution Day Event
virtual, 12pm - 2pm |
| | 23 LWVMD Board Meeting
TBD, 10am - 12:30pm |
| | 25 Fall Workshop
virtual, 9am - 12:30pm |
| | 28 National Voter Registration Day |
| | 30 Advocacy Training Workshop
virtual, time TBD |

LWVMD Fall Workshop

Mark your calendar to attend the LWVMD Fall Workshop* on Saturday, September 25, 2021, from 9am - 12:30pm. This annual event is for League members and non-members. Grow your

League knowledge to help build a stronger LWV presence in Maryland. Join breakout sessions for expert and peer learning. Help to cross-pollinate innovative ideas for best League practices. Workshop and registration details coming soon to the LWVMD website, www.lwvmd.org, and in email invitations to all League members.

* To protect the health of its members, the half-day workshop will be virtual.



The SBL is a monthly LWVMD publication that seeks to strengthen understanding and collaboration between the Board and local Leagues statewide

Co-Presidents' Message

Co-President Nancy Soreng and I want to acknowledge and thank the SBL Editor, State Staff, our State Board and Committee members for continuing throughout this summer to provide this organization with their advisement, leadership, and hard work to educate members, advocate for core LWVMD public policy issues, and to participate in strategic events to advance the League's mission to Empower Voters and Defend Democracy.

Team and committee efforts include:

- The June 2021 SBL received rave reviews from local League presidents, members and other readers about its dynamic content and redesigned format—kudos to SBL editor Stacey Morrison, Communications Chair Kathy Larrabee, and other Communications workgroup contributors for raising this publication's stature in the LWV community.
- Under the auspices of State Director Nikki Tyree and LWVMD DEI Committee Co-Chairs Sara Richman and Carol Wynne, the LWVMD DEI Education Subcommittee is hosting a Book Club (8/31 at 4pm) and will begin publishing a DEI Blog.

- LWVMD Redistricting Advocacy Team Co-Chair Beth Hufnagel and team members have coordinated with all of the local Leagues to present testimony at the governor's Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission listening sessions around the state and has begun tracking the work of the Legislative Redistricting Advisory Commission, a committee established by the Maryland General Assembly. See article on page 5 for more information.
- The Online Services Committee is working with the Fall Workshop Committee (Niecy Chambers, Andrea Gruhl, Kathy Larabee, Linda Kohn, Genie Massey, Nikki Tyree and Richard Willson) to plan the upcoming LWVMD workshop on September 25, 2021.

These represent only a few of the many examples of collaborative LWVMD committee and teamwork that Nancy and I ask you to join us in recognizing and thanking members for their commitment and hard work.



Deborah Mitchell (l) and Nancy Soreng (r), Co-Presidents

State Board Meeting Highlights

LWVMD interns have been developing a social media plan and an internal bill tracker to use during the 2022 legislative session. They're also collecting information on local League histories and assisting various Board committees.

The University of Maryland is accepting archival information from all Leagues; contact Board Member [Niecy Chambers](#) for more information.

Due to an illness, the Board's Membership Chair had to step down; we are currently in the process of finding someone to take on this role.

Stacey Morrison, SBL editor

League Collaboration

LWVMD Board Takes Steps to Foster State-Local Collaboration



One of the LWVMD Board's responsibilities is ensuring that local Leagues have the resources, knowledge, and support to participate in the League's mission work. An important means by which we achieve this is through the Board liaison program. Though the role and involvement of the liaison varies by local League, their primary purpose is to establish a relationship and familiarity with the local League and to be available as a resource when questions arise.

Below are the liaisons for the 2021-23 term. In some cases, the liaison is a member of the local League who is currently serving on the LWVMD Board, noted by an asterisk; in other cases, the liaison is a volunteer LWVMD Board member. In the next few weeks, your liaison will reach out to introduce themselves, find out when local League meetings are held, and answer any questions.

Anne Arundel	Niecy Chambers*, Kathy Larrabee*
Baltimore City	Gail Sunderman*
Baltimore County	Barbara Crain*, Ericka McDonald*, Stacey Morrison*
Calvert	Janet Bellizzi*, J.C. Hooker*
Carroll Affiliate	Richard Willson
Frederick	Stacey Morrison
Harford	Barbara Crain
Howard	Andrea Gruhl*
Kent	Nancy Soreng
Mid-Shore	Niecy Chambers
Montgomery	Genie Massey
Prince George's	Joyce Duckett*, Deborah Mitchell*
Queen Anne's	Kathy Larrabee
St Mary's	Deborah Mitchell
Washington	Richard Willson*

In addition to liaisons from the LWVMD Board to local Leagues, there are times where it is useful to have a contact from the local League to the state board. For example, program activities happen throughout the year and a "program contact" is needed for each local League to communicate with their members about new studies forming, help coordinate a review of League positions that happens each winter, and facilitate the consensus process on any new positions. The President of each local League will be getting a request to identify a local program contact. If you might be interested in this role, contact your League President or LWVMD Board Member Linda Kohl at lkohl@lwvmd.org.

As a supplement to the Board Liaison program, the LWVMD co-presidents plan to initiate monthly calls with local League presidents in September 2021. Beyond these outreach efforts, the Board is actively working to update LWVMD's *Policies, Guidelines and Procedures* to reflect current practices. This document is intended to govern the League's day-to-day operations and is a valuable resource for local Leagues as well as the State.

All successful collaborations rely on two-way communications. Please contact any [LWVMD Board member](#) with suggestions, comments, concerns or questions. The League is strongest at its grassroots; your state League Board looks forward to hearing from you.

Niecy Chambers, League Support;
Linda Kohn, Director

Committees

Call to Action

The LWMD Action Committee is calling on you! Yes, you! We are starting our plan of action for the Legislative Session, and we want you to be ready to advocate our issues. Please consider joining one of the following State Advocacy Teams:

Advocacy Teams seeking members:

- Affordable Housing
- Health
- Immigration
- Police Accountability
- Protecting the Vote
- Public Education
- Redistricting Reform
- Transportation

Open positions for chair, co-chairs or members:

- Campaign Finance
- Clean Energy
- Domestic Violence
- Family Issues
- Fiscal Structure

With your help as advocates, Maryland Leagues have the potential to make a real impact on Maryland legislation. If you would like to be a part of the change you wish to see, please contact your local League, state League, or Action Committee Chair, J.C. Hooker, jchooker@lwvmd.org, to learn how to get involved. Make sure to mark your calendars, too, for our Advocacy Training Workshop on September 30, 2021. Check our [calendar](#) in the coming months for more information.

J.C. Hooker, Action Chair

The LWVMD Board is working to increase youth engagement in civic activities and Director Genie Massey is focusing on this portfolio. Here are just a handful of initiatives we are taking:

- Discussions are underway with several universities and community colleges in western Maryland to support civic engagement activities on campus.
- We will be focusing on the celebration of civic holidays, starting with Constitution Day on September 17 (see article on page 7 for more information).
- LWVMD participates in the [Students Learn Students Vote Coalition](#) which is planning events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 26th Amendment on college campuses across Maryland and the country.
- To support K12 teachers across the state, LWVMD is developing a toolkit full of lessons on local, state, and national government that will reside on our website.

Youth Engagement



If you are interested in collaborating on youth engagement, contact Genie at gmassey@lwvmd.org.

Genie Massey, Director of Youth Engagement

Committees

Redistricting

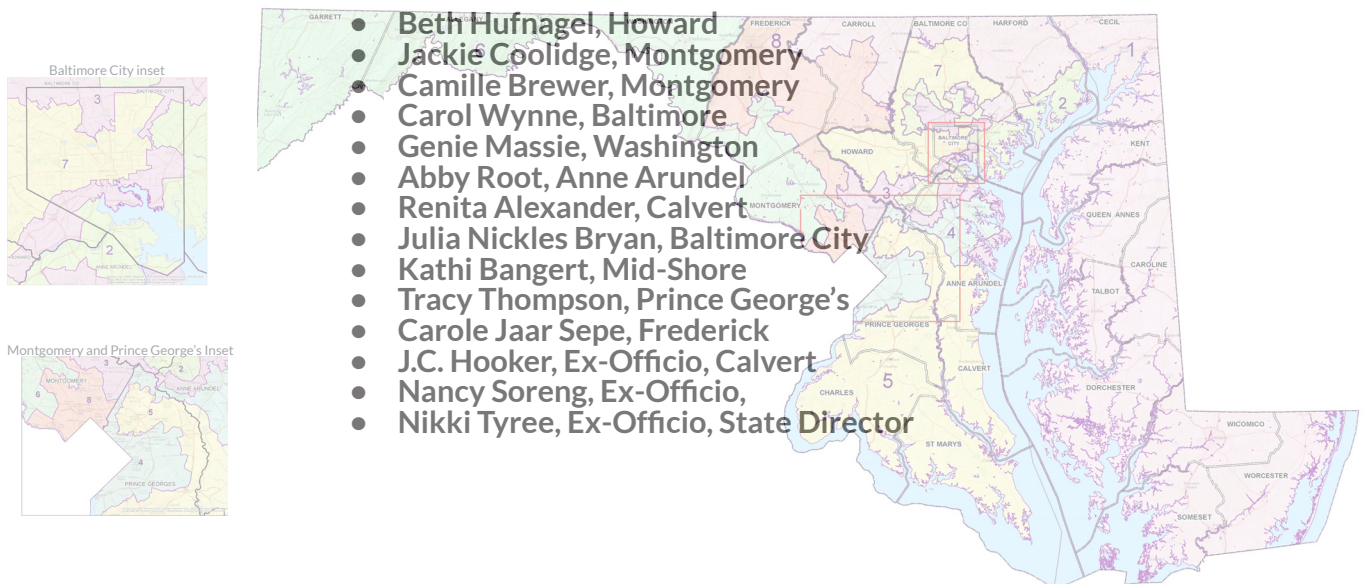
For some years, the League has been working in coalition with other nonprofits on fair elections, including redistricting. Because of the interest of Governor Hogan, and later the litigation around the Sixth District, we have been advocating for redistricting well beyond the usual every-ten-years Census time frame. We work with our key redistricting partner, [Common Cause Maryland](#) (CC), in the years-old [Tame the Gerrymander](#) (TTG) coalition, while other partners, such as the [Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#) (LCCRUL), choose to work on particular campaigns. LWVMD State Director Nikki Tyree is the point of contact for the TTG.

An important campaign of the TTG Coalition is The Peoples Maps Maryland campaign (2021-2022), which advocates for and facilitates creating community of interest (COI) maps. These maps will be created by and for the COIs, which have shared characteristics, interests, or needs. In particular, we have targeted politically underrepresented communities to proactively inform the map-drawers of their need to stay together in the re-districting process. This means working not only with the CC and LCCRUL as traditional TTG partners, but also new, local service providers.

TTG has presented two educational webinars about COIs, attended not only by the ACLU, but also by the [Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus](#), the [Chinese American Political Association](#), and others. On July 29, 2021, LWVMD presented a redistricting webinar around the work of the commission(s) and session; a taped version of the presentation will be on our website next month.

Two commissions have been established in regard to mapping out new districts: the [Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission](#), MCRC, formed by Governor Hogan; and the [Legislative Redistricting Advisory Commission](#), LRAC, formed by the Maryland General Assembly leadership. The State League has observed all of the MCRC meetings and we have sent County-based local League speakers to all of their hearings, offered educational assistance on our two key positions, Redistricting and Single versus Multi-Delegate Districts, and established a relationship with staff. The LWVMD and possibly TTG hope to produce our own maps, based on the LWV positions and considering The Peoples Maps Maryland results. We are pricing demographers, since this must be done correctly to be considered by the Commissions, other activists, and the courts.

A big thanks to the current Redistricting Team members listed below who regular attend weekly meetings and volunteer for tasks. If you would like to be a part of this team, contact Redistricting Chair, Beth Hufnagel, at bhufnagel@lwwmd.org.



Beth Hufnagel, Redistricting Advocacy Team Leader

Committees

Broadband Together: A Study to Determine if Internet Access is Equitable and Affordable

The LWVMD has joined with *Consumer Reports* and dozens of organizations from across the country on a groundbreaking initiative designed to determine if internet prices and reliability vary because of where you live, because of lack of choice in internet providers, or because of exorbitant fees and charges. Based on the LWVMD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy and commitment to fighting systemic inequality, the League is sharing this initiative with our members; To participate takes a few minutes, an internet connection, and a copy of your internet bill. Click [Broadband Together](#) to participate.

Broadband internet is an essential service in the daily lives of Marylanders, but many people don't have access to internet service. And for those who do, it's often unreliable and too expensive. In Maryland and elsewhere, there is a persistent "digital divide" between people who have and can afford internet service, and those who cannot. The divide is two-pronged: both availability and cost of service determine whether people are able to get online. This isn't just an access issue, it's a civil rights issue. People without broadband access are disproportionately Black, Latinx, Indigenous, rural, or low-income.

Little rigorous research has been done to determine how much people actually pay for internet service, and what factors contribute to the prices paid. The best available data on broadband pricing is self-reported by Internet Service Providers to the FCC and only describes available plans, not who actually subscribes or how the plan is bundled in a monthly statement. This study is designed to help fill this gap in data.

This July, a coalition of researchers, civic and advocacy groups came together to launch a first-of-its-kind effort: Broadband Together, an initiative that is asking people across the country to share their monthly internet bills to find out if people are getting what they pay for and to advocate for a better internet that costs less. Broadband Together is an interactive website that asks the public to take an internet speed test, upload a copy of their internet bill, and complete a short questionnaire. By comparing thousands of consumer bills, the study will be able to develop benchmarks around cost of service and understand how and why prices vary.

This initiative has a goal of collecting 30,000 internet bills from across the country. It is partnering with organizations across the country to ensure a diverse and representative set of bills from a range of household incomes and communities. The LWVMD is encouraging its members to participate in Broadband Together; because LWVMD will have access to the Maryland data, this initiative can help LWVMD address systemic inequities related to affordable and reliable internet access in Maryland. If you have questions about this study, please contact Gail Sunderman at gsunderman@lwwmd.org.

Gail Sunderman, 2nd Vice President

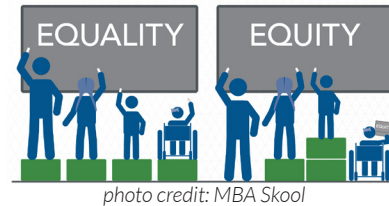


Committees

Committees Forming for New Studies

As noted in the prior State Board Letter, two studies were adopted at convention this past June. One is on equity in education and another is on living wage. Study committees are forming now and some members have already stepped forward. If you have an interest in either of these topics, just let me know at lkohn@lwvmd.org. I am especially interested in identifying potential chairs or co-chairs. No experience necessary and I will be available throughout as needed. We are aiming for both study committees to get underway in the fall.

Linda Kohn, Director



Join the LWVMD as we present the **15th Annual Constitution Day Program**. Co-sponsors for this event are: the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law; the University of Maryland, Baltimore; and the University of Maryland, College Park, Department of Government and Politics, MLAW Program.

Constitution Day Program

- Date/Time:** Friday, September 17, 12pm - 2pm
- Topic:** An Audacious Idea Whose Time Has Come: The Democracy Constitution.
- Speakers:** **Sanford Levinson**, Garwood Centennial Chair in Law and Government, University of Texas School of Law
- Michael Tomasky**, editor of "Democracy: A Journal of Ideas" and editor of "The New Republic"
- Commentators:** **Leslie Henry**, Professor of Law at the University of Maryland School of Law
- Mark A. Graber**, University System of Maryland Regents Professor
- Chair:** **Peter Danchin**, Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development and Jacob A. France Professor of Law, University of Maryland School of Law



photo credit: [Democracy Journal](#)
illustration: Pep Montserrat

This virtual event is free and open to everyone. If you would like to attend, send your name, phone number, email and local League to Andrea Gruhl at agruhl@lwvmd.org or 301-328-1845.

Andrea Gruhl, Director

Advocacy

LWVMD Speaks Out Against P3 Highway Widening Project

Recently, I was invited by Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich to speak at a press conference that was organized to urge the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board](#) (TPB) to not reverse their previous vote to remove a project to widen I-495, I-270, and the American Legion Bridge from their long-range plan. This multi-billion-dollar project would be designed, and most likely built, by an Australian company who would provide up front financing in exchange for the right to collect tolls in variable priced toll lanes for 50 years to cover the cost. Removal of this project meant that it wouldn't qualify for federal funding, which meant that the project would not be possible. Below is a transcript of the arguments I made.

The TPB ended up reversing its decision after much lobbying by those in support of the project and the appointment of two new Board members who were in favor. LWVMD has been engaged in fighting this project since it was announced. Since there is more to be done before it is finally approved, we will continue to engage.

Transcript:

In 2002, The League of Women Voters of Maryland conducted a study of Maryland's transportation system and our members state-wide agreed that these elements are essential:

- Regional visions and frameworks for transportation planning which reflect local concerns and which incorporate our values on land use, economic development and environmental protection. ***This project includes none of these elements.***
- Our members also agreed that achieving and maintaining cooperative working relationships among state and local agencies in order to achieve better planning and to decrease the use of single occupancy vehicles is essential. ***This project was sprung on our local officials with no collaboration and only a meager attempt, after the fact, to respond to local concerns and add transit element.***
- The League of Women Voters has always supported the public's right to know and transparency in the decision making of government bodies. Yet we know very little about how this will actually be constructed, the environmental impacts it will create, the traffic models that were used to validate it, and whether funding it through a 50-year P3 plan will end up costing residents more or less than the traditional ways of funding transportation. ***This is not transparency in Government operations.***
- The League of Women Voters strongly supports programs and policies that support social and economic justice. While proponents say that everyone will benefit, we know that in order for the financing scheme to work, the free lanes must remain congested in order to collect the necessary tolls to pay for this incredibly expensive endeavor. ***A project that only benefits those with the ability to pay the substantial tolls is hardly economic justice.***
- And, finally, as many who spoke before have said, while we stand here in yet another searingly hot day, ***climate change is upon us.*** We can come up a better, more sustainable solution, one that looks to the future, not the past.

Nancy Soreng, Co-President



State of Maryland rendering



State of Maryland rendering

Advocacy

Civic Health Month

The LWVUS is a proud partner of [Civic Health Month](#), a nationwide celebration held each August to highlight the strong connections between health care, healthy communities, and civic participation. As a nonpartisan advocacy and awareness month, Civic Health Month strives to make voting and civic participation accessible to all, especially those underserved by the healthcare system, by bringing together diverse organizations, institutions, and individuals across the healthcare and civic engagement space that are excited to support healthy communities by promoting voter participation.

Civic Health Month is a project of [Vot-ER](#), a non-partisan group of physicians, designers, and behavioral scientists dedicated to helping make it easier for patients to participate in the democratic process. The LWVUS has been a partner with Vot-ER since March of this year because, according to a [March 31 LWVUS press release](#) by Dr. Deborah Ann Turner, LWVUS board president, “Our shared goal of making democracy work for everyone comes from a core belief that equality of voting access leads to better health outcomes for all people.”

As further stated in the LWVUS press release, the COVID pandemic highlights both the issues of lack of access for the poorest communities to high-quality affordable health care and to safe, healthy voting access. Health care was already the number one issue facing American families and communities before the pandemic. The pandemic poignantly reminds us that access to high-quality health care is an issue of critical importance across the country at national, state, and local levels. Through the pandemic’s direct impact on casting our votes safely, it also brought into stark relief the need for every sector of society to help expand access to the ballot box. Increased voting participation and civic engagement by communities struggling with health and survival issues will benefit not only the health of those community members but also our overall democracy.

Participation in Civic Health Month is a great opportunity for Leagues to expand their voter services’ outreach in the community. To make it even easier to participate in this awareness movement, Civic Health Month’s creators have put together a fantastic social media toolkit complete with graphics and text to use on several different platforms; you can find it on the Civic Health Month website, www.civichealthmonth.org. Once there, you can also access their 2021 elections toolkit for additional voter outreach tools, talking points and timelines. This August, League members can be part of the effort to support healthy communities and promote voting access as part of healthcare.

Stacey Morrison, SBL editor

