



## Spring 2017

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## Scorecard: Our League vs. 2017 General Assembly



In the fall of 2016, with input from members around the state, the Board of the League of Women Voters of Maryland chose the following areas for our legislative advocacy during the 2017 General Assembly session: **Protecting the Environment, Making Democracy Work and Promoting Social and Economic Justice.** As happens every session, we made some progress in each of these areas, and also have more work to do.

### Protecting the Environment

by Betsy Singer, LWVMD Director

2017 was the last chance to get a total ban on hydraulic fracturing in Maryland. We went into the General Assembly session with regulations for fracking written and time running out on a 2.5-year moratorium from the 2015 General Assembly.

The process of fracking causes great harm to the ecosystem, water supplies, air quality, and communities where it is used as an extreme method of extracting natural gas from shale deposits. Leaking gas and methane are a regular part of the process that uses millions of gallons of water that can never be reused because of its toxic and radioactive condition. LWVMD joined the coalition for the "Don't Frack Maryland" campaign, led by Food and Water Watch.



### No Fracking

[HB 1325 – Oil and Natural Gas – Hydraulic Fracturing – Prohibition](#) was voted out of the Environment &

Transportation Committee on a bi-partisan basis. The bill went to the full House a week later and passed (97-40) on March 10. SB 740, of the same name, went to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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that held a lengthy hearing. Subsequently, Governor Hogan held a press conference to announce he would support legislation to ban fracking in Maryland. Subsequently the Senate passed it (36-10).

Governor Hogan signed the legislation on April 4. Maryland is now the first state with gas reserves to ban fracking legislatively.

### **Renewable Energy Standards Raised**

[HB 1106/SB 921 – Clean Energy Jobs – Renewable Energy Portfolio](#)

[Standard Revisions](#) The Governor vetoed this legislation in 2016. The Act raised Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard to 25 percent by 2020, up from the previous goal of 20 percent by 2022, including increasing the solar requirement to 2.5 percent by 2020.

The House of Delegates had the votes to override the Governor's veto on Jan. 31, and the Maryland Senate followed with a veto-proof majority on Feb. 2. LWVMD wrote testimony in support of the original legislation and advocated the override.

### **EmPOWER**

Thinking ahead to possible challenges to the EmPOWER Maryland program, [SB 184/HB 514 – Energy Efficiency Programs Savings and Consideration of Cost Effectiveness](#) requires the Public Service Commission to direct each electric company to provide energy efficiency and conservation services to its customers beginning with the 2018-2020 program cycle. After passage in the Senate and the House, the Governor signed the bills.

EmPOWER was extended until at least 2024. The programs will have electricity savings that achieve an annual gross energy savings of at least 2.0% per year as a percentage of the company's 2016 gross retail sales.

The program is expected to create nearly

\$12 billion in energy savings over the next ten years while reducing the carbon equivalent of taking nearly 200,000 cars off the road each year.

The EmPOWER program is a major pillar needed to achieve the reductions of the Maryland Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act of 2016.

### **Pollinator Friendly Energy** (It's a real thing.)

In an unusual coupling of energy production and cultivation of nature, the legislature passed [SB 1158 – Department of Natural Resources – Solar Generation Facilities – Pollinator-Friendly Designation](#).

It establishes a process for Maryland to designate a utility-scale ground mounted solar facility as "pollinator friendly." The designation includes solar facilities that use native vegetation and habitat management practices to maximize habitat creation for birds, pollinators and other small wildlife.



### **Continue Oyster Sanctuaries**

[HB 924 Natural Resources – Oyster Management – Prohibited Actions](#)

brought a reprieve to oyster sanctuaries by prohibiting the Department of Natural Resources from reducing or altering them until the Department develops a fisheries management plan. A study and report for the scientific management of oyster stock will support the plan.

### **Making Democracy Work**

by Nancy Soreng, LWVMD Co-President

### **Closing the Back Door On Circuit Court Judge Candidates**

[HB 1382 – Election Law – Candidate for Circuit Court Judge Defeated in Primary Election](#)

passed both Houses. In Maryland, candidates for Circuit Court judge run in both the Republican and Democratic primary elections, with the appropriate

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number of winners advancing to the General Election ballot. However, it was possible for a candidate for Circuit Court judge to lose both primary elections, and subsequently be nominated by a minor political party.

In the recent election, a candidate lost both primary elections, and was later nominated by the Libertarian Party as its candidate for Circuit Court judge.

This legislation eliminated the possibility of a candidate running in the General Election if the person had not won at least one of the primary elections.

### **Teenaged Election Judges**

Finding qualified individuals to serve as election judges is always a challenge for local Boards of elections. [HB 73 – Election Judges – Minimum Age](#) was unanimously supported by the Maryland Association of Election Officials.

Passage of this legislation allows persons who are 16 years old AND a registered voter to be appointed and serve as election judges. It also requires the State Board of Elections to survey local election boards about their experience with these younger judges and report back by 2019.

(Ed note: Maryland residents may register to vote at 16, but their registration is inactive until they are eligible to cast a vote.)

### **Candidate Finances**

After several attempts to more clearly define a coordinated expenditure, [HB 898 Election Law – Campaign Finance – Coordinated Expenditures](#) passed this session. This was important because coordinated expenditures are subject to contribution limits, but independent expenditures **have no limits**.

Without a clear definition of when coordination has taken place, it is difficult

to hold parties accountable for exceeding contribution limits. In addition to a lengthy attempt to define what constitutes coordination, the bill lays out fines and a procedure for prosecuting violations.

### **Redistricting**

Numerous proposals for reforming the way Maryland draws legislative and congressional districts have been before the General Assembly for years. This is the first time a proposal actually passed both chambers. [SB 1023 Independent Congressional Redistricting Commission – Mid-Atlantic States Regional Districting Process](#) says Maryland won't adopt a non-partisan redistricting process until New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, AND North Carolina adopt something similar.

Not only was this legislation passed by



both chambers, the General Assembly stripped more than a million dollars from the

Gubernatorial Fair Campaign Finance Fund and directed the Secretary of State to use those funds to work for redistricting reform in the other five states. As Mark Twain said, "Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits."

The League supported [SB 252/HB 385 Constitutional Amendment – Redistricting Reform Act of 2017](#) which was based on the recommendations of the Governor's Redistricting Reform Commission. The commission did not propose waiting until other states act before getting our own house in order. For an explanation of how the commission process would work, see the info-graphic on page 5 in this edition of the LWVMD Voter.

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## HOW TO CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE



Not sure what to do when you receive an **Action Alert**? Here's a helpful guide!

### READ YOUR ALERT!



LWVMD works with legislators on behalf of its members to advance and protect the causes they care about most - read the Action Alert and decide how you want to help LWVMD advocate for your cause!

### MAKE A PHONE CALL

It might seem like your busy representative's office won't have time to take a call from you - but that's what they are there for! And a call counts! Legislative Aides have running tally lists for every call they receive for an against legislation.



### MAIL A LETTER

*Yes! In the Post!*



Sometimes it's easy to disregard an email - especially when many constituents are reaching out to their representative on lots of issues - taking the time to write a letter can really attract your rep's attention!

### SEND AN EMAIL

Sometimes it *CAN* be as easy as sending your representative a quick email. Legislators may receive hundreds of emails from their constituents, but they know their duty to the people, so their offices devote serious man power to ensure each email is read and your voice is heard.



### QUESTIONS?

Still have some questions?  
Contact your LWVMD Action Chair  
at [action@lwmvmd.org](mailto:action@lwmvmd.org)

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT US AT [WWW.LWVMD.ORG](http://WWW.LWVMD.ORG)



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## Election Day Registration

The General Assembly seemed to agree the State should have Election Day voter registration. Unfortunately, the House and Senate ran out of time to resolve their varying preferences.

A bill (SB423) proposed a constitutional amendment authorizing voter registration at a polling place on Election Day. The bill passed the Senate (32-13) on March 10. Then the House substantially amended it with detailed information about the process for polling place voter registration. This amended version passed in the house on April 7 (88-49).

On the last day of the session, the Senate refused to concur with the House amendments and asked the House to recede. However, the session ended before further action could be taken.

Election Reform advocates hoped the bill would pass in its simplified, original form, leaving process details for after the voters approved the constitutional amendment. Still, the detailed preferences in the house version may help the League and other advocates craft solutions to satisfy the different interests.

The failure of [SB 423 Elective Franchise – Registration and Voting at Polling Place](#) disappointed election reform advocates. However, the strong votes to support the idea of election day provides an excellent starting point for our work with legislators before the 2018 session.

## Promoting Social and Economic Justice

by Ruth Crystal, LWVMD, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President

## Increased Minimum Wages Falls Short

The League has long supported fair and livable wages. We opposed [HB 317 Wages and Benefits – Preemption of](#)

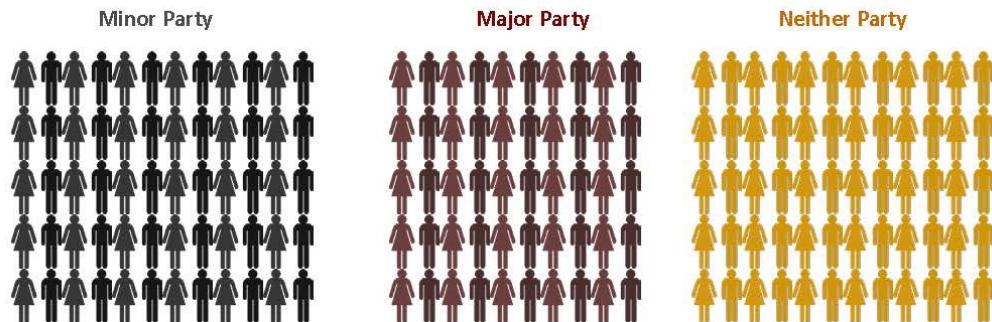
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# TAME THE GERRYMANDER!

## How does SB 252/HB 385 Constitutional Amendment – Redistricting Reform Act of 2017 work?

Maryland citizens apply to be selected to serve on the redistricting reform commission. Their applications are sorted into three categories:



3 independent auditors, randomly selected by the state's Legislative Auditor evaluate the applications. The criteria to apply to be on the Redistricting Commission include:

- must have been a registered voter in Maryland for 5 years
- may not have changed affiliation during that time
- may not have run for or served in state or federal office during the 5 years preceding appointment
- may not have an immediate family member who has run for or served in state or federal office during the 5 years preceding appointment
- may not be or have been staff, consultant, or under contract state or federal office holder
- may not be a regulated lobbyist in this state;

The auditors pick 10 qualified applicants from each category based on relevant skills, impartiality, diversity, and geography



A random drawing of three citizens from each category results in the Redistricting Commission.



The Commissioners will propose Congressional and Legislative District maps that have been created with data that does not consider, party affiliation, voting records and incumbent residences. To the extent possible, the districts on the maps will be contiguous, compact, respect geographic and political boundaries. They will also conform to the Voting Rights Act.

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Local Authority, which prohibited a county or municipality from enacting a law that regulates wages for employees other than employees of the county or municipality.

It prohibited local governments from setting the minimum wage for their jurisdiction at a higher rate than the state minimum wage. As a practical effect, it nullified work in several jurisdictions to increase their minimum wage to \$15/hour. It received an unfavorable report from Economic Matters Committee and was withdrawn.

We supported [HB 1416](#) Payment of Minimum Wage Required (Fight for Fifteen). This bill increased minimum wages for employees of firms employing 26 or more from \$9.25 in July 2017 to \$15 in July 2022, and other employees a few years later. It never made it out of Economic Matters.

### **Paid Sick Leave**

For a few sessions, the League has advocated paid sick leave for employees. It has been introduced by the Maryland Working Families Coalition. In 2017, the General Assembly passed [HB 01](#), The Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, which required an employer with 15 or more employees to provide paid sick leave.

Employees will earn at least one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours they work. Employers will not be required to carry over more the 40 hours of earned sick leave to the following year nor pay more than 64 hours of leave in a single year. The Governor has said he will veto it but has not yet acted.

### **Income Discrimination in Housing**

For many years, the League and other advocacy groups sought to prohibit discrimination based on source of income. [HB 172](#) HOME Act of 2017. The bill's backers saw it as an opportunity for people using public subsidies to live in neighborhoods other than the locations (neighborhoods) that commonly house

people on public assistance. The bill would have prohibited discriminatory practices in residential real estate transactions and the sale or rental of a dwelling because of a person's source of income. The bill passed the House, but didn't make it out of the Judicial Proceedings Committee.

### **Public Transit Fares**

The Leagues supports transit systems that are accessible and have adequate and equitable funding. Therefore, we supported [SB Bill 484/HB 271](#) Fare box Recovery Rate – Repeal. It **repealed** the requirement MTA in the Baltimore region recover at least 35% of its total operating costs from fares. We were pleased it passed because this requirement could push up fares, which in turn makes public transportation too costly for many with no alternative.



### **Free Money**

If you shop on Amazon.com, connect your account to smile.amazon.com and Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchases to a charity you select from a plethora of charities listed alphabetically. And you can change the charity at any time.

Hint: This space is all about selecting “League of Women Voters of Maryland Education Fund” No pressure.