

League of Women Voters

OF KENT COUNTY

The Kent County Voter

P.O. Box 374
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www.kent.lwvmd.org

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Events Calendar

Tuesday, September 8, 9:30 am LWVKC Board Meeting, Yellow Bldg., Chestertown Public Library

Thursday, September 17, 12:00 pm – 2:30 pm, Constitution Day, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, 500 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore MD. 21201. Contact Andrea Gruhl at andregruhl@aol.com or by phone 301-596-5480.

Saturday, September 26, 9:30 am – 1:30 pm, LWVMD Fall Workshop 2015, Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, 10431 Twin Rivers Rd., Columbia, MD 21201. Registration: \$25.

Sunday, October 11, 2:00 pm. Join the LWVMD at the Arena Stage Theater, Mead Center for American Theater for the World Premier of *Erma Bombeck at Wit's End* by Alison Engel and Margaret Engel. Tickets :\$90 Limited seating. For information: 410-269-0232 or email at lwvmd@verizon.net

Tuesday, October 13, Board Meeting and New Member Coffee. Social Time at 9:00 am, coffee, tea and scones. Board meeting at 9:30. Yellow Bldg. Kent County Public Library

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

As we bid a fond farewell to summer, the outlook for the program year looks full and exciting. Both our local and state leagues have important studies approved that will require consensus from our members, including the primary system to elect candidates for office in Maryland, developer rights and responsibilities, a study of police and community relations, Instant Runoff Voting, and redistricting.. There will be programs and workshop to familiarize members with those issues. I hope that all of you will review the materials provided, decide the issues in which you have an interest, and participate in the consensus meetings. It is important that the Kent League add its voice on these issues.

There is work ahead, but also fun. We are pleased to have a group of new members, and we will be inviting them to a new member coffee in October. We hope that our stalwart members will join the Board in welcoming them to our League.

Looking forward to seeing you in the fall.

Sandra

THE 95TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 19TH AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES – AUGUST 28, 2015

Ninety-five years ago, after decades of struggle, women finally won the right to vote. It took just a year after Congress had approved the 19th Amendment for the required three-quarters of states to ratify it. It was during that final push that Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, founded the League of Women Voters. As Elizabeth MacNamara wrote in the LWVMD blog in August, “From the beginning the League has sought to strengthen our democracy by empowering voters to engage with their government and to tackle the most important issues in our communities, states and nation.”

In our time we have seen legislation in a number of states that restrict the voting rights of citizens. What better way to celebrate the anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the League of Women Voters than continue the struggle to guarantee equal voting rights to all.

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

This summer also marked the anniversary of another important milestone in the history of our country’s democracy. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 on August 6th of that year. The law prohibits racial discrimination in voting. It was designed to enforce the voting rights guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. It resulted in the enfranchisement of racial minorities throughout the country, but especially in the South.

The Act also contained “special provisions” that apply only to certain jurisdictions, particularly in the South. Those provisions have recently been struck from the provisions of the Act with the result that some jurisdictions have passed voter ID requirements and other measures that impose restrictions on voting. The League of Women Voters still has much work to do to assure voting rights to all citizens and to help to educate voters.

REDISTRICTING IN MARYLAND

Because the Maryland Constitution has no standard for drawing Congressional Districts, when a federal judge declared in 2011 that the 3rd Congressional district was so misshapen it is “reminiscent of a broken winged pterodactyl, lying prostrate across the center of the state,” he was nonetheless helpless to do other than uphold the map, because he had no legal basis to ask for it to be redrawn.

The system for drawing district lines that currently exists in our state is as follows: the Governor appoints a bipartisan commission to develop the new maps. While this appears to be balanced, in practice the commission is typically limited to leaders of the Governor’s party and a token representative of the other party. Thus the maps are drawn by government insiders most invested in controlling the outcome of elections.. Also the public is not invited to the meetings where the maps are determined. Generally, the only opportunity that the public has to comment on the

legislative maps is at a hearing in December. Public input at these hearings has never changed the adoption of the maps.

According to the 2010 Census only 174,000 Maryland citizens needed to be placed in new districts in order to create districts with equal population; however, the plan adopted placed over 1.5 million citizens, nearly a third of the state's residents, into new districts.

The LWVMD supports the following reforms:

1. The lines for both congressional and state legislative districts should be drawn by an independent commission.
2. To insure the commission's independence, (a) no political party should have a majority and the membership should include voters who are unaffiliated or members of a party other than the Republican or Democratic parties; (b) no elected official or political party official should be appointed to the commission.
3. Congressional districts should conform to the same standards the Maryland Constitution applies to state legislative districts (compact, composed of adjoining territory, and respect geographic and political subdivision boundaries).

Calls for constitutional amendments to establish an independent commission began as early as 1978, but have received little serious consideration. As a result the LWVMD and its coalition partners began an aggressive campaign to engage the public in demanding reform. The League sponsored a forum at the University of Maryland last fall. In September they sponsored a 225 mile relay race that involved about two dozen athletes, tracing the 225 mile boundaries of the 3rd Congressional district to call the attention of the public to the issue. On August 6th Governor Hogan announced the appointment of a commission to study the state's redistricting process. He charged the commission with proposing reforms to present as legislation to the General Assembly. He invited the League of Women Voters of Maryland to recommend commission members, and he selected Ashley Oleson, the LWVMD administrator. The study commission will include 4 Legislators – one Democrat and one Republican, each appointed by the respective party leaders of each chamber, two representatives from a policy research organization, one representative from a non-profit voter advocacy organization (LWVMD), one representative from a government reform advocacy organization (Common Cause) and up to five additional members appointed by the Governor. The commission's report is due on November 3rd. For more information go to: <http://governor.maryland.gov/redistricting-reform/>

Suggested citizen actions to support redistricting reform:

1. Petitions collecting the names of redistricting reform supporters. Ask friends and neighbors to go to: http://www.lwvmd.net/redistricting_reform and sign the petition. Or ask the LWVMD to send you hard copies of the petitions addressed to the LWVMD office.
2. Submit comments to the Governor's Redistricting Commission. Go to: <http://www.lwvmd.net/> to find out how to submit comments.