2016 PRIMARY ELECTION: WHAT'S NEW or DIFFERENT?
HOW DOES LWVMC ENCOURAGE and EDUCATE VOTERS?

Every new election cycle brings changes. In 2016, we have a new primary date, some changes and additions to Early Voting Centers, as well as a different method for marking and submitting our ballots. More people are able to vote, including convicted felons who have completed their prison sentences, and procrastinators who forget to register but can now do so at Early Voting.

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) devotes a significant part of its resources and volunteers' time long before elections to encourage and educate voters to be engaged. During the past two years we have been busy with outreach through the Roundtable for Civic Engagement; voter registration drives at local colleges, prisons and release centers; naturalization ceremonies; federal installations; and at fairs, conferences and libraries. We have redesigned our *Voters' Guide* to be more readable and understandable, sought more cost-efficient production and printing choices and received more financial resources from the community to support printing and mailing the *Guide*.

This Fact Sheet and the April unit discussions encourage everyone to consider additional ways to promote citizen involvement in the primary election. Regardless of the status of the presidential delegate counts by the April 26 Maryland Primary Election, the voters will still have major choices to make--narrowing the candidate field for a new U.S. senator, for representatives from three congressional districts that include Montgomery County and for the At Large seat on the Board of Education. Is there at least one activity that catches your interest? Get engaged this month! Help the League "Make Democracy Work"!

WHAT IS A PRIMARY?
Every year, millions vote in primary elections to nominate the candidates who will appear on the general election ballot for their party. Primaries are held for most public offices when there are multiple candidates from the same party seeking election to the same office. Primaries are crucial to the shaping of the election as voters narrow down the choices available on the general election ballot. Primaries are generally held between February and June, well in advance of the general election.

In many areas, the outcome of primary elections has a major impact on the outcome of general elections because a single party controls most offices in that jurisdiction. Increasing numbers of voters who want to maintain their independence, however, choose not to affiliate with a party. In the many states with closed primaries, those voters are not allowed to participate in this critical step in the election process. Even among those affiliated with a party, few voters actually go to the polls for a primary election. But this also means that any increase in participation in the primary election can have a significant impact as fewer votes are needed to change the outcome.

Maryland uses a closed primary system -- only voters who are registered members of either the Democratic or Republican party three weeks prior to the election may participate in choosing that party's candidates. Maryland law permits both the Republican and Democratic parties to open their

primary election to unaffiliated voters. Neither party has done so except for one primary election some years ago when the Republican party allowed unaffiliated voters to vote in their primary.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is currently conducting a two-year study of the primary election process in Maryland. Look for more discussion on this topic in the future.

WHEN IS THE PRIMARY AND WHERE CAN I VOTE EARLY?
Are you surprised at the April 26th Presidential Primary date? It's no wonder. Since 2000 our primary date has bounced all over the calendar – including mid-February, early March and early April. The General Assembly changed the date to April 26 to avoid having early voting on Easter Sunday, March 27. It also avoids a conflict with the Montgomery County Public Schools' spring break, which has impacted both recruiting judges and encouraging voting in past years. This year, our primary election date coincides with those of Delaware and Pennsylvania, creating a mini mid-Atlantic regional primary. Connecticut and Rhode Island also vote on April 26.

In addition to voting on Election Day at the assigned polling place from 7:00am to 8:00pm, the voter may vote early at any one of ten Early Voting Centers. Early voting begins on Thursday, April 14 and ends on Thursday, April 21, with Centers open between 10 am and 8 pm.

The eight Early Voting Centers are the same as those of 2014:
Burtonsville   Praisner Community Recreation Center, 14906 Old Columbia Pike
Chevy Chase   Lawton Community Recreation Center, 4301 Willow Lane
Damascus   Damascus Community Recreation Center, 25520 Oak Drive
Gaithersburg   Activity Center at Bohrer Park, 506 S. Frederick Ave
Germantown   Germantown Community Recreation Center, 18905 Kingsview Road
Rockville   County Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street
Silver Spring   Mid-County Community Recreation Center, 2004 Queensguard Road, *and* the
                           Silver Spring Civic Building, One Veterans Place at Fenton & Ellsworth.

There are two additional Early Voting Centers for 2016:
Wheaton   Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad Ballroom, 2400 Arcola Avenue
Potomac   Potomac Community Recreation Center, 11315 Falls Road.

The former site at the Wheaton Community Recreation Center is undergoing demolition and renovation. Last fall, the Board of Elections requested and the General Assembly and Governor recently approved adding a tenth county center, in Potomac, increasing access to early voting to a wider geographical area in the county.

The Board of Elections also approved alternate Early Voting Centers, if needed, in case emergency issues occur during the early voting period. The alternate sites include Long Branch Community Recreation Center, Bauer Drive Community Recreation Center, Upper County Community Recreation Center and the Board of Elections.

WHO CAN REGISTER TO VOTE? WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?
April 5, 2016 at 9 pm is the deadline to register or make name/address changes for voting absentee or on Primary Election day. To register you must:
   •   Be at least 16 years of age.
   •   Be a citizen of the United States.

- Be a resident of Maryland.
- Not be under court-ordered ineligibility to vote due to mental disability.
- Not have been convicted of buying or selling votes.
- Not have been convicted of a felony, or, if so, have completed serving any prison sentence. *This is a change that took effect on March 10, after the General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto of last year's bill making this change in election law. Once released from prison, a person can register before completing any other terms of the sentence, such as the payment of fines, probation, or parole.*

If you are not already registered to vote in Maryland and miss the April 5 registration deadline and are qualified, you can register and vote the same day at any of the ten county Early Voting Centers from 10 am – 8 pm, Thursday, April 14 through Thursday, April 21. Same day registration requires proof of residency -- bring a Maryland driver's license, identification card, learner's permit or other residential proof with you. You can NOT change your party affiliation after April 5.

Age Requirement -- If you are registered and will be age 18 by November 8, 2016, you may vote in the April 26 Primary Election.

WHICH OFFICES CAN I VOTE FOR?
Democratic and Republican Primaries -- The Democratic and Republican political parties are required by Maryland law to choose their candidates for the General Election in party primary elections. To vote in the Democratic or Republican party primaries for President, U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and for the judicial races for Circuit Court, you must be registered with the party of your choice by Tuesday, April 5. You can NOT change your party affiliation at Early Voting Centers or on Election Day. Maryland law requires that judges who must stand for election appear only on the Republican and Democratic primary ballots even though judges are considered non-partisan. (LWVMD prefers that all voters can participate in non-partisan judicial elections.)

Board of Education -- All registered voters, regardless of political party or non-affiliated status, may vote for an At Large Board of Education candidate in the Primary Election. Since only two candidates filed for the District 2 and 4 Board of Education seats, both candidates automatically advance to the General Election without having to compete in the primary. Five candidates filed for the At Large seat. Therefore, they must compete in the primary to narrow the field to two At Large candidates who will appear on the General Election ballot.

Green Party Primary -- All voters who are registered as Green Party members with the Board of Elections may participate in this year's Green Party primary to select its nominees for offices at the state and local level. This is separate from the primary on April 26. The Green Party will publish the primary ballots on April 2. All candidates seeking the Green Party nomination will be on the Green Party ballot in that district, whether the race for an office is contested or not. Registered Green Party voters may also choose "None of the above," but no write-in candidates are allowed.

Green Party primary ballots will be sent to party members only upon request. Requests for a Green Party ballot must be submitted before midnight on Sunday, April 17. The request should be sent to baltimoregreens@gmail.com or to Baltimore Green Party, P.O. Box 22857, Baltimore, MD 21233. Montgomery County residents may also submit their requests to Montgomery County Green Party at P.O. Box 217, Kensington, MD 20895 or at mocogreens@gmail.com. Voted ballots must be received by the Party no later than 5 PM, Saturday, April 30. For additional information, visit the Green Party website for Maryland, http://www.mdgreens.

Since candidates for the Green and Libertarian parties will not appear on the official Maryland primary ballot, they are not included in the printed LWV Montgomery County *Voters' Guide*. However, all the Green Party candidates, including three running in the Congressional District 8 race, will appear in vote411.org during the primary season.

WHERE IS MY LOCAL POLLING PLACE? WHO ARE MY CHOICES?
Check your sample ballot from the Board of Elections. All registered voters receive an 8-1/2 x 11 newsprint booklet about the election (blue for Democratic, red for Republican, green for not affiliated or non-principal party registrants) in early April. It includes your local polling place and address and your party affiliation, printed above the mailing label. It also lists the candidates who will appear on your ballot in your precinct as determined by your congressional district.

If you do not receive a Sample Ballot or disagree with the cited information, be sure to contact the Board of Elections at 240-777-8683 or go on-line (elections.maryland.gov) as soon as possible to check or make changes to your registration. Party affiliation changes must be made by April 5. Name and address changes can be made at Early Voting Centers or on Election Day (with identification/proof of residency), but they might require that you vote with a provisional ballot.

Some Precinct Polling Places change every election cycle. Former precinct buildings may be under renovation or have not met all the requirements for ease of access. Occasionally precincts are combined or split due to a change in the number of residences in the area or the availability of a better site. The Board of Elections makes every effort to keep the polling location within the boundaries of the precinct and at an accessible building that is convenient to reach. Voters affected receive a postcard mailing about the change (probably during the last six months), but check your site on the sample ballot. The list of 2016 Polling Place Changes is posted as "November 2015 Precinct Changes" on the Board of Elections website at
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Elections/Information/redistricting.html.

If you receive a Sample Ballot for someone who does not live at your address, such as a previous occupant or someone who has died, please do not discard the Sample Ballot. Rather, return it to your postal carrier for the Board of Elections so they can keep their records up to date. This year's Sample Ballot includes boxes you can check for 1) not at this address or 2) deceased.

WHAT KIND OF VOTING EQUIPMENT ARE WE USING THIS ELECTION?
Beginning with the 2016 Primary Election, a paper ballot that can be verified by the voter will be the basis of the state voting system instead of the touchscreen voting machines used in Montgomery County since 2002 and statewide since 2004. General Assembly legislation required the change in 2007 but funding was delayed until now.

Most registered voters at both Early Voting Centers and on Election Day will receive a paper ballot for their particular races that they will mark by hand with a black ballpoint pen in the oval next to the candidates' names. The voter should review the ballot to make sure all races have been reviewed (front and back side) and will then insert the completed ballot into a digital image scanner that counts and collects the completed ballots. The scanner records your vote in two separate memory units, as well as retaining the paper ballot. Voters will not receive any part of the ballot back, just an "I Voted" sticker. Some people had suggested that voting machines produce a "receipt" listing the voter's choices, but this raised concerns about the risk that people would be paid to vote for certain candidates.

The Montgomery County Board of Elections has conducted an extensive outreach effort beginning last summer to educate voters about the new voting system. They have transported and demonstrated the new voting equipment/system at over 300 voter empowerment outreach events at libraries, fairs, community gatherings, etc. so that voters will be familiar with the new system at early voting and on Election Day.

There are seven ballot styles for Montgomery County, one for the independent/non-principal party registrants for the Board of Education race, and three each for the Republican and Democratic choices for Presidential, Senatorial, Circuit Court and Board of Education races, and the different Congressional candidates for Districts 3, 6 and 8. The ballots are printed in English and Spanish as required by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1975.

Early Voting Centers and all precincts on Election Day will provide at least one touchscreen ballot marking device to facilitate voting by those challenged by paper (whether due to impairments of vision or dexterity). The marking device has large-print and high contrast screens as well as Braille and audio capabilities, including a keypad that can be used to move through the ballot and mark it.

Initially, it was expected that touchscreen ballot marking devices would be used at Early Voting Centers to avoid stockpiling large numbers of paper ballots in many different styles (Baltimore City will have nearly 50 different ballot styles). However, in February, the State Board of Elections (SBE) decided to change from widespread use of the ballot marking devices at Early Voting Centers to paper ballots because the machines could display only seven candidates per screen.   During city elections in Rockville and SBE-conducted testing, some users reported difficulty moving between screens to see all the candidates for a given race. In addition, some candidates with names at the end of the alphabet on the second page of the race objected to the use of the ballot marking devices except for those voters unable to use paper ballots and requested a temporary restraining order to block or limit the use of the ballot marking devices.

On Friday, March 4, the SBE held a special meeting to discuss how to protect the privacy of the paper-challenged community's vote by including randomly or self-selected voters to also use the touchscreen. The Board noted that anyone who asks to use the touchscreen machine will be allowed to do so as election judges are not permitted to ask any voter about the nature of their disability. In addition, election judges will be instructed to offer the touchscreen to voters who have not requested it, until at least two voters in each precinct (and 2 voters per day at an early voting center) have chosen to do so, and that this should be completed during the morning.

LWVMC EFFORTS TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Roundtable on Civic Engagement
We are actively promoting civic participation and voter registration through our Roundtable on Civic Engagement. The Roundtable is an attempt by the League and other citizens to reverse the low voter turnout experienced during the 2014 Maryland Primary Election. It is also an outgrowth of the League's participation in the County Council's Task Force on the Right to Vote (2013-15).

This 15-month old project began with an invitation to community leaders and activists to identify reasons for the low voter turnout and work collectively to reverse the trend and encourage greater civic engagement. Two Roundtables and two meetings of the Working Group led to the participation of key community leaders/activists representing large numbers of citizens, soon to be citizens, and those who have recently arrived.

To date we have worked with two mosques, one Buddhist temple, one West-African church, a large umbrella organization representing the Chinese community, and with newly naturalized Latino citizens, providing all an opportunity to register to vote in connection with religious services or other civic events. We were also invited to address the importance of voting in the primary election to student leaders of 19 high schools at the General Assembly of the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association held at Montgomery Blair High School. We also discussed the primary election and how students as young as 12 can be involved at the General Assembly of the Montgomery County Junior Council (MCJC) at Kingsview Middle School.

Pending, at the time of printing this Fact Sheet, is a possible co-sponsorship with a Chinese community organization of a debate to be held on March 26 for all candidates for U. S. Representative from Congressional District 8. A January meeting with a local group of the Council of Negro Women, was postponed due to the snow storm, but has been rescheduled for March 26.

Target Precinct Project
Another major project focuses on five target precincts that had lower than average voter turnout in the November 2014 election. By devoting increased, targeted activities in those precincts we hope to encourage more registered voters in these precincts to get out and vote. We anticipate holding an event in each of the precincts before the Primary and General Elections, such as a voter registration drive in a shopping center, door to door delivery of the *Voters' Guide* in neighborhoods that are accessible or an educational session on both the candidates and the election process.

We are mailing the *Voters' Guide* to households where door to door delivery is not possible such as multi-household apartment buildings that are locked. At your earliest convenience as you read this Fact Sheet or at the unit meetings, please let us know if you can help Making Democracy Work (MDW) hand-deliver the 3100 copies going to individual homes and townhouses. Several professors of American Government classes at Montgomery College have contacted the League requesting student service learning experiences for their students. We hope some of these students also may be interested in helping with this project.

The target precinct voting sites are listed below:
Precinct 4-24 - Lakewood Elementary School, Rockville, 20850
Precinct 5-14 - Joann Leleck at Broad Acres Elementary School, Silver Spring, 20903
Precinct 5-21 - East Montgomery Recreation Center, Silver Spring (near Burtonsville), 20904
Precinct 9-16 - WSSC Gaithersburg Depot, Gaithersburg, 20877
Precinct 9-18 - Fox Chapel Elementary School, Germantown, 20876

Voters' Guide **and Get Out the Vote**
Despite the overarching emphasis on voter registration by many groups, the League devotes efforts to educating voters about the candidates and issues. One of the main efforts is through our *Voters' Guide*. We have tried to increase our outreach to registered voters by getting the *Voters' Guide* into the hands of more voters. We have both a printed *Voters' Guide* (mailing about 60,000 copies to households, reaching over 150,000 registered voters), and an online interactive *Voters' Guide*, www.vote411.org, which is the most comprehensive compilation of the candidates and responses.

For the primary election, our League received a $6,000 grant from the Montgomery County Council to print and mail our *Voters' Guide* to all households that had an individual who became registered since the 2014 General Election. This funding helped, but did not totally cover the costs for reaching out to

50,500 new registrants signing up from November 2014 through the end of 2015, putting the *Voters' Guide* into the hands of many more voters than ever before.

What's in the *Voters' Guide*? The *Guide* contains basic information about voting, such as registration deadlines, how to vote early, by mail (absentee), or on Election Day, a description of each office (President, Senator, etc.), with both responsibilities and how they are elected. The core of the *Guide* is the unedited responses by the candidates to questions developed by the League on issues of concern to all voters.

All candidates on the primary election ballot (for President, Senator, Congressional Representative, Judges of the Circuit Court, Board of Education, and Convention Delegates) were invited to respond to questions relevant to the office they are seeking and type their answers directly into the online vote411.org *Voters' Guide*. We include the candidates' name, political affiliation, campaign website and responses to the questions in the candidates' words. Their responses are then available online in vote411.org and are also downloaded or exported into our printed LWVMC *Voters' Guide* which is also posted on the LWVMC website as a PDF document. Due to space limitations and responses after our print deadline, not all responses are included in the printed *Voters' Guide*. Late responders, Green Party candidates not on the statewide ballot, and a few additional questions for the Congressional candidates are available online in vote411.org. Additionally, responses to two questions posed to the 232 convention delegates are not included in the printed *Voters' Guide* but also are available in vote411.org.

Beyond distributing the *Voters' Guide* to households in the target precincts, we will need assistance distributing the *Guides* to other places around the county. The County will distribute it to libraries, recreation and senior centers. We also try to make the *Voters' Guide* available where and when people congregate during the time of early voting and just before the April and November election days. We appreciate your help taking copies of the *Voters' Guide* to YMCAs, sports programs, Metro stations, coffee shops, grocery stores, farmers' markets, fairs or community events, etc. The *Guide*'s design has been totally revamped for greater readability. It will be a separate publication, no longer distributed in *The Beacon*.

So, how can you help to increase voter participation so we have a democracy that represents all citizens?
- Encourage your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers to vote. Personal appeals are very effective regardless if done in person, by phone, on Facebook, email, etc.
- Show people how to use vote411.org at your local civic, school and religious organizations and circulate the contents and direction to listservs and your e-mail list.
- Offer to answer voter's questions about voting or let them know where they can find the information. Volunteer to answer calls to the Voter Hotline at the office.
- Help deliver the *Voters' Guide* in places you frequent.
- Consider helping with Polling Place Support, a monitoring of 3-6 polling places on Election Day that assists the Board of Education and earns the LWVMC Citizen Education Fund (CEF) funds to support our election outreach.
- Make a special contribution to the LWVMC-CEF to continue our efforts to Make Democracy Work!

This Fact Sheet was prepared by Making Democracy Work Committee members Zaida Arguedas, Chris Hager, Mary Lanigan (Chair), Karen Lechter, Karen Logsdon, Barbara Sanders (Lead), Ralph Watkins, and Marge Wexler.