

League of Women Voters of California Advocacy Wrap-Up 2020

This was a year like no other.

We ended the 2019 legislative session and began 2020 with great optimism and hope, a robust economy, and ambitious goals. The Governor’s January budget forecast projected a \$5.6 billion surplus and a record-breaking \$220 billion state budget.



We had big plans to address the housing crisis and advocate for investments in green technology. But you know what happened next.

By mid-March, COVID-19 had started infecting Californians and the ripples that followed impacted every facet of our daily lives. Schools, businesses, and even the legislature shut down. California's long economic expansion came to an end and progress in some areas was stymied. Our focus both concentrated on priorities like **Schools & Communities First**, and shifted as we faced the virus’ threats to democracy and the exigencies created by the killing of George Floyd.

While 2020 was full of unprecedented obstacles, the League persevered and met the moment.¹

¹ As always, detailed letters related to legislation may be found at bit.ly/BillStatusReport2020. Our ballot measure advocacy is summarized in this year’s recommendations at bit.ly/LWVCBallotRecs. The LWVC Legislative Wrap-Up for 2019 may be found at bit.ly/LWVCLegWrapUp2019.



Our Biggest Wins

- ★ **Free the Vote** (McCarty), Prop 17, restores voting rights to 50,000 Californians on parole. The League co-sponsored the legislation to put the measure on the ballot and signed ballot arguments. Prop 17 confronts the racist legacy of an impediment that has disproportionately impacted the voting strength of California's Black and Latino communities for decades.
- ★ **The Racial Justice Act** (Kalra) is landmark legislation that prohibits the state from seeking or obtaining a criminal conviction, or from imposing a sentence, based on race, ethnicity or national origin. This bill, co-sponsored by the League, was initially set aside due to the effects of COVID, but was revived through intensive advocacy in the closing days of the Legislative session and **signed into law** by the Governor.

These achievements would not have been possible without strong coalition allies and your help. Our League members throughout the state worked to get over 7,500 signatures for ballot measure petitions, sent over 8,000 Action Alert messages to the Legislature and Governor to pass critical bills, and campaigned or advocated locally to accomplish these important reforms.

Despite best efforts, we also suffered a few notable losses.

- Notwithstanding your tireless work to get petition signatures and intensive grassroots advocacy to pass the ballot measure, **Prop 15, Schools & Communities First** lost by a razor-thin margin. While we are disappointed to have lost this years-long battle, we will keep fighting to ensure that corporations pay their fair share.
- **Prop 16, the Opportunity for All Act**, also failed. While this effort to overturn the Prop 209 ban on affirmative action was unsuccessful, the League will continue to find avenues to work toward equity in public education and employment.

Overall, the League took positions on nearly **80 pieces of legislation**. Here are some highlights from the past year.

Government

When the state shut down in March, we knew that COVID-19 would not be just a public health crisis. That's why we immediately started working with state and county elections officials, as well as a broad coalition of stakeholders, to adapt our elections to be both



accessible and safe. We helped craft and advocate for three emergency bills in response to the pandemic.

- **AB 860** (Berman) ensured that all registered voters in the state automatically received their ballots in the mail for the November election.
- **SB 423** (Umberg) ensured that voters who prefer or need to vote in person have access to sufficient voting locations and ballot drop boxes, guaranteeing a broad range of robust voting options.
- Expected delays of Census 2020 data will impact redistricting, so passage of **SB 970** (Umberg) to move the primary election from March to June in non-presidential election years will allow cities and counties more time to accommodate the likely delay of data for making redistricting decisions and provide ample time for community outreach and engagement.

Furthering transparency in campaign financing is part of our effort to minimize the impact of money in politics – so we supported **AB 2151** (Gallagher) that requires local governments to post all campaign finance reports online.

Natural Resources

With a new focus on the COVID-19 crisis, and the resulting deficit, efforts on climate change, waste reduction, natural resource conservation, and green technology were stalled. Numerous bills introduced in 2019 and early 2020 died and remain on hold. We initially followed and supported some 20 bills on water, land use, hazardous materials, and climate change. One that failed in the Legislature during its final days, **AB 3030** (Kalra) would have called for California to comply with the UN's global call to conserve 30 percent of land and coastal (marine) areas. But that goal did not die. Governor Newsom's **Executive Order N-82-20** allows California to work toward that objective.

One silver lining is the passage of **SB 288** (Wiener), which will help communities expedite work on sustainable transportation systems.

Social Policy

Perhaps our greatest accomplishments are our criminal justice victories. Beyond taking a strong stance in favor of the Racial Justice Act and two ballot measures (Propositions 17 and 25), and opposing Prop 20, we successfully supported a handful of criminal justice and public safety bills:

- **AB 1185** (McCarty) authorizes counties to create sheriff oversight boards,
- **AB 1869** eliminates onerous fees placed on people in the criminal legal system,



- [AB 2512](#) (Stone) redefines “intellectual disability” with the intent to better protect those individuals from severe sentencing, such as the death penalty.
- [AB 3070](#) (Weber) removes barriers to a more fair and equitable jury selection process.

While 2019 saw a plethora of housing legislation passed, and we began 2020 prepared to take more action on both housing and homelessness, the legislature failed to find common ground to pass meaningful housing legislation. Not one of the housing bills that we championed survived.

We supported two immigration bills that made it through.

- [AB 2788](#) (Gloria) prohibits public utilities from disclosing customer billing information to the Department of Homeland Security, as such data could compromise households with any undocumented immigrant family members.
- [AB 3228](#) (Bonta) requires that any private detention facilities must provide the same standard of care that is provided in public (government) facilities.

Working with a broad coalition of nonprofits, we helped pass [AB 376](#) (Stone), which establishes a Student Borrowers Bill of Rights, giving student borrowers more assistance and protection for loans needed for housing, food, and other living expenses. And with the successful passage of [AB 901](#) (Gipson) young people aged 12-17 may no longer be charged with criminal offenses due to truancy or failure to obey parents, charges which put youth at greater risk of falling into the clutches of the criminal justice/juvenile court system and potential cascading legal problems.

Looking Ahead

COVID-19 isn't going away just yet, and neither is climate change, the housing crisis, or any number of problems. The Black Lives Matter protests throughout the year have reminded us how inequality is still deeply rooted in our society. Another season of wildfires has shown how susceptible California is to natural disasters. Our state faces multiple urgent challenges that have been further compounded by the pandemic. Yet this may also be an opportunity to rethink what is normal and find opportunities for systemic and structural changes to lift all of us up toward more economic security and greater quality of life. With 2020 nearly behind us, we are gearing up for 2021 and the next century of League.