DEMOCRACY WORKS FALL/WINTER 2023

#FreeTheVote





Direct Line



Maya Paley

Board Member, Development Committee Chair

As a Board member of the League of Women Voters of California, and Chair of the Development Committee, I am constantly thinking about the future.

The future of the LWVC and the future of our democracy. But as the seasons are changing, this is a time of reflection, and it is important to pause and acknowledge our accomplishments.

We did some amazing things this year in support of the LWVC's engagement in meaningful and impactful work. For the first time, the LWVC hosted Drag for Democracy in conjunction with our statewide convention in San Francisco. On May 20, 2023, we came together to celebrate LGBTQ+ leaders and advocates while being captivated by local beloved drag performers. We danced the night away, all while fundraising for the LWVC and sending an important message that there is a home for everyone at the League of Women Voters of California. Additionally, we raised funds for the Trudy Schafer Public Policy Fellowship, which identifies emerging leaders and supports them with mentorship in legislative analysis, community organizing, coalition building, communication, and lobbying. We launched the LWVC Action Fund, highlighting how the LWVC transforms the energy of Leaguers into statewide policy action. This legislative session, the LWVC fiercely advocated in Sacramento for Fair Maps, restoration of voting rights, improvements to statewide recall elections, and much more that you can read about in this publication.

I am so proud of the League, and am energized for what's to come. As we approach the 2024 primaries, and a monumental presidential election, there is a growing undercurrent of discontent about the health of our democracy. In my role as Development Chair, I lead efforts that keep the LWVC resourced to do what we do best: empower voters and defend democracy. The LWVC is tirelessly working to ensure every person can access democracy and use it to build the future they want. Our support is critical to these efforts.

Thank you to everyone who has championed the LWVC through donations, volunteering, and advocacy. We must continue to stand with the LWVC, now and into the future.



Stephanie Doute, CAE

Executive Director

I've been reflecting a lot lately on the state of women and women's nonprofits, and in particular the League in California.

I am always in awe of the amazing work being done by the LWVC and all of you in your local Leagues around the state. When you truly stop to reflect, our grassroots work to increase participation of Californians in our democracy by engaging them with issues that matter to them is critical to changing the make-up of our electorate, and serves to put more power into the hands of people in our diverse communities. It's pretty amazing to think about the millions and millions of lives that we are changing through our passionate issue grassroots and grasstops advocacy, our community coalitions, and our work to make sure that good laws are not just passed - but they are implemented to benefit our communities.

Women are powerful. We are powerful. And the incredible thing about power is that when it is shared, it grows. It is not a finite resource, but one that multiplies as we convene and work in coalition with our justice and equity partners across the state. And all of our work with coalitions is a testament to that. Whether it is in our coalition to move forward restoration of the right to vote for currently incarcerated people, or to ensure that formerly incarcerated people know about their right to vote and know how to do it... whether it is in our convening of the Future of California Elections Network and Conference to bring together great and passionate minds focused on building a more equitable elections system and electorate... whether it is our 2023 Drag for Democracy event that brought together diverse people from diverse communities to stand up for civil rights and our democracy together - power grows when we hold it collectively and we can all do so much more together.

At the same time, recent research by the Equitable Giving Lab shows that women's nonprofits receive less than 2% of all philanthropic giving nationally. Less than 2%. While we focus on changing lives, building power across diverse communities, convening and working in coalitions to drive change that truly impacts lives and builds a more just and equitable California - we do it with less than 2% of philanthropic contributions being given to organizations like ours. Among the many social challenges we are facing, misogyny is alive and well and growing. And these philanthropic giving numbers are just one indicator of that.

But the League was born of fighting misogyny and we certainly are steeled to continue through the trenches of it today. Some days that will mean we have to really focus on increasing giving to organizations like ours because so much in this country has been built on the free labor of women - and we cannot allow that to continue. Women deserve better as drivers of change in our communities. Some days it will mean standing arm in arm with our partners and pushing forward - together - the fights for racial justice, climate justice, housing justice, reproductive justice and so many others.

What we know for sure is that the League has not been here for over 100 years because we shy away from anything. Please take a few minutes to read through this report and learn about some of the amazing work done by the LWVC this past year. I'm really proud of all that we have accomplished. And as we all gather ourselves and get ready for a critical election year bearing down on us, I hope you will take some time to rest and care for yourselves. Our work, our collaborations, and the power of women are needed more than ever as we enter 2024 and we must take care of ourselves to be able to do all that will be needed from us.

I am grateful to you all and proud to serve alongside you in the League.

Year In Review

2023 marked yet another exciting and dynamic year for the LWVC.

We led many important legislative efforts, arm in arm with our statewide and community partners, commissioned two redistricting reports, participated in numerous coalitions and task forces, and supported federal climate policy efforts.

A host of new districts and open seats paved the way for a historically diverse California legislature in 2023. While there have been notable improvements in representation - including a record 50 women in office up from 32 in 2022 – there continues to be a gap in representation among women, Latino/a/x people, and Asian Americans as compared with their share of the state's population. Despite budget issues, the influx of new members also heralded the introduction of 2,632 bills - the highest number in over a decade. **Of those, the League took positions on 77 bills, a 13 percent increase from the same period in the previous legislative session.** In this year's Wrap-Up, you can read highlights of our hard-earned victories and a preview of some of our advocacy goals for next year. As always, detailed letters related to all the bills on which we took positions may be found in our Bill Status Report, which you can see by following the QR code at the end of this article.

OUR BIGGEST WINS AND A FEW LOSSES

Strengthening the Fair Maps Act

The "Promise of Fair Maps," a report by the LWVC and partners, found that local governments often prioritize the interests of incumbent politicians in redistricting, instead of focusing on community needs and using fair criteria to draw district lines. To address these issues, we sponsored AB 764 (Bryan), which was signed by Governor Newsom. The new law will prohibit the consideration of incumbent protection, ensure that the safeguards of the Fair Maps Act extend beyond cities and counties to educational and special districts, and make the process more transparent and equitable overall. However, our victory is tempered by the Governor's veto of another sponsored bill, AB 1248, which would have required large local jurisdictions to establish independent redistricting commissions before the 2030 cycle. California is nationally recognized for our gold-standard Citizens Redistricting Commission, and the Governor's veto represents a missed opportunity to eradicate local gerrymandering. Instead, many communities will continue to face incumbent politicians manipulating the process for their own benefit. This fight is far from over - the League will continue to advocate for independent redistricting commissions in local governments across California to make sure that the power is in the hands of the people, not politicians.

Extending Protections and Convenience to California Voters

As we expand the use of vote by mail, it is critical to ensure the process is equitable, fair and increases engagement. AB 1037 (Berman and SB 77 (Umberg are wins that will modernize the way that voters are notified of and correct errors on ballot envelopes, helping to guarantee that every eligible vote is counted in California, and every voter is heard. Gail Pellerin, the former Santa Cruz County Registrar of Voters, hit the ground running as a new assemblymember, securing a position as Chair of Assembly Elections and introducing a spate of pro-voter bills that have been signed into law. Among the ones that passed, supported by our advocacy are:

- AB 545 (Pellerin) will make accessible voting more available to Californians by requiring all inperson voting locations to offer curbside voting and provide prominent signage and contact information to make sure voters are aware of the ways that voting can be more accessible to them.
- AB 626 (Pellerin) will allow voters to cast the ballot they receive in the mail at a vote center, without the added barrier of the identification envelope. This both makes ballot processing more efficient and respects the choice of those who prefer to vote in-person where accessibility may be easier and assistance is available.
- **AB 292 (Pellerin)** provides information directly on No Party Preference presidential primary ballots regarding how to request a partisan ballot and makes it easier to replace the original.

This advance is critical because many voters who are registered as No Party Preference are shocked to find that their ballot does not contain primary candidates. Often, voters do not even know they can ask for a ballot that has primary candidates. This bill helps to honor voters' choices and lower confusion and frustration that can lead to lower turnout and distrust in elections.

Democracy in the Balance

In a flurry of dramatic end-of-session activity, the League helped get ACA 13 (Ward) and ACA 1 (Aguiar-Curry) through the legislature and they are slated to appear on the November 2024 ballot. ACA 13 would require ballot measures that propose to increase the number of votes needed to pass a measure, to also pass by the same increased number. ACA 1 would lower the threshold needed to pass bonds and taxes that fund affordable housing and certain public infrastructure projects from a $\frac{3}{2}$ vote to a 55 percent vote. Both constitutional amendments promote fairness in the democratic process.



On the flip side, we were not successful in defeating SJR-7 (Wahab), which adds California to the states seeking an Article V Constitutional Convention on gun violence. While the League passionately supports and engages in focused policy to address gun violence and the damage it is doing to our children and our communities, opening a constitutional convention puts every right, civil liberty, and underlying value of our country at risk. There are no limits or guardrails to what can be changed in the process, and it opens the door to well-funded special interests buying access to change the Constitution to serve their purposes. There are other ways to amend the Constitution that would be more protective of our existing civil rights and liberties and have less risk of being beholden to well-funded special interests.

Open meetings also suffered a setback with the passage of SB 544 (Laird), a bill we advocated against because it weakens Bagley-Keene open-meeting rules by stifling people's ability to meaningfully engage with members of state advisory boards and commissions in person. On the other hand, our coalition successfully stopped SB 537 (Becker), which would have fundamentally changed the Brown Act's open-meeting protections for multijurisdictional cross-county local agencies. We recognize that there is a balance to be struck to ensure that public officials with disabilities that prevent in-person attendance are able to serve. But, we also know that AB 2449 (Rubio 2022) already allows for Brown Act exceptions to in-person attendance for members with caregiving responsibilities, health concerns, or a need to travel on official business. We urged a step back and review of open meetings laws, writing:

> The League of Women Voters of California strongly believes that changing open government regulations, when not in an emergency, deserves the focused evaluation afforded by legislative hearings, rather than a piecemeal adoption of situation-specific language. We believe that a comprehensive look into the matter, guided by an explicit mandate to support citizen participation and preserve the focus on transparency and access reflected in both the Bagley-Keene and the Brown Acts, will result in a thoughtful solution that recognizes advantages discovered during the pandemic and benefits both the public interest and that of state and local bodies.

Beating Back Climate Change

SB 253 (Wiener), the Climate Accountability Act, is a groundbreaking advance that will require companies doing business in California to publicly disclose annual greenhouse gas emissions. By 2025 the California Air Resources Board must develop and adopt regulations requiring businesses operating in California with more than \$1 billion in annual revenues to reveal their carbon footprint across three "scopes." The requirements would apply to an estimated 5,400 companies, including Walmart, Apple, ExxonMobil, and Chevron.

In other environmental wins, SB 49 (Becker) will encourage the installation of solar power infrastructure along California's highways and AB 43 (Holden) will require the Air Resources Board to establish an embodied carbon trading system (the carbon that is created when goods are manufactured) that will help build a market to attract private investment and incentivize improvement of low-carbon building materials. This is expected to reduce total carbon emissions from the building sector.

Criminal Justice Reform Hits Snags

Many of our priority criminal justice bills have been held as two-year bills due to the complexity of managing opposition and educating new legislators on the need for reform. Among our priority bills, that we hope to address with renewed vigor in 2024, are:

- **SB 94 (Cortese)** to allow judges to review life-without-parole sentences for people who have served at least 25 years of their sentence, and who may have received unwarranted enhancements to their sentences, to request a recall or possible resentencing. This fresh look by a judge can now consider modern-day sentencing practices that were not in place at the time of original sentencing.
- **SB 50 (Bradford)** to limit law enforcement's ability to use minor, non-safety-related traffic infractions to conduct racially biased pretextual stops. It will help protect Californians of color from unnecessary harm and help ensure that public dollars dedicated to community safety are being used resourcefully.



• AB 280 (Holden) to, among other things, end the use of solitary confinement for vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women. It would bring California closer to following international humanitarian standards and the United Nations' Nelson Mandela Rules, which define solitary confinement for greater than two weeks as torture.

Housing Victories

In an important win for creating affordable housing, which is desperately needed in California, SB 423 (Wiener) will extend SB 35's streamlined building permitting process (which sunsets in 2026) in cities that are behind on meeting state-mandated housing goals to 2036. SB 35 has successfully streamlined approval of over 18,000 new homes since 2017, including over 9,000 affordable to low-income families, 5,500 affordable to very low-income families, and more than 1,000 homes affordable to extremely low-income families. SB 423, which also expands the provisions of SB 35 to encourage mixed-income housing developments, will maintain the shortened permit processing times and help increase our housing supply at a time when there is an affordable housing crisis in California. Amendments were taken during the legislative process clarifying that SB 423 would not apply to certain environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas, like those vulnerable to sea-level rise or fires. The Governor also signed SB 4 (Wiener) to ease barriers to educational and religious institutions building affordable homes on their own property. This new law is projected to open up almost 40,000 acres for development.

Federal Action

The League of Women Voters of Fresno County, working with the LWVUS and the LWVC, spearheaded a statewide Action Alert calling on Californians to urge federal representatives to support funding for climatesmart agriculture and conservation technical assistance in the 2023 Farm Bill.

California's agricultural industry employs almost 10% of our workforce, provides more than 50% of the fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States, and is vital for our nation's food security. Our agricultural lands are also an integral part of the state's climate strategy. Climate-smart agricultural practices build healthy soil, protect topsoil, increase water efficiency, improve biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration, and are an essential tool for farmers to build resilience to drought. Our farmers need assistance to build a resilient, equitable and sustainable food system and Californians and League members can contact your representatives to support the 2023 Farm Bill and protect our agricultural systems right now.

BEYOND BILLS

Our work goes far beyond legislation. Among other things, we also advise the work of key state agencies to ensure they meet the needs of Californians, guide effective implementation of legislation, and provide education related to advocacy. Here are just a few of the current projects.

- Motor Voter Task Force. In 2021 we passed AB 796 (Berman) to improve the voter registration process at the DMV and help more than 3 million eligible unregistered Californians register to vote. This year, we began our tenure on the Secretary of State's Motor Voter Task Force, established by law to monitor the DMV voter registration process. A 2022 Annual Report is now available on the Secretary of State's website, and we are currently advocating for the DMV to add a single optional question to the registration process related to race and ethnicity. Collecting this information would better identify the specific challenges to building a more inclusive democracy and greatly expand our understanding of voter turnout, voting method preferences, and potential obstacles to participation within communities of color in different parts of the state.
- **Redistricting Reports.** The LWVC published two comprehensive reports on redistricting in 2023.
 - The 2020 California Citizens Redistricting Commission's Successes and Challenges is a comprehensive report evaluating both the outcomes and the processes of the state's 2020 California Citizens Redistricting Commission. The report, authored by Dr. Christian Grose, professor of political science and public policy at USC, highlights the successes and challenges of California's 2020 statewide redistricting process, which bore the responsibility of following California's 2010 best-in-the-nation showing and was conducted entirely during the pandemic. The report also offers detailed recommendations for strengthening the upcoming 2030 redistricting cycle.
 - The Promise of Fair Maps, California's 2020 Local Redistricting Cycle:

Lessons Learned and Future Reforms, which evaluates the effectiveness of the FAIR MAPS Act and related independent redistricting reforms aimed at encouraging meaningful public participation and promoting the adoption of local maps that better reflect and empower a jurisdiction's diverse communities.

- Free the Vote Implementation. We meet regularly with the Secretary of State to explore designating the Division of Adult Parole Operations as a National Voter Registration Act Agency. Doing so would make registering to vote much more accessible to people who are formerly incarcerated and were granted voting rights through Prop 17.
- Fighting Voter Suppression. We are working in coalition with other organizations to advocate against dangerous actions by the Shasta County Board of Supervisors that were fueled by mis- and dis-information and election denialism.
- Our Advocacy Interest Groups are growing in many areas, including Criminal Justice, Healthcare, Housing and Homelessness, Open Government, Climate Change, and Water - check the list on our website to join one! They are the perfect place to become educated in issue areas.

A WORD OF THANKS

None of this would be possible without the tireless work of our advocacy team and grassroots leaders. Thank you all for helping us significantly impact the well-being of Californians.



LOOKING FORWARD

We have a big year planned ahead and rely on the generosity of League members to sustain our advocacy programs and services. The League is dependent on member donations and your support is what allows us to achieve these goals. Join us in giving and donate to the Action Fund on our website.

Sponsored Two-Year Bills

The following sponsored measures were introduced this year but will become active in January 2024.

- ACA 4 (Bryan) is a constitutional amendment to restore voting rights to people who are currently incarcerated, Because mass incarceration disproportionately impacts Black, Latino/a/x and Indigenous communities, this is both a voting rights and racial justice issue. The League was born from the suffrage movement and this is a critical measure to achieve full suffrage. It is also the next logical step after working to successfully pass Prop 17, which restored the right to vote to Californians who have completed their prison term.
- SCA 1 (Newman) is a constitutional amendment to adjust how state-level recall elections are conducted, so that only one question will appear on a recall ballot asking a voter to decide whether an elected official should be recalled from office. If a recall is successful, the official will be replaced in a manner consistent with existing law if the official were to leave the office for any other reason. This will simplify a process that is confusing for voters and reduce the risk of abuse of the recall election by special interests.

Ballot Measures

The November 2024 ballot is anticipated to include, in addition to ACA 1 and ACA 13 referenced above, the following legislatively-referred constitutional amendments that the League lobbied to pass:

 SCA 2 (Allen), to repeal Article 34 of the California Constitution, thereby removing legal impediments to building low-income and public housing in our cities. Eradicating this antiquated 1950 provision will help California move past redlining and segregation and foster the construction of affordable housing.

• ACA 5 (Low), would amend the California Constitution to repeal Proposition 8's unconstitutional, discriminatory ban on same-sex marriage and provide that the right to marry is a fundamental right.

Shrinking California's Voter Participation Gap

Despite the fact that we are a state where underrepresented groups are a majority, and have recently passed laws designed to remove impediments and promote access to voting, there are significant disparities in participation among youth and voters of color compared to our older, non-Hispanic white population.

In 2022, the League led a coalition in a first-of-its-kind Voter Education & Outreach Legislative Budget Request, which was championed by a group of legislators. The idea is to use robust voter education and outreach as a tool to shrink the participation gap and create a more representative democracy. We worked with the Secretary of State, the Governor's office, and other stakeholders to build support, and while we were unable to get the funding incorporated into either the 2022 or 2023 budget, this is a long term effort and we developed some key relationships and a solid foundation on which to continue the advocacy in 2024.

We know that 2024 will be here in the blink of an eye, and are ready, focused and determined. The LWVC never wavers in our commitment to empower voters and defend democracy, even as we pause to reflect on another monumental year of strong work. Thank you to our Leaguers who show up for democracy and support the LWVC every day. Onward!

> Scan QR code to read our Bill Status Report:



Event Recap

2023 LWVC Convention

Last May, over 230 League members convened at the Hyatt Regency Downtown SOMA Hotel in San Francisco for our biennial convention. Membership delegates meet every other year to conduct business as outlined by the bylaws. They vote and approve the LWVC slate of nominees, the two-year budget, the bylaws amendments (if any), and program/issues.

But just as important, we gather to inspire and empower Californians to increase their active and informed participation in civic life. The three-day event also provided workshops, League-led caucuses, and opportunities to network with other League members from across California.

Attendees also got to hear from amazing speakers like Cheryl Boudreau (UC Davis), Cathy Darling Allen (Shasta County Clerk/Registrar of Voters), and Lisa García Bedolla (UC Berkeley). We had a panel discussion titled "Driving Impact: The Importance of Collaboration" which featured Assemblymember Ash Kalra, Lori Pesante (Dolores Huerta Foundation), Thanh Tran (Documentarian, Organizer), and Taina Vargas (Initiate Justice Action).

Awards were given to three Leagues whose work made an exemplary impact in their communities.

- Making Democracy Work Award LWV Solano County
- Leaning into League Power Award LWV San Luis Obispo County
- Leaning into League Possibilities Award LWV San Francisco

We look forward to the next LWVC Convention in 2025!





Drag for Democracy

Thank you to everyone who joined us for Drag for Democracy! Together, we celebrated people exemplifying the values and strength of our democracy through their work in advocacy and activism for LGBTQ+ people, rights, and equality. The League of Women Voters of California and the League of Women Voters of San Francisco co-hosted this fabulous event to honor community members making democracy work as they build justice and equity in California. The evening glittered with stunning performances, beautiful recognitions of our honorees, rooftop views of the San Francisco Bay, and of course dancing. We could not have accomplished this without the support of our incredible sponsors, performers, event planning committee, and honorary advisory council. For a list of all who contributed to Drag for Democracy, and to see the event photos, visit DragForDemocracy.org.



Leaguers in Action

Laura D. Hernandez

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Committee Chair for the LWVC

DE&I and Social Racial Justice Co-Chair for the League of Women Voters of Ventura County



Laura's family is from Mexico and migrated to California in the early 1900's. Her father was a Lutheran Pastor and her mother worked very hard to raise seven children. Both her parents taught her the value of civic engagement, the importance of voting, and the benefits of a good education. Years ago, she heard on the news that women were not turning out at the polls to vote. Realizing the voting power of women, she became interested in getting out the vote. When she learned of the League of Women Voters, she immediately identified with its core values to empower voters and defend democracy.

The League of Women Voters matters to her because today, we are at a critical turning point in our history as a democracy. Despite the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, today, many Americans are still without full voting rights. Voter suppression efforts continue to disproportionately target voters by creating voter ID laws, limiting access to polling places, purging of voter rolls, intimidating voters, discouraging early voting, and spreading disinformation campaigns. As a result, people of color and other marginalized groups, especially women, are still underrepresented in elected positions; shut out of most of the top jobs; paid less than their male counterparts and denied bodily autonomy.

The League of Women Voters matters to her because they encourage informed and active participation in government, they work to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influence public policy through education and advocacy. Most importantly, they work hard to defend our democracy.

Laura serves as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Committee Chair for the LWVC, and serves as the DE&I and Social Racial Justice Co-Chair for the League of Women Voters of Ventura County.

Laura's most admired women include:

- Dolores Huerta Labor Leader
- Ruth Bader Ginsburg Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States
- Miriam Hernandez Award winning Journalist and her sister

Laura's favorite quote:

"Whatever you choose to do, leave tracks. That means don't do it just for yourself. You will want to leave the world a little better for your having lived."

-Ruth Bader Ginsburg

What do you want to be remembered for?

"I want to be most remembered for my professional career in emergency management, serving over 40 years in local government, and helping the League of Women Voters become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization."

League Updates

Meet the Newest (Returning) League Team Member



Adrianna Champagne Zamora

Public Policy & Organizing Manager

We're so happy to welcome back a familiar face to our team! Adrianna Champagne-Zamora rejoined the League as our Public Policy & Organizing Manager. She originally joined us as our third Trudy Schafer Fellow for Public Policy, so her hard work and passion for issues like housing and the environment made her the perfect fit for this new position. Adrianna was raised in Vallejo and graduated from UC Davis with a degree in Political Science and a focus on California state policy. In her free time, Adrianna is an avid rock climber and loves to spend time outdoors camping, backpacking, and hiking.



Drag for Democracy Fun



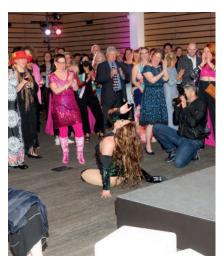
















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Show Up for Democracy - Donate Today

These are trying times for our democracy. But, the League was forged through grit and determination. We were born to empower voters and defend Democracy. We are here to make sure every person can access Democracy and use it to build the future they want to see in this country, in this state, and in their communities. And we will keep that work going. Showing up for democracy means being ready for these elections. It means supporting the LWVC so we can stand for safe and secure elections and fight misand disinformation by getting our election materials into the hands of voters. Our democracy needs you. Donate at lwvc.org/donate2023

Donate Online

Support during this time is more important than ever. Support the LWVC during this crucial time: <u>lwvc.org/donate</u>.

Become a Monthly Donor

Becoming a monthly donor gives us a voice. Together, we can ensure elections are free, fair, accessible, and reduce the influence of money in our elections. Become a monthly donor at lwvc.org/monthly.

Honor a Loved One

Send a card to someone you care about in honor of a birthday, in memory of someone's life, or for any special reason. More at www.org/tribute.

Legacy Giving

Help us unlock democracy for future generations of Californians by including the League in your estate planning: <u>lwvc.org/legacy</u>.