

# DEMOCRACY WORKS

FALL/WINTER 2024



**LWV** LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS'  
OF CALIFORNIA

The U.S. Senate Candidate Forum, sponsored by the LWVCEF, ABC7 Los Angeles, and Univision. Pictured (left to right): Abril Villanueva (Volunteer), Carolina Goodman (Volunteer), Renee Leask (Volunteer), Marc Brown (ABC7 Eyewitness News Anchor), Dr. Ninotchka McTaggart (LWVC Board Member), and Alejandra Ramirez-Zarate (LWVC Board Member).





# Direct Line



**Chris Carson**  
*President*

We find ourselves in a moment both familiar and new—a place where our rights are under threat, our democracy is strained, and the path forward feels daunting. But even now, our resolve stands firm.

Democracy has faltered before, and we've seen the grit and determination of Leaguers rise time and again to protect and support her. This is why we're here. Democracy begins at home, and our grassroots organizing will not stop. In this year's Democracy Works, we'll celebrate our accomplishments and gather strength to keep moving forward together.

I'm in awe of what we've achieved this year. Although we all hold immense uncertainty right now, I feel such pride in the groundswell of grassroots energy—much of it powered by women—that emerged across California over the past year.

Election years keep the LWVC busy, and the renewed

enthusiasm for democracy fueled our efforts even more. Our production of the Easy Voter Guide reached new heights, with thousands distributed across libraries, food banks, health clinics, and more. I'm also deeply grateful for the tireless dedication of our VOTE411 volunteers, who helped make critical voting information widely accessible.

This year also brought a record workload for our advocacy team as we co-sponsored numerous bills. You'll read about our legislative successes, including the Peace Act, which protects voters and election workers from threats and intimidation. We were proud to support this bill and others that safeguard voting rights.

The story of democracy has no beginning and no end—it's a story the League entered over 100 years ago and one we protect to this day. Serving as your LWVC President is part of my journey in defending democracy, and your involvement in the League is part of yours.

As we step into the next chapter, we need all of us to stay involved—through donations, volunteering, or advocacy. Together, we stand strong with the LWVC.



## Stephanie Doute

*Executive Director*

I'm writing this on November 8, just three days following the 2024 election. In this moment, like so many of you, my head and heart are full of a cacophony of noise - emotions, reflections, worries, and plans all bouncing off of each other. By the time you read this, we will have all started truly processing these things and putting back on our armor to do what's next.

Because I remain clear eyed about the role of the League and the strength of our members. Collectively, we have lived through and fought through hard times. We have faced political headwinds, misogyny, violence - all of it. Our histories are long. Our stories, plentiful. Our work, enduring and persistent.

Where we are right now doesn't take away from the work we have done in the past year. We have accomplished so much this past year at the LWVC, and I hope that you will take the time to read this report and see how much we have done to advance our state and our communities. From working to advance access to affordable housing, to securing our elections, on climate change, to fighting mis/disinformation and AI - we have been at the helm of some of the most critical issues in California. This is our story - and nothing can take away from it - and nothing can stop us from continuing to write it. This is what strengthens our state and our futures, here in California.

I am so proud of everyone across this state who worked with us to doggedly advocate for policies that build better, safer, stronger, communities for everyone who lives here. That work is more important than it has ever been. Who worked to ensure that every voter was registered and had access to the tools and resources they needed to participate and cast a ballot. Who gave their all to get our every vote. We spent thousands and thousands of hours collectively serving our communities and the people of California. Thank you.

And our work will persist. As we look at the landscape ahead and determine where and how the League shows up, and what our work looks like in the future - we will be needed. Our communities will need us. Our state will need us. People who are less safe than they were a year ago - they will need us. And we will show up. Because that's what we do. Because the League has never stood down and shied away from our values, our positions, and the future we want to build.

I want to encourage you all to lean into your community right now. Your League community, your local community. Lean into the people you love, and who matter to you. And rest if you need to. Because progress is born of pain and love and an unwavering light of hope. And we are going to need to rest now and take care of ourselves and each other, embrace our pain and love, so we can keep forging ahead. We will find our grit and our perseverance in our love for each other and our communities.

Our democracy doesn't end here. Our stories do not end here. Our love of community does not end here. We just begin a new chapter - together. Enduring and persistent.

In League,  
Stephanie

WINNER 2024





# Year In Review

Our team may be small, but our impact is powerful—especially in the California Capitol. In fact, CalMatters recently ranked the League of Women Voters of California as the third most effective advocacy organization in the state, with an impressive 85% of our policy goals achieved. In a state packed with well-funded policy groups, the League's grassroots strength and commitment to equity keep us at the forefront.

We are excited to share with you our hard-earned victories, some unfortunate defeats, and a preview of some of our goals for the new two-year cycle beginning in 2025. You will also learn about some of the work that we do outside the legislature.

## OUR BIGGEST DEMOCRACY WINS IN A CHALLENGING BUDGET YEAR

Despite a challenging state budget, 5,500 bills were introduced during the 2023-2024 legislative cycle. Many didn't pass, and the Governor vetoed 1 in 5 bills, often citing budget concerns. Still, we remained steadfast in defending democracy and successfully advocated for the following bills.

- **AB 2642 (Berman)**, The PEACE Act, adds protections for poll workers and allows people to sue in state court if they are intimidated or threatened around elections. The law also presumes that carrying firearms near election workers or voting activities is a form of intimidation.
- **SB 1174 (Min)** blocks cities from passing measures that restrict voting rights. Voter ID laws disproportionately impact low-income people, seniors, those with disabilities, and people of color.
- **SCA 1 (Newman)** is a constitutional amendment, co-sponsored by the LWVC, that makes California's recall elections more democratic and fair. SCA 1 removes the second recall question about a replacement candidate and ensures that if a recall succeeds, a new election will decide the replacement with majority support.
- **AB 2127 (Berman)**, another LWVC co-sponsored bill, keeps the New Motor Voter Task Force active for another five years, until January 2030. This extension lets the task force keep improving voter registration at the DMV.

- **SB 977 (Laird)** requires San Luis Obispo county to create a Citizens Redistricting Commission to set district boundaries fairly and transparently. The League has strongly supported fair redistricting, including last year when the San Luis Obispo League intervened in a lawsuit that led to a fairer district map.

## Defending Against Deception

The LWVC fights mis/dis/mal information in all its forms. In an ongoing effort to address this, we supported two bills around deceptive content.

- **AB 2655 (Berman)**, or the Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act requires large online platforms to block or clearly label false or edited election content before and after an election. It also requires platforms to let users report fake or misleading information during these times. The bill is facing a court challenge, but we continue to support it as a way to protect voters.
- **AB 2839 (Pellerin)** extends the time before an election when it's illegal to knowingly spread false or misleading information about a candidate from 60 to 120 days. It also allows elected officials, candidates, and elections officials to take legal action to stop the spread of deceptive content.

## THE LOSSES IN PROTECTING DEMOCRACY

Alongside our successes were some tough losses this session. The hardest were setbacks in voting rights for people in jails, and restoration of voting rights. The League is committed to ensuring voting rights for all eligible voters, and we will keep fighting to restore rights for people in prison and access for people in jails.

- **AB 544 (Bryan)** proposed a pilot for in-person voting in three county jails to support eligible voters who often lack information or resources to vote. Unfortunately, Governor Newsom vetoed AB 544.
- **ACA 4 (Bryan)** would have restored the right to vote for people currently serving a state or federal prison sentence for a felony. Due to a challenging environment for bills touching on criminal justice reform, the legislation did not move forward.

## Other Democracy losses this session include:

- **AB 886** and **SB 1327** allowed us to engage the new national position on local news. **AB 886** would have required platforms like Google and Meta to pay digital journalism providers, while **SB 1327** proposed a fee on large internet companies to fund local journalism. Although these bills didn't pass, Governor Newsom and





Assemblymember Wicks reached a compromise to provide subsidies to local newsrooms based on their number of editorial staff, not their web traffic or link counts. This approach aims to protect local journalism without threatening editorial independence or prompting Google or Meta to remove news from their platforms.

- **AB 884 (Low)** aimed to improve language access in elections, requiring counties to provide translated ballots to more language communities. With California's high number of households speaking languages other than English, this bill would have helped more people vote—but it was vetoed.
- **AB 270 (Lee)**, co-sponsored by the League, sought to put a measure on the 2026 ballot to repeal California's ban on public campaign financing. This would reduce special interest influence and create fairer conditions for candidates. Unfortunately, it stalled, but we plan to reintroduce it in 2025.

### Housing Wins Build on Prior Bills

This year's housing legislation focused on strengthening and clarifying existing laws. Among the bills we supported that passed are:

- **AB 1893 (Wicks)** helps implement the "Builder's Remedy," which lets developers skip some local zoning rules to build housing if a city isn't meeting state housing requirements.
- **SB 450 (Atkins)** updates **SB 9** from 2021 by setting deadlines for project reviews, removing

some project requirements, and adding state enforcement. **SB 9** was meant to help create more affordable housing by letting homeowners split their lot and build two homes on each part, but local issues slowed progress. SB 450 aims to remove these barriers.

- **SB 1037 (Wiener)** addresses cities and counties that ignore state housing laws, causing delays in building much-needed housing, especially affordable projects. This bill introduces quicker, predictable penalties for breaking these laws to keep housing projects on track.

### Climate & Water

Legislation around climate change brought both good news with a victory for the environment and consumer protection, and disappointment in a veto that would have protected clean and safe water in California. **AB 660 (Irwin)** will standardize food labels in California to use clear terms for quality and safety dates, reducing confusion about "sell by," "use by," and "best by" labels. **AB 828 (Connolly)** was vetoed, but would have protected water access for disadvantaged communities and managed wetlands by offering relief from pumping cuts and requiring impact studies in Groundwater Sustainability Plans.

### Criminal Justice

Despite setbacks on jail voting and rights restoration, we celebrated two wins. **AB 1186 (Bonta)** eliminates restitution fines for juveniles and cancels any unpaid balances after 10 years, including collection fees, and **SB 1001 (Skinner)** clarifies criteria for determining intellectual disability in criminal cases, making people with intellectual disabilities ineligible for the death penalty. **SB 94 (Cortese)** sadly did not make it through the legislature. Since 2023, we supported **SB 94**, which would have allowed judges to review old sentences and consider rehabilitation for parole eligibility. Unfortunately, the bill faced pushback and didn't pass.

### Education

This session, our advocacy led to two wins in education: **AB 1825 (Muratsuchi)**, which prohibits public libraries from banning or censoring books based on content, ideology, or viewpoints, and **SB 98 (Portantino)**, which initiates a study to look at improving equitable school funding by shifting from an attendance to an enrollment model in K-12 schools.





We also continued advocating for funding equity, pushing for an equity formula in this year's bond measure (**Proposition 2**). Although we didn't succeed in adding this formula, we supported **Prop 2** because a lack of funding would harm all students. We will keep advocating for this issue in future bond measures.

## LOOKING FORWARD

As we wrap up the two-year legislative cycle, our sights are set on the 2025 session. With elections for 20 state Senate and all 80 Assembly seats in November 2024, the legislative landscape will shift. We already know that our state Senate will, for the first time, be comprised of at least half women. And depending on some undecided contests, the full state Legislature could reach gender parity. The state budget is expected to face continued challenges, as predicted by the Legislative Analyst Office.

We're actively discussing 2025 legislation with our partners and plan to push for key reforms, including a 2026 ballot measure to end the public campaign financing ban and reintroducing a jail voting pilot bill.

Check out our Advocacy Interest Groups on topics like Criminal Justice, Healthcare, Housing, Climate, and Water. These groups are excellent for getting involved and staying informed on key issues.



## BEYOND BILLS

Our work goes well beyond passing laws. We advise state agencies to better serve Californians, help make sure new laws are implemented effectively, and educate others on advocacy. Here are just a few of our projects:

- Voter Education and Outreach:** California's voters don't fully reflect the state's diversity due to factors like historical disenfranchisement, limited election information, and doubts about voting impact. Since 2021, the League has led a Voter Education and Outreach Coalition to close the gap, and this year advised on a study by the Data for Social Good Foundation that outlines a voter education program to bring over 7 million new voters into the electorate. The study is available to read at [LWVC.org](https://lwvc.org). In the coming year, we'll engage with state agencies and policymakers to address these issues.
- Motor Voter Task Force Updates:** In 2023, we started our term on the Secretary of State's Motor Voter Task Force to oversee the DMV's voter registration program, established in 2021 by AB 796 (Berman). The 2023 report highlights voter registration data from the DMV Motor Voter Program, including total registrations, language preferences, and opt-out numbers. A proposal to add race and ethnicity to DMV registration faced budget issues, though it would help address data gaps on race and ethnicity in state voter

registration. This remains a discussion topic in 2024.

- **Sheriff Oversight & Accountability:** Our Criminal Justice Interest Group has been busy this year! They helped start the California Coalition for Sheriff Oversight (CCSO) and hold monthly meetings with expert speakers. Their main goal is to gather resources to support local Leagues' work on sheriff oversight. The group also hopes to create a scorecard for all 58 California counties in the future.
- **Vote with the League:** To create "Vote with the League" for each election, we dig deep into each state ballot measure. Our team of volunteer experts analyzes every detail, aligning it with League positions. The Legislation Committee then debates and refines those analyses before sending recommendations to the Board for final approval. Once a position is set, we craft clear, easy-to-share guides for the public and more detailed resources for local Leagues to use in their communities.
- **Election Protection:** The LWVC is part of a statewide election protection coalition with a rapid response network that allows us to monitor and address threats to fair elections in real time. This network helps us quickly assess and respond to any issues, sometimes reaching out to local Leagues if concerns arise in their areas. Local Leagues also play a vital role by reporting problems, which lets us mobilize the coalition to take action when needed. This work is essential for safeguarding the integrity of our elections.
- **Attorney General Advisory Group:** The state League is part of the Attorney General's community advisory group, where we offer feedback on justice-related issues that align with our work. We also use this opportunity to highlight areas we believe should be prioritized.

- **Future of California Elections Network:**

We lead the Future of California Elections Network, bringing together diverse community organizations to collaborate on election issues. For the past two years, we've also planned and hosted the Network's annual conference.

- **Voter's Choice Act (VCA) Ambassador Program:**

The Secretary of State's Ambassador Program partners with counties, community organizations, and leaders to improve voter education and close participation gaps. As part of this effort, we attend meetings to support Ambassadors, who serve as trusted messengers in their communities.

This is just a snapshot of the many ways we work to strengthen democracy and create lasting change. From advising state agencies to leading coalitions, our efforts extend far beyond passing laws, addressing a broad range of issues that impact Californians. Together with our partners, we continue to advocate for justice, equity, and a more inclusive future for all.

## A WORD OF THANKS

Thank you to our dedicated advocacy team and grassroots leaders. We couldn't make this impact without your tireless support. With 2025 around the corner, we remain committed to empowering voters and defending democracy. Thank you to our Leaguers who stand up for democracy every day. Onward!

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

Big changes and challenges lie ahead. We rely on member support to fund our advocacy programs. Help us achieve our goals by donating to the Action Fund.

Follow this QR code for a complete legislative wrap up!







# 2024 Voter Engagement

## Empowering Voters: Reflecting on Our Impact

As the dust settles from the November 2024 General Election, it's important that we reflect on the really critical voter engagement efforts the LWVC carried out over the past year. We are deeply grateful to our dedicated volunteers and partners for tirelessly ensuring that non-partisan information reached voters across California.

In 2024, the LWVCEF's voter engagement efforts included:

- **Unveiling the Easy Voter Guide (EVG):** We launched the Easy Voter Guide in five languages—English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese—crafted to deliver "snack-sized" information that simplifies the complexities of 10 state propositions. With over 118,000 printed copies distributed in partnership with the CA State Library and community organizations, we ensured that vital information was accessible to every voter. For those who prefer digital, the online PDF was just a click away at [easyvoterguide.org](https://easyvoterguide.org).
- **Launched VOTE411:** Our comprehensive online election guide, VOTE411, continues to be an invaluable resource for California voters, offering nonpartisan insights into candidates and measures at federal, state, and local levels. Thanks to the dedication of **over 120 volunteers**, we reached out to more than **4,800 candidates** and entered detailed information on **600 local measures**. VOTE411 also offers essential guidance on polling places, ballot return processes, and more. Dive into the wealth of information at [vote411.org](https://vote411.org).

- **Engaging Communities Across California:** Local Leagues didn't just sit back—they sprang into action by hosting candidate forums and Pros & Cons presentations that empowered communities statewide. Our Pros & Cons PDF, available in both English and Spanish, provides a clear and unbiased overview of state-level ballot measures, arming voters with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.
- **Expansive Resource Distribution:** Our outreach efforts turned the Easy Voter Guides into a lifeline for voters. Highlights include:
  - **LWV Santa Barbara** distributed **9,000 guides** through local food banks and libraries.
  - **LWV San Diego** provided **5,000 guides** to libraries, community groups, and jails.
  - Our partner, **AltaMed** offered **30,000 guides** in English and Spanish at their clinics.
  - Support from numerous **election offices and adult literacy programs across 103 libraries** statewide.

As we close out this election year, we want to celebrate the unwavering commitment of everyone who helped us reach voters across California. Amid the challenges and uncertainties, your dedication ensured that communities had the resources they needed to cast informed votes and participate in our democracy. Together, we made a powerful impact—reminding us that even in turbulent times, our collective efforts can shine a light on the path forward. Thank you for standing with us, empowering voters, and defending our democracy. Here's to continuing this vital work in the year ahead.

# Leaguers in Action

Connie Guerrero



Connie stands out as a dynamic force within her community, driven by an unwavering passion for Community Engagement, Education, and fostering Latino Representation and Leadership. At the helm of the League of Women Voters South San Mateo County Chapter, she has spearheaded impactful voter registration and education initiatives, demonstrating her commitment to enhancing civic participation and ensuring that every voice is heard.

## **When did you become a Leaguer?**

I joined the League in 2021, following an invitation from a dedicated League volunteer who recognized my passion for civic engagement and proposed that I take on the leadership role of president. This invitation was not the beginning of my journey but a continuation of a longstanding commitment to fostering voter registration and education within our community.

## **What did you dream of doing when you were young?**

Growing up in an environment where material possessions were scarce, my dreams were shaped

by the values and experiences of my family life. My parents, embodying the epitome of hard work and dedication, tirelessly ensured that we had the essentials—shelter and sustenance. Observing their relentless effort and sacrifice instilled in me a profound respect for the virtues of hard work and the significance of family.

Amidst this backdrop, my childhood dreams were not just about personal achievements but also about fostering a sense of continuity and connection. I dreamt of a future filled with joyous gatherings, where the warmth of our familial bonds and the beauty of our cultural heritage would be celebrated.

My business career has been fulfilling, but the actual realization of my dream lies in the community that has enveloped me—a community that has grown to become a second family.

## **Brag about yourself. How has your work influenced the League?**

I have profoundly influenced the League, especially in our collective efforts to reach underserved communities and encourage voter participation. Recognizing the importance of inclusivity and representation in the democratic process, I have steered the League towards more proactive, targeted outreach initiatives that resonate with these communities. This has involved not just traditional voter registration drives, but also educational programs designed to demystify the voting process, clarify the importance of each vote, and highlight the impact of civic participation on local and national issues.

By fostering partnerships with local organizations and leveraging media platforms for broader engagement, I've helped to amplify our message and reach. Moreover, my approach has been characterized by a willingness to listen and learn from the communities we aim to serve.



# League Updates

## Meet the Newest League Team Members



**Renee Rocha**  
*Finance Manager*

Renee Rocha joined the League of Women Voters of California in June as Finance Manager. Renee's financial background and passion for serving her community led her to nonprofit finance in 2016. Renee utilizes her financial and business background to continuously strive for the creation and sustainability of efficient

and progressive financial and administrative support systems, ensuring continued accessibility to critical services and information for our community. She is honored to be a part of the LWVC and the mission we uphold. Please join us in welcoming her to the LWVC!



**Savannah Jorgensen**  
*Public Policy and Organizing Manager*

We're excited to introduce Savannah Jorgensen as our new Public Policy and Organizing Manager! In this role, Savannah will serve as a key connector between our dedicated volunteers and our advocacy efforts in Sacramento, amplifying our mission to empower voters and protect democracy.

Before joining our team, Savannah made her mark as the Legislative Coordinator for the Lutheran Office of Public Policy-California, where she honed her skills in advocacy and public engagement. She holds a master's

degree in Atmospheric Science from Texas A&M University, and brings her passion for climate justice and gender equity to our work, inspiring us all to make meaningful changes in our communities.

When she's not busy championing important issues, Savannah loves to spend her time outdoors hiking, belting out her favorite tunes, and supporting her beloved Green Bay Packers.

Please join us in giving Savannah a warm welcome to the League!



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### Show Up for Democracy - Donate Today

Right now, many communities across the country are living with a profound sense of uncertainty of what the future holds for them and for our democracy. In times like these, the stories we tell are more than words; they are acts of defiance, courage, and survival. And no one can take away your story. By supporting the LWVC Education Fund, your donation gives these stories the power to reach far and wide, to educate, inspire, and encourage action. Each contribution fuels our work to protect democracy, reminding us all of the unbreakable spirit and relentless hope that keep us fighting forward. This is how we resist, how we protect, and how we will save our democracy—one story at a time. Donate at [lwvc.org/donate2024](http://lwvc.org/donate2024)

### Donate Online

Your support is more important than ever. Help the LWVC during this crucial time: [lwvc.org/donate2024](http://lwvc.org/donate2024). When you donate, you can share a story that fuels your commitment to democracy. Stories are optional, but welcome!

### Become a Monthly Donor

Becoming a monthly donor gives us the power to amplify our stories. Together, we can ensure that every voice is heard, every story is shared, and that democracy is protected for generations to come. Become a monthly donor at [lwvc.org/monthly](http://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 [lwvc.org/tribute](http://lwvc.org/tribute).

### Legacy Giving

Help us protect democracy for future generations of Californians by including the League in your estate planning: [lwvc.org/legacy](http://lwvc.org/legacy).