

2024 Advocacy Wrap-Up



In June, CalMatters published [an analysis](#) that identified the League of Women Voters of California as the third most effective advocacy organization in the state, achieving 85% of our desired policy outcomes by that point toward the end of the legislative session. As Stephanie Doute, the LWVC Deputy Director, noted at the time:

I have said time and again that the League is powerful and that the voices of women are powerful drivers of equity-based policy change in California. ...California is a big state, with a lot of well financed organizations working on policy - but the League rises to the top in effectiveness because we are grassroots, and we stand firmly in advancing equity for all people.

The Advocacy Wrap-Up offers a look into the work that we have been doing in 2024. Despite the challenging budget situation facing the state, the California Legislature introduced over 5,500 bills during the two-year legislative cycle from 2023-2024. Many of those did not make it through both houses, and the Governor [made heavy use](#) of his veto pen on the 1,206 that did reach his desk in 2024 - most often citing budgetary concerns in his vetoes. The League took positions on 106 bills during this two-year period

In this year's Advocacy Wrap-Up, you can read highlights of our hard-earned victories, some unfortunate defeats, and a preview of some of our advocacy goals for the new

two-year cycle beginning in 2025. We also highlight some of the advocacy work that we do outside the legislative context. As always, detailed letters related to all of the bills on which we took positions may be found in our [Bill Status Report](#). And you can [sign up](#) to receive our monthly e-news to keep you abreast of developments.

OUR BIGGEST WINS & LOSSES IN A CHALLENGING BUDGET YEAR

Protecting Democracy - The Wins

Voter Registration Gains. Governor Newsom signed [AB 2127 \(Berman\)](#), a League sponsored bill to extend the operation of the New Motor Voter Task Force for five years to January 2030. The extension will allow the task force to continue its work, avoid the rollback of critical gains that the DMV has made in increasing voter registration and keeping registrations current, and allow us to improve the system to promote more equitable access to voter registration.

The New Motor Voter Program has successfully registered over 28 million Californians through the Department of Motor Vehicles since its launch in 2018. Much of the program's success has been accomplished through a partnership between government agencies and voting rights organizations like the LWVC. That partnership was formalized through a task force that is scheduled to sunset in 2025. But the need for the task force will not end in 2025. Several important elements of the law will not go into effect until July 2025, and the task force plays a vital role in monitoring their rollout. Despite the successes of the New Motor Voter program, more than 4.6 million eligible adults in California remain unregistered. This group disproportionately includes youth, people with disabilities, Black and Brown people, those with limited English proficiency, and those with low income. The task force plays a critical role in recommending solutions to facilitate the registration of underrepresented communities.

Recall Reform. A key victory in our democracy efforts in 2024 was [SCA 1 \(Newman\)](#). We co-sponsored this constitutional amendment to ensure that recall elections for statewide and legislative offices in California are democratic, fair, and free from political manipulation. Currently, voters are presented with two questions - whether an officer should be recalled and who should replace the officeholder. SCA 1 removes the second question for all statewide and legislative recall elections and requires that in the event of a successful recall, a replacement candidate is selected with majority support in a separate, subsequent election. This constitutional amendment, expected to appear on the November 2026 ballot, will help to eliminate recalls that are frivolous or degrade democratic legitimacy.

Protection at the Polls. The signing of the California PEACE Act, [AB 2642 \(Berman\)](#), a bill the League advocated strongly to pass, makes California a national leader in protecting voters and election administrators against intimidation and violence. It creates a new civil cause of action in state court against anyone who engages in intimidating, threatening, or coercive behavior towards election workers or voters. Additionally, the bill creates a legal presumption that people who carry firearms around election activities or workers are engaged in such intimidation, threats, or coercion. A [survey](#) conducted in May 2024 by The Brennan Center found that more than 1 in 3 local elections officials reported experiencing threats, harassment, or abuse. The PEACE Act will provide important tools to address threats, administer elections, and vote without fear. Check out LWVC's Deputy Director, Dora Rose, [testifying on AB 2642](#) at the Assembly Elections Committee hearing in April to hear more about why the bill is so critical.

Among our victories were two critical bills to fight back against election misinformation spread through deep fake and deceptive content.

- **Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act.** [AB 2655 \(Berman\)](#) requires large online platforms to block or label false or altered election-related content before and after an election. It also requires these platforms to provide ways for users to report fake or misleading content during these times. This bill is currently being challenged in court, but we remain supportive of the legislation to protect voters.
- **Controlling Deceptive Content.** [AB 2839 \(Pellerin\)](#) extends the blackout period during which it's prohibited to knowingly distribute materially deceptive content about a candidate, from 60 to 120 days before an election. It also authorizes elected officials, candidates, elections officials and others to file a civil action to stop distribution of materially deceptive content.

Voter Identification. We have seen a troubling increase in efforts to undermine elections by creating unnecessary impediments to voting in California. For example, the Huntington Beach City Council placed a voter identification measure on the March 2024 ballot, necessitating [SB 1174 \(Min\)](#) to clarify that voting rights, including voter verification, are matters of statewide concern, and that a charter city may not institute measures that burden voting rights and conflict with state law. While voter fraud is exceedingly rare, voter identification laws are calculated to disenfranchise the poor, the elderly, those with disabilities, and people of color who are statistically less likely to have, or be able to easily obtain, government-issued identification. The successful

passage of SB 1174 vindicates the principle that the right to vote should not be undermined by unnecessary Voter ID laws.

Independent Redistricting. With the signing of [SB 977 \(Laird\)](#) we welcome Independent Redistricting to San Luis Obispo County. The bill requires San Luis Obispo County to establish a Citizens Redistricting Commission to adjust district boundaries in accordance with California's local redistricting law and the FAIR Maps Act of 2023. The League supports a redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation with maximum opportunity for public engagement. The League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County has been [deeply engaged](#) in working to ensure the fairness of local redistricting. Last year, they intervened in a 2022 lawsuit regarding the fairness of the Board-approved district boundaries. The resulting settlement required San Luis Obispo County to set aside the adopted map and reconsider alternative maps from the redistricting process, one of which was later adopted.

Protecting Democracy - The Losses

Jail Voting. Our successes are tempered by a significant veto. Eligible voters held in California jails have the right to vote. However, Californians incarcerated in jails often do not know their rights or are unable to access the means to exercise them. California has a long history of denying ballot access to people who are not white. Black, Latine, Indigenous and Asian Californians have been denied equal access to voting through constitutional fiat, literacy tests, English-only ballots, and, historically, refusal of citizenship to Native Americans and Chinese. The legacy of voter disenfranchisement continues today as a disproportionate number of Black, Latine, and Indigenous people are locked up in jails and prisons. Enter [AB 544 \(Bryan\)](#), which would have created a pilot program to facilitate in-person voting in jails in three counties - San Mateo, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. We are deeply disappointed by Governor Newsom's [decision to veto AB 544](#) and will continue the very important work to ensure that all eligible voters can exercise their rights.

Other Important Democracy Bills that Died

- **Ban on Public Financing Removal.** [AB 270 \(Lee\)](#) was co-sponsored by the League. The bill would have placed a measure on the ballot in 2026 for voters to decide whether to repeal California's ban on public financing of campaigns. Money presents one of the greatest threats to representative democracy today. It distorts incentives, makes the competition among candidates inequitable, and drowns out the voices of ordinary voters. Public financing of election campaigns

reduces the influence of special interests, increases the power of small donors and ordinary voters, enables candidates to compete more equitably for public office, and diminishes barriers to entry – thereby diversifying the candidate pool. Unfortunately, AB 270 died in the [black box](#) of the Assembly Appropriations Suspense File this year. We plan to work with coalition partners to reintroduce the bill in 2025 - still in time to get the measure on the 2026 ballot.

- **Voting Rights Restoration.** [ACA 4 \(Bryan\)](#) would have restored the right to vote for people currently serving a state or federal prison sentence for a felony. Felony disenfranchisement undermines incarcerated peoples' right of citizenship and disproportionately impacts Black, Latine, and Indigenous Californians. Removing the right to vote for people in prison results in a less representative electorate. Due to a [challenging environment](#) for bills touching on criminal justice reform, the legislation did not move forward. The League will continue to fight to restore voting rights for people in prison.
- **Local News Support.** We flight tested LWVUS' [new position on local news](#) through supporting both the [California Journalism Preservation Act, AB 886 \(Wicks\)](#) and [SB 1327 \(Glazer\)](#), neither of which made it out of the legislature. The first would have required covered platforms like Google and Meta to pay into a fund to compensate digital journalism providers for accessing the providers' California-audience websites, or to participate in an arbitration process and pay the amount determined in arbitration. The second would have levied a fee on large internet companies to generate revenue to support local journalism. Instead, Governor Newsom and Assemblymember Wicks [struck a deal](#), summarized [here](#) by Rebuild Local News. While we may not agree with all their conclusions, the [Free Press](#) offers an insightful assessment of the process by which the compromise deal was struck.
- **Language Access Expansion.** In a loss for language access in elections, [AB 884 \(Low\)](#) was [vetoed](#). The bill would have made voting easier for people who speak languages other than English. California has the nation's highest proportion of households that speak a language other than English at home and millions of Californians who identify as limited-English proficient. AB 884 would have improved language assistance and required counties to provide translated ballots to smaller language communities.

Housing Wins Build on Prior Bills

Housing legislation this year focused largely on improving policy implementation. Among the bills that passed, supported by our advocacy, are:

- **Builder’s Remedy Implementation.** [AB 1893 \(Wicks\)](#) to facilitate implementation of the “Builder’s Remedy,” a law that allows developers to bypass certain local zoning laws and regulations to build housing projects when a local jurisdiction fails to meet its state-mandated housing planning requirements.
- **Housing Production Increase.** [SB 450 \(Atkins\)](#) amends [SB 9 \(2021\)](#) by setting timelines for review, removing various requirements on applicable projects, and adding state enforcement. SB 9 was designed to increase the construction of housing for those locked out of the current market by allowing homeowners to split their lot and build a duplex on each new lot. Barriers to construction emerged during local implementation, and SB 450 is designed to remove those impediments.
- **Legal Compliance.** [SB 1037 \(Wiener\)](#) Some jurisdictions have chosen to ignore various laws passed by the Legislature to address the significant need for housing in the state, and as such, the production of housing, especially affordable projects that are time-sensitive to grants and tax-credit cycles, are delayed. This bill will provide more predictable and immediate penalties for violations of state housing laws.

Climate & Water

- **Food Waste Reduction.** In a victory for the environment and consumer protection, [AB 660 \(Irwin\)](#) will require the use of California Department of Food and Agriculture specified terms to communicate quality dates and safety dates to consumers. Food waste contributes to climate change through the release of methane as it decomposes. Additionally, consumers throw away food often due to confusion around expiration labels that state “sell by,” “use by,” or “best by.” This often means that food that could still feed families is being thrown away, which is a waste of money for the consumer and does not cut down on hunger in the state. AB 660 allows for continued communication of “sell by” dates to retailers, but in a manner that is not confusing to the consumer.
- **Safe Water Access.** In less happy news, [AB 828 \(Connolly\)](#), which would have protected safe and clean water accessibility for California communities, was [vetoed](#). Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) have been found to neglect managed wetlands and small water systems serving disadvantaged communities. The bill would have provided temporary relief to small disadvantaged community water systems and managed wetlands from mandated pumping reductions and fines. Additionally, it would have required GSPs to study the impacts of their plans on such users.

Criminal Justice

- **Fine Elimination for Juveniles.** Rehabilitation is a key component of our position on criminal justice, which is why we supported [AB 1186 \(Bonta\)](#). The legislation will eliminate restitution fines for juveniles and make the outstanding balance of any restitution fines, including any collection fees, unenforceable and uncollectible 10 years after the fine was imposed. Restitution fines disproportionately impact Black, Latine, Indigenous, and other youths of color. Furthermore, since youth have very little income and financial autonomy, monetary restitution often fails to deliver meaningful, timely, or complete restoration for victims. Elimination of such fines will allow formerly convicted juveniles greater opportunities to develop financial stability and gain closure from previous offenses.
- **Protection for People with Intellectual Disabilities.** Another victory in the criminal justice space came from [SB 1001 \(Skinner\)](#). This bill clarifies the criteria for determining intellectual disability in criminal cases and will codify existing case law to make people with intellectual disabilities ineligible for the death penalty. While existing federal and state law hold that it is unconstitutional to execute a person with an intellectual disability, SB 1001 will provide people with these disabilities necessary and important safeguards that ensure their appropriate diagnosis and fair treatment in the legal process. Senator Skinner issued a powerful statement thanking Governor Newsom for his signature, saying, “It is unconstitutional to execute an intellectually disabled person in the United States. And yet because of insufficient safeguards in California’s current law, some intellectually disabled people have ended up on Death Row. In 2019, Governor Newsom took the courageous step of halting executions. His signing of SB 1001 will ensure that if a future governor reinstates death penalty executions, California will not execute people who are intellectually disabled.”
- **Judicial Review of Old Sentences.** Our victories are tempered by the failure of [SB 94 \(Cortese\)](#), a bill we have been supporting since 2023. SB 94 would have allowed judges to review old criminal sentences, taking into account mitigating factors and evidence of a person’s rehabilitation to determine whether the person has an opportunity to be evaluated for parole. The process for judicial review created by SB 94 would have restored hope and incentivized participation in rehabilitative and educational programming. SB 94 was caught up in this year’s [backlash against](#) criminal justice reform, and the bill died in the legislature.

Education

- **Freedom to Read.** With the successful passage of the [California Freedom to Read Act AB 1825 \(Muratsuchi\)](#) California public libraries will be prohibited from banning or censoring books based on their content, ideology, or the viewpoints they present. Libraries play a vital role in safeguarding intellectual freedom and ensuring access to diverse perspectives, ideas, and knowledge. By stripping shelves of literature related to particular communities we erase their existence, scrub out their history, deny their representation, lose the opportunity to expand everyone's knowledge and understanding, and participate in the marginalization of large swathes of society. Removing and banning books from public libraries are acts of government censorship and run counter to our country's commitment to freedom of expression and the right to receive information. They diminish our humanity and narrow our world view. Public libraries are crucial spaces for education, discovery, and community growth, and protecting their collections from censorship helps prevent the erosion of free expression. This bill reinforces the fundamental democratic principle that individuals should have the autonomy to read, learn, and engage with a wide array of materials, regardless of differing viewpoints or controversial topics.
- **Enrollment-Based Attendance Study.** The success of [SB 98 \(Portantino\)](#) will initiate a study to help determine whether an enrollment instead of an attendance-based K-12 student finance system would effectively redistribute resources to school districts with greater student needs. It will provide evidence to reallocate funding to enable school districts to better assist chronically absent and habitually truant students by explicitly using services and support mechanisms that have been determined to improve conditions for these students.
- **School Facility Bond Funding Formula.** The League of Women Voters of California has supported every K-14 state facilities bond measure that has been put before the voters in the last 30 years, believing that a good physical environment is crucial to learning. For the past several years we have been raising the issue of equity in funding, and advocating that the Legislature ensure that the next measure placed on California's ballot includes an equitable funding formula. You can read more details about our efforts in these letters [LWVC Letter of Concern to Governor](#) and [Coalition Equitable School Bond Alert](#). We were not successful in getting an equitable formula incorporated into this year's bond measure (Proposition 2), but we [support](#) it because providing no funding would hurt all students. We are playing the long game, and will continue our advocacy on this issue for future bond measures.

BEYOND BILLS

Our work goes far beyond legislation. Among other things, we advise state agencies to ensure they meet the needs of Californians, guide effective implementation of legislation, and provide education related to advocacy. Just a few of the projects we're involved in include:

Voter Education & Outreach. California's voting population does not fully reflect the diversity of the state's population. Reasons range from historical disenfranchisement to a lack of information about the election and a belief that their vote does not have an impact. As a result, decisions about critical issues of local and statewide importance are being made by a predominantly older, whiter electorate. In some instances, despite California's recent pro-voter reforms which were designed to remove impediments to voting and promote greater access, we have seen even greater voter participation disparities emerge.

Since 2021, the League has been leading a Voter Education and Outreach Coalition working to reduce California's voter participation gap between white and nonwhite voters. By advocating for investment in hard-to-reach voters across the state, we aim to achieve greater voter turnout and build a democracy that represents all Californians.

Over the past year we have been advisors on [this study](#) from the Data for Social Good Foundation. The study quantifies the problem and proposes a robust and comprehensive voter education and outreach program to shrink participation gaps for underrepresented groups and bring 7+ million voters into the electorate. Over the next year we plan to engage with California agencies and policymakers to seek solutions to these critical issues.

Motor Voter Task Force Updates. In 2023, we began our term on the Secretary of State's [Motor Voter Task Force](#), established by law to monitor the DMV voter registration process established in 2021 by [AB 796 \(Berman\)](#).

The [2023 annual report](#) discusses the latest voter registration trends and statistics as gleaned from the Motor Voter Program run by the DMV and SoS. Data show how many voters have been registered, voters' language preferences, and how many people opt out of the voter registration at the DMV, among other focus areas. A proposal from the task force to add race and ethnicity to the DMV registration process hit a snag in 2023. While adding race and ethnicity to the DMV registration process would conform with the optional race/ethnicity question presented on California Online Voter Registration and

help tackle the challenges of inadequate data for race and ethnicity in statewide voter registration data, the DMV and SoS raised budgetary concerns. This proposal remained a discussion topic in 2024.

Sheriff Oversight & Accountability. The Criminal Justice Interest Group has been very active this year! In fact, they have been hard at work helping to found the California Coalition for Sheriff Oversight (CCSO). They have also been holding meetings on the topic every month and bringing in speakers to inform the group. The main goal right now is to gather data and resources to support local Leagues' advocacy around sheriff oversight. Members are encouraged to refer to CCSO to access their local resources pertaining to this issue.

Check out a recent [scorecard](#) highlighting police and sheriff departments across the US. The Criminal Justice Interest Group has so far focused on the county Sheriff departments in California. It is their hope to partner with CCSO to develop a scorecard of all 58 California counties down the road. You can also watch the recording of the CCSO launch event on [YouTube](#).

Ballot Measures

In addition to all the policy work that we do, the League devotes significant resources to analyzing ballot measures and making recommendations to the public. Here's a nutshell summary of [our recommendations](#) for the November 2024 election. Since our recommendations were released, results have come in and are [summarized here](#).

- **School Bonds.** [Proposition 2](#) - Support - Prop 2 provides critical state bond funds to support construction and modernization of K-12 schools and community colleges, which has been sorely needed. While equity concerns exist in the measure's funding formula, LWVC supported Prop 2 because providing no funding would hurt all students.
- **Marriage Equality.** [Proposition 3](#) - Support - California's Constitution contains harmful and legally invalid language declaring that only marriage between a man and a woman will be recognized by the state. Prop 3 enshrines marriage equality in the California Constitution, setting a precedent that personal freedoms and civil rights are foundational and non-negotiable.
- **Climate Bonds.** [Proposition 4](#) - Support - Climate change exerts an immense toll on the economy and communities across California. Prop 4 allows the state to borrow \$10 billion for much-needed climate and environmental projects, which is crucial for mitigating the escalating costs of climate change.

- **Voting Margin for Local Bonds & Taxes.** [Proposition 5](#) - Support - Prop 5 would have reduced the voting margin necessary to approve local bonds and taxes for affordable housing, transportation, parks, and other public infrastructure from 66.7% to 55%. The League signed the formal [ballot arguments](#) in support of the measure because this amendment is essential to eliminate the anti-democratic supermajority vote requirement that hinders the approval of local housing and infrastructure bonds.
- **Involuntary Servitude.** [Proposition 6](#) - Support - California's Constitution allows involuntary servitude as a punishment for a crime, which is a profound injustice disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities by perpetuating systemic racial and economic inequalities. Prop 6 would have abolished this exception in the state's constitution and ended the archaic and unjust practice of forced labor that is tantamount to slavery.
- **Minimum Wage.** [Proposition 32](#) - Support - Prop 32 would have raised the minimum wage across the state to \$18 in 2025 and 2026, accounting for employee numbers at businesses. We supported this measure as an increased minimum wage would reduce income inequality and improve the standard of living for millions of California workers.
- **Rent Control.** [Proposition 33](#) - Neutral - Prop 33 would have expanded local authority to enact rent control on residential property. We support efforts to help resolve California's housing crisis, but since there are benefits and drawbacks to rent control, we chose to remain neutral on the measure.
- **Healthcare Provider Spending.** [Proposition 34](#) - No Position - Prop 34 restricts spending by health care providers meeting specified criteria. When the LWVC has [no position](#) relevant to a ballot measure, we offer no analysis.
- **Medi-Cal Tax.** [Proposition 35](#) - Oppose - Prop 35 changes the temporary tax that helps fund Medi-Cal to a permanent tax on Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) and requires the tax proceeds to be used to support only Medi-Cal and other health programs. The LWVC opposes this sort of ballot-box budgeting, which limits the legislature's flexibility to adjust priorities based on emerging and essential needs - including to support safety-net programs critical to low-income and underserved Californians
- **Criminal Justice Reform Rollback.** [Proposition 36](#) - Oppose - Prop 36 rolls back criminal justice reform in California by reversing key advances aimed at reducing mass incarceration and promoting rehabilitation. We are concerned that it will exacerbate existing racial and socioeconomic disparities in the criminal justice system.

LOOKING FORWARD

With the conclusion of the two-year legislative cycle, the focus shifts toward the start of the 2025 session and new two-year cycle. The legislative landscape will be different, as 20 state Senate seats and all 80 state Assembly seats are up for election in November 2024. While we don't know precisely what the budget situation will be, the [Legislative Analyst Office](#) has predicted continuing budget problems over the next few years.

Conversations within coalitions and between partners are ongoing regarding ideas for legislation and policy priorities for 2025. It can take many years to make significant policy changes, but we do not give up on key reforms. As mentioned above, we plan to continue to work to put a measure on the 2026 ballot to get rid of the state's ban on public financing of campaigns. We also plan to reintroduce a jail voting pilot bill.

Don't forget about our Advocacy Interest Groups! The groups span many policy topics, including Criminal Justice, Healthcare, Housing and Homelessness, Open Government, Climate Change, and Water - [check the list](#) to join one. They are a great 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. We are grateful to you all for helping us significantly impact the well-being of Californians.

We know that 2025 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!

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORK

A big year is ahead with the changing landscape and state budget situation. We 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.