

2025 Advocacy Wrap-Up



The 2025 Advocacy Wrap-Up captures a year when democracy itself was on the line - and the League came out swinging. As authoritarian threats grew and the very framework of our Constitution came under attack, the League of Women Voters of California met the moment.

We delivered a landmark victory by securing the placement of the California Fair Elections Act on the November 2026 ballot - giving voters the power to reclaim control over campaign financing. We also won key advances in constitutional protections, racial justice, housing and reproductive rights. Just as critically, we stopped a torrent of dangerous rollbacks in their tracks: sweeping voter ID mandates, assaults on vote-by-mail, and efforts to gut anti-corruption laws. Each was a calculated attempt to silence voices and weaken democracy. Each was defeated.

In this moment of constitutional crisis, the League proved that vigilance and action matter. And as we surge into 2026, we remain unflinching in our fight to protect voting rights, expand participation, and ensure a democracy that works for all.

This wrap-up offers just a few highlights of the first year of the two-year session. As always, detailed letters related to all of the bills on which we took action may be found in our [Bill Status Report](#). And please [sign up](#) to receive our monthly e-news to keep you abreast of developments.

HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR WINS & LOSSES IN A RAPID RESPONSE YEAR

Protecting Democracy - The Wins

Campaign Finance Victory. For decades the LWVC has fought to end California's ban on public financing. We are one step closer now that our sponsored bill, the [California Fair Elections Act SB 42 \(Umberg\)](#), will place a measure on the November 2026 ballot for voters to decide. Elections should put voters - not big donors - at the center of our democracy so that candidates can spend more time listening to constituents instead of chasing money. Public financing opens the door for women, people of color, and working-class Californians to have a fairer shot at running and winning, and it strengthens the very foundation of our democracy. Get ready to campaign to pass the California Fair Elections Act in November 2026!

Defending the Constitution. In the face of increasingly dangerous authoritarian threats to our democracy, LWVC sponsored [SJR 1 \(Wiener\)](#), which rescinds California's seven prior calls for an Article V Constitutional Convention. As Dora Rose, our Deputy Director [testified](#), in today's political climate, where extremist forces are actively seeking to undermine democracy, California's open calls for a convention left open a direct path to chaos. There are no rules to limit what can be proposed or changed in such a convention and even one called for a specific purpose could spin out of control. SJR 1's successful passage will protect our most fundamental rights to safety, health, family, and democracy. We await the rescission's publication in the federal Congressional Record.

Independent Redistricting in Merced County. Fair maps are the bedrock of fair representation. [AB 1441 \(Soria\)](#) establishes an Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission for Merced County, ensuring that future supervisorial districts are drawn transparently and free from partisan gerrymandering. Savannah Jorgensen, the League's Public Policy and Organizing Manager, [testified in support](#) of this legislation. She noted our longtime advocacy in this area and that the bill is a natural extension of the state-level Citizens Redistricting Commission and the FAIR MAPS Act. The victory would not have been possible with strong advocacy at the county level by the Merced County League. AB 1441 represents a local victory with statewide significance, showing the movement of reform between the statehouse and counties across California.

Early Voting. With [AB 1249 \(Wilson\)](#), California took another step forward in making democracy more accessible. The bill requires all non-Voter's Choice Act counties to provide at least one early voting site on the Saturday before statewide elections and

removes barriers to ballot return at elections offices and satellite sites. Savannah Jorgensen [testified in favor](#) of this measure, stressing that early voting opportunities are crucial for shrinking participation gaps, especially for young voters and voters of color.

Safeguarding California's Elections. When democracy is under threat, the League responds swiftly. [SB 851 \(Cervantes & Pellerin\)](#), introduced late in the session, protects voters, elections officials, and the integrity of California's elections amid rising misinformation, intimidation, and federal interference. The law bars unauthorized armed personnel - including federal agents - from polling places and elections offices, strengthens state oversight of federal lawsuits targeting local elections, closes loopholes on deceptive ballot collection, and affirms that certifying results is a ministerial duty, not a political choice. With its urgency clause, these protections took effect immediately—well before the next statewide election. We mobilized rapid support, making clear that Californians must be able to cast ballots free from fear and manipulation.

Protecting Democracy - LWVC Steps Up to Quash Bad Bills Early

Early this cycle we confronted a wave of proposals threatening to roll back hard-won voting rights safeguards that illustrated the extent to which California's democracy was under attack. The League rose to the challenge: mobilizing quickly, educating lawmakers, and building coalitions to stop these dangerous measures before they could gain traction.

Voter ID. The most sweeping attack to voting rights this cycle came in the form of [AB 25 \(DeMaio\)](#). Framed as an "Election Integrity Act," it was the opposite. The bill would have imposed strict voter ID requirements, demanded documentary proof of citizenship, invited mass voter roll purges, and forced counties to complete ballot counts in just 72 hours - an impossible standard designed to throw out valid votes received after Election Day. The League [exposed the truth](#) in fiery testimony; AB 25 was a solution in search of a problem, built on misinformation about nonexistent voter fraud. Our swift opposition made clear that California would not tolerate laws designed to disenfranchise millions, and the bill collapsed in its first committee.

Stop Local Voter ID Mandates. [SB 405 \(Choi\)](#) attempted to allow local governments to impose their own Voter ID rules, creating a patchwork of unnecessary and conflicting identification restrictions that would confuse voters and disenfranchise many. We [testified](#) that California already has one of the strongest election security systems in the nation and that Voter ID laws disproportionately harm communities of color, seniors, and low-income voters. The bill failed.

Protect Vote-by-Mail and the Voter's Choice Act. Three separate bills went after California's vote-by-mail system and the Voter's Choice Act, which play critical roles in making our elections accessible and inclusive. Thanks to our strong and steady opposition, these bills never made it out of their first policy committees in the Legislature.

- [SB 406 \(Choi\)](#) sought to reject ballots that arrived after Election Day, even if they were postmarked on time. This would have disenfranchised rural voters, military voters, and anyone relying heavily on the mail. In [testimony](#), we underscored that California's current seven-day grace period is essential to fairness and access.
- [SB 407 \(Choi\)](#) tried to slash the time counties have to verify and count ballots from 30 days to just 10. That reckless rush would have guaranteed mistakes and undermined public confidence in election results. The League [reminded legislators](#) that accuracy, not speed, is the foundation of trust in elections.
- [SB 335 \(Strickland\)](#) would have ended the practice of mailing ballots to every active, registered voter for all elections and repealed the Voter's Choice Act entirely. With over 80 percent of Californians now voting by mail, we [testified](#) that millions would lose access, confusion would skyrocket, and years of investment would be wasted.

Our democratic process thrives on inclusivity, broad voter participation, and keeping big money out of politics. By passing strong legislation and defeating threats early, we preserved the foundation for a fair, inclusive democracy and reminded lawmakers that Californians expect progress. Next year will present more challenges to voting rights, and we will be there - leading the charge for advances in elections and against policies that diminish an equitable, inclusive democracy for all.

Protecting Democracy - Notable Losses

Language Access. [SB 266 \(Cervantes\)](#) would have expanded language access for California voters by requiring counties and cities to provide fully translated ballots, voting instructions, and related election materials - not just sample or "facsimile" ballots - for more voters who need them. Current federal law requires ballot access in a limited set of languages like Spanish, Asian, and Native American/Alaskan. While state law covers more languages, it only requires providing a translated sheet not a votable ballot, leaving out and confusing many immigrant and limited-English-proficient voters. SB 266 would have directed the Secretary of State to identify language needs and ensure translated votable ballots are available in more languages, including Arabic, Armenian,

Somali, and Filipino, across nearly every county. Its passage would have strengthened our democracy and created a more representative electorate. LWVC has long worked to expand language access, making this defeat especially disappointing. A [similar effort](#) was vetoed in 2024. Persistence pays off, however, and with legislative advocacy being a long game, there are already plans afoot to bring another similar bill in 2026.

Open Meetings. The League and coalition partners urged vetoes of [SB 707 \(Durazo\)](#) and [SB 470 \(Laird\)](#) because both weaken California's open meeting laws, making the government more removed from the people it's supposed to serve. SB 707 undercuts the Brown Act by allowing countless local government meetings to take place entirely online, letting appointees to subsidiary bodies avoid ever meeting in person. It gives officials sweeping power to shut down remote public comment under a vague definition of "disruption" - even though the Brown Act already provides tools for handling disruptive individuals - raising serious First Amendment concerns. The bill also limits livestreaming and remote comment requirements to only some jurisdictions, and even then guarantees only audio access, despite evidence that small cities can provide full video access at low cost. SB 470 undermines the Bagley-Keene Act by allowing state board and commission members to participate from undisclosed remote locations without justification, eroding transparency despite existing teleconferencing flexibility with guardrails. Despite our requests for vetoes, the Governor signed both bills into law.

Housing's Big Year

It was a big year for housing legislation and we added our support to a number of bills, including:

Transit-Oriented Housing Development. A big step in addressing California's housing crisis, [SB 79 \(Wiener\)](#) will enable more housing to be built near major public transit. Transit-oriented development provided by the bill addresses California's ongoing housing crisis while also giving families access to sustainable transportation. Safeguards are included to protect affordability, local control, and environmental protections. We celebrate the Governor [signing](#) this critical bill to increase the supply of safe, decent, and adequate housing for all Californians.

CEQA Reform for Housing. Key components of [AB 609 \(Wicks\)](#) and [SB 607 \(Wiener\)](#) were incorporated into budget trailer bills (AB 131 and SB 130) that were signed by the Governor in June. By drawing on the two bills that we supported, the budget bills will make it easier and cheaper to build resilient infrastructure while accelerating wildfire risk

reduction projects and other climate adaptation strategies. California's housing shortage is too severe to let outdated processes stand in the way of solutions. While CEQA was designed to safeguard the environment, it has often been misused to stall or block badly needed infill and affordable housing, driving up costs and deepening the crisis. Reform is essential to cut red tape, stop abuse of the law for non-environmental purposes, and ensure homes near jobs and transit can be built quickly. At the same time, we are closely following a plan for clean up bills next year to address environmental concerns. By modernizing CEQA, California can both protect the environment and deliver the housing our communities desperately need.

Ensure Local Governments Follow Housing Law. [SB 786 \(Arreguín\)](#) will resolve ambiguities in housing law and provide clarity for local governments, project applicants, and the courts.

Fighting Criminalization of Homelessness. The League joined a coalition of housing advocates to oppose [AB 20 \(DeMaio\)](#). The bill would have criminalized basic survival behaviors - like sitting, lying, sleeping, or storing essential belongings on sidewalks - if a shelter bed is "available" within 500 feet of a school, park, or transit stop, turning homelessness into a punishable offense. It would have abandoned compassionate "Housing First" strategies, disproportionately harming marginalized groups, and shifted the approach to homelessness toward enforcement rather than support. This cruel bill was successfully killed in its first policy committee.

Climate & Water

Both major environmental bills the League supported were held in Appropriations this year, but negotiations are ongoing and we'll continue driving this work in 2026.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction. [SB 285 \(Becker\)](#) would have established protocols and requirements for assuring that carbon dioxide removal or carbon offsets counted towards California's goal to achieve net zero emissions are real, quantifiable, verifiable, and show actual removals of carbon dioxide.

Clean Water protections. [SB 601 \(Allen\)](#) would have written federal Clean Water Act safeguards into California law. With federal rollbacks leaving waterways vulnerable, the bill aimed to empower the State Water Board to protect all state waters more easily and reduce confusion for regulated communities.

Reproductive Rights

The League joined partners in the California Coalition for Reproductive Freedom to support three key bills this year, but only one crossed the finish line.

Medication Abortion Access. [AB 260 \(Aguiar-Curry\)](#), signed by the Governor as an urgency statute, took effect immediately. The new law protects and expands access to medication abortion in California by writing explicit safeguards into state law. It ensures that Californians can continue to obtain and use abortion medication regardless of shifting federal policies. By aligning statute with California's constitutional guarantee of reproductive freedom, the bill strengthens legal certainty for providers and patients and secures timely access to critical reproductive healthcare.

Unfortunately, two other important bills stalled in Appropriations.

Reproductive Privacy Enforcement. [AB 67 \(Bauer-Kahan\)](#) would have empowered the California Attorney General to investigate and take legal action against anyone - individuals, organizations, or government entities - who violate the Reproductive Privacy Act. Currently, enforcement is limited to private civil suits, making it hard to hold bad actors accountable; this bill would have added a state-level enforcement tool to protect reproductive rights more robustly.

Reproductive Health Emergency Preparedness. [AB 551 \(Krell\)](#) would have established a statewide program to equip emergency departments and clinics with the training, tools, and protocols needed for handling reproductive and pregnancy emergencies - such as miscarriage, abortion, contraception, and pregnancy loss. This is an especially urgent need as maternity wards close and the OB/GYN shortage deepens.

Criminal Justice

Fair Pay for Incarcerated Firefighters. [AB 247 \(Bryan\)](#) is an important step toward justice, dignity, and respect for the incarcerated firefighters risking their lives to protect ours. The new law will increase the hourly wage for incarcerated individual hand-crew members and a ward or youth placed at the Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp to \$7.25/hour, updated annually, while they fight an active fire incident. This represents a significant increase from the current rate of as little as less than \$6 a day, and just a dollar an hour when actively fighting wildfires.

Stop Endless Probation for Youth. Long probation terms increase the risk of violations and unnecessary incarceration for young people. Evidence also shows that long

probation disproportionately impacts Black and Brown youth. The League supported [AB 1376 \(Bonta\)](#) as part of our commitment to equity and justice because it creates a clear limit on juvenile probation terms, capping them at twelve months unless a court finds an extension truly serves the young person's best interest. By shortening timelines and requiring conditions to be developmentally appropriate, AB 1376 promotes healthier, more constructive outcomes for youth while also reducing costs to the state.

Strengthening the Racial Justice Act. [AB 1071 \(Kalra\)](#) builds on the landmark Racial Justice Act (RJA), originally co-sponsored by the LWVC, by fixing roadblocks to enforcing the RJA. It removes procedural barriers and gives courts the guidance they need to enforce the RJA, keeping clear the principle that racism has no place in our justice system.

Accountability for In-Custody Deaths. [AB 1108 \(Hart\)](#) ends the conflict of interest when sheriffs' offices investigate in-custody deaths by requiring an outside county medical examiner or independent medical team to conduct reviews. This reform strengthens transparency, impartiality, and public trust in cases involving law enforcement.

Advancing Police Transparency. We supported two bills that focus on police transparency and accountability. [AB 847 \(Sharp-Collins\)](#) affirms that Sheriff Oversight Boards and Inspectors General have the same access to confidential officer personnel files as attorneys general, district attorneys, and grand juries. This is critical for ensuring law enforcement personnel are held accountable for misconduct. [AB 1388 \(Bryan\)](#), will increase police accountability by putting an end to the practice of law enforcement agencies signing police misconduct nondisclosure agreements.

Protect Integrity of Racial & Identity Profiling Act. In another win for police transparency, we opposed [AB 284 \(Alanis\)](#) and helped stop it from advancing. The bill would have weakened the Racial & Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) by diluting community voices through the addition of a district attorney to its Advisory Board, and creating an unnecessary, costly process for dissenting opinions that would undercut the Board's recommendations. RIPA remains a cornerstone of California's work to combat biased policing through data collection, community oversight, and annual reports to the Legislature.

Rollbacks to Police Transparency. We opposed [AB 1178 \(Pacheco\)](#), because California has struck a careful balance between officer safety and transparency, and the bill threatens to roll back those gains. Framed as a measure to protect undercover officers and sensitive investigations, the bill is unnecessary because existing law already gives

agencies the authority to redact records where safety is at risk. Its unfortunate signing will result in confusion in the courts and costly litigation, and opens the door for police unions to challenge and delay the public's right to know.

Immigration

As communities across California face rampant intimidation and threats from federal immigration agents, LWVC is standing up for immigrant rights in the legislature and providing resources to local Leagues to protect their communities.

Fighting Erosion of the California Values Act. The League opposed [AB 85 \(Essayli\)](#), which sought to reverse the California Values Act that created our sanctuary state provisions and force local law enforcement to cooperate with federal immigration authorities. The bill would have damaged community trust, deterred immigrant residents from reporting crimes, and fueled racial profiling and fear without improving public safety. By standing against AB 85, we helped protect immigrant communities and uphold California's commitment to fairness and inclusion.

Immigration Resources. True democracy means everyone can live with dignity and safety. You can learn more about what the League is doing on immigration issues nationally as well as find helpful resources for your communities by visiting our website [here](#).

Education

Youth and communities of color remain vastly underrepresented in California's electorate, with participation rates far below those of older, white voters. LWVC works with a [coalition of voting rights advocates](#) to close these gaps and build a democracy that truly reflects all Californians.

Civic Engagement Suffers Setback. The League supported [SB 316 \(Reyes\)](#), and worked with the author to strengthen it, recognizing schools as a vital place to spark civic engagement among young people. The bill would have required that all students receive voter registration information before finishing 11th grade, and allowed schools to partner with experienced, nonpartisan nonprofits to deliver it. Unfortunately, SB 316 was held in Assembly Appropriations, but we remain committed to advancing youth civic participation in 2026.

BEYOND BILLS

Our impact goes well beyond passing laws. We advise state agencies to better serve Californians, help ensure new legislation is implemented effectively, engage in litigation, and provide education that explains the reasons behind our advocacy. A few examples of this work include:

Litigation

- [Issa v. Weber](#) – Congressman Darrell Issa has sued to block California from counting mail ballots that are postmarked by Election Day but arrive within seven days, as state law allows. If he succeeds, hundreds of thousands of Californians could lose their votes in every election. The LWVC has moved to join the case as a party and is being represented by the ACLU of Northern California.
- [Louisiana v. Department of Commerce](#) – This case challenges whether the Census should count all residents or only citizens. Several states want to add a citizenship question to the 2030 Census, which would exclude millions of people and distort representation, funding, and redistricting. The LWVC, represented by the Southern Poverty Law Center, is moving to join the case as a party to defend the long-standing rule of counting everyone, warning that a citizenship question would cause a major undercount and weaken democracy.
- [US v. Weber](#) threatens voter privacy by seeking to force California to hand over its full, unredacted voter registration list - including sensitive details like addresses and birthdates - to the U.S. Department of Justice. LWVC is moving to join the case as a party to defend Californians' privacy rights and prevent chilled participation, especially among communities of color and immigrant voters. By stepping in, the League seeks to keep election data secure, check federal overreach, and ensure voters can participate without fear of their personal information being misused. LWVC is represented by the ACLU, in coordination with LWVUS and other state Leagues.

Voter Protection

Much of our voter protection work is educational in nature - we run a hotline, offer information online at cavotes.org, amalgamate [Know Your Rights](#) resources, and provide advice to voters to allow them to cast a ballot that will be counted. On the advocacy side we engage in state-level election monitoring with partners and work with state and county agencies to resolve problems with voting access.

Advocacy Webinar Series

In the spring, we hosted three educational webinars on voter participation, housing, and immigration. Each webinar featured experts and a guided discussion to dig into the issues and the policies shaping them. The series was intended to equip attendees to take action in their communities and across the state. You can learn more about the panelists and find the recordings [here](#).

Secretary of State Task Forces

Motor Voter Task Force. Dora Rose, the League's Deputy Director, has served on the Secretary of State's [Motor Voter Task Force](#) since its inception. In fact, the League sponsored the legislation that created it. The task force is responsible for reviewing voter registration trends under the New Motor Voter Program, consulting on the Secretary of State's annual and monthly reports (including registration data, notices, system issues, and usability/design), and advising on significant errors or delays in processing or transmitting records and how they were resolved.

Voter's Choice Act Task Force. Dora also serves on the [Voter's Choice Act \(VCA\) Task Force](#) which was also established through advocacy by the League and other good government groups. Its role is to ensure that California's VCA elections are both accessible and accountable. The task force includes representatives from county election officials, language access experts, the disability rights community, and election specialists. Its purpose is to review elections conducted under the VCA, gather community and expert input, and deliver recommendations to the Legislature within six months after each election. By bringing together diverse voices, the task force helps strengthen voter access, improve transparency, and ensure California's election system continues to meet the needs of all voters.

LOOKING FORWARD

Primary Election Reform. In the 2026 session we will continue to advocate with a coalition of voting rights organizations to pass our sponsored bill, [AB 868 \(Carrillo\)](#), which would modernize county elections by ensuring that all voters - not just a small, low-turnout primary electorate - have a say in choosing their local leaders. Today, many county offices are decided outright in primaries, shutting out younger voters and communities of color who turn out in higher numbers in general elections. AB 868 would require the top two vote-getters to advance to November, making county elections

more equitable, representative, and aligned with how most Californians already vote. While the bill has not yet crossed the finish line, it represents a critical step toward building a fairer and more inclusive democracy.

Affordable Housing. [The Affordable Housing Bond Act of 2026, AB 736 \(Wicks\)](#) has advanced to the Senate and is now a two-year bill that, if enacted, would place a \$10 billion bond on the 2026 ballot to address California's persistent housing shortfall - well documented in [CalMatters' "Missing the Mark" chart](#). The measure would fund affordable rental housing for lower-income families, expand homeownership opportunities, and support housing for people experiencing homelessness, with projected outcomes of 35,000+ new homes, assistance for 13,000+ Californians to become homeowners, and the preservation and rehabilitation of tens of thousands more homes. We support AB 736 to give Californians a chance to invest in more affordable homes and pathways to ownership.

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 2026 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 from the federal level down to the local level. 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.