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Commemorating Suffrage
The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island is working in concert with the Department of State/Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and over 30 other organizations developing programs to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment passage. The 19th Amendment, alternatively regarded as the Women’s Suffrage Amendment, codified in the Constitution of the United States every citizen’s right to vote, regardless of sex. Rhode Island became the twenty-fourth state to ratify the amendment on January 6, 1920, which was adopted on August 18, 1920. We, along with these other organizations, are developing plans to mark this milestone and to raise awareness of the multi-faceted story of suffrage in our country.

Common Sense Gun Laws in RI
The Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence held a half-day power building retreat on Sept. 19. Faye Zuckerman attended and represented LWVRI, which is a coalition member. She was among the more than 35 advocates and legislators (Senators Goldin, Miller, Coyne and Representatives Tanzi, Williams and Casall) in attendance. The morning was spent mapping who has power around the issue of common sense gun laws, who doesn’t and what is needed to shift the narrative. The purpose of this retreat was to sort out policy priorities in advance of the RI 2020 legislative session.

Faye Zuckerman
LWVRI Advocacy Committee
President’s Message

It’s clear that over these last 99 years our League of Women Voters of Rhode Island has been up front in Making Democracy Work For All. Hold on! How about since 1868? Indeed, women in Rhode Island, like Paulina Wright Davis and Elizabeth Buffum Chace, have engaged in advocating, lobbying, and educating citizens. Davis and Chace formed the RI chapter of the National Women’s Suffrage Association in 1868, from which the LWV and LWVRI was formed. Many issues then were very much the same as now, and we continue to address them.

As you will read in the LWVRI Advocacy report in this Newsletter, this past year included expansive and directed lobbying and education on an array of issues, many of which we will focus on again this year.

Our National LWV launched the People Powered Fair Maps Campaign (PPFM Campaign—see page 5) on September 5, 2019, in which all 50 state Leagues and D.C. have joined ‘to undertake a program of state-based advocacy that aims to promote a redistricting process that puts power in the hands of the people’. LWVRI will work toward fair representative districts as we engage the people of Rhode Island.

Among our 2019-2021 LWVRI goals are to increase public awareness of the redistricting process in Rhode Island, to encourage and increase participation in the RI political process, to seek opportunities to promote and support RI laws that increase transparency and oppose RI laws that seek to remove transparency. We will conduct legislation advocacy for a RI Independent Redistricting Commission.

LWVRI will reach out to RI residents, our local libraries, Life Long Learners groups, the media, RI Redistricting Commission and Political Science departments and political science students at RI colleges and universities to participate in our set goals.

LWVRI and our local Leagues will conduct public forums and invite experts to speak on this issue as we answer questions around redistricting and its effect on a community. Questions like: How does Redistricting happen in RI? Who is responsible for drawing the maps? Are the maps fair? What are the effects of unfair maps? What are the redistricting practices in other states? What is Gerrymandering?

We will continue to work with many good-government partners and our Coalition partners including the RI Redistricting Initiative, a Rhode Island voting rights community which includes Common Cause RI, RI ACLU, and the NAACP.

THE CENSUS AND REDISTRICTING:
I must also emphasize that LWVRI and our partner organizations will be focusing a great amount of time and energy to ensure a total count of all RI persons during the 2020 Census that begins April 1. The National League again with all 50 state Leagues and the D.C. League have joined together to educate our local communities to the importance of every person being counted. LWVRI will join with our National League in a GET OUT THE COUNT (GOTC) CAMPAIGN and participate in Watchdog Reporting as we share information and resources with our neighbors and community groups about how to participate in protecting this 2020 Census and discuss how to ensure that low-reporting areas be counted. Please go to the LWVUS website and to the US Census websites for more information.

We need your help. Please consider volunteering.

In League,
Jane Koster
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Jane W. Koster
President
League of Women Voters of Rhode Island

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Membership in the League is open to any citizen. Noncitizens may become associate members. Annual dues of $50 for an individual and $75 for a household include membership in Local, State and National Leagues. Membership forms are available at www.lwvri.org or call 401-434-6440. Please join us and help promote informed citizen involvement in government.

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Reminiscent of the battles that women fought 100 years ago to win the right to vote, the hard-fought battle for passage of the Reproductive Privacy Act succeeded in passing the Legislature in June.

The efforts to affirm the civil liberty, freedom, and equal rights of Rhode Island women, and specifically the freedom to exercise control over their bodies, were won by the amazing, sustained work by so many of you, by our coalition partners, individuals, and many supportive legislators. It was won by your letters, phone calls, and appearances at the State House. It was the result of women having the right to vote, and exercising that right.

Kudos to all who joined the effort!

A Victory Celebration was held at Lincoln Woods State Park on August 29 on a beautiful summer’s day. In attendance were key legislators, some of whom had been pursuing reproductive freedom in the legislature for over 25 years. They thanked all of us, asserting that the bill would not have passed without us all.

Of course, there will still be a need to be vigilant, especially concerning the national level actions, but we can now focus on Rhode Island women’s other health issues, which will be elaborated on as the 2020 legislative session approaches.

LWVRI is a member of the RI Coalition Against Gun Violence (RICAGV). Faye Zuckerman represented us at meetings and contributed written testimony on key bills that align with our advocacy work. She attended the coalition’s monthly meetings. Sadly, only one bill made it out of committee. It was Sen. Coyne’s bill, which bans the 3D printing of guns. In the House that bill was held for further study. The Coalition is starting to gear up for the 2020 session. We are determined to get more traction on bills during the upcoming session. Continued on page 4

It’s Time to Renew your LWV Membership

We are always so grateful for the tireless support of our volunteers and members who are continually fighting to Make Democracy Work right here in Rhode Island.

Please visit www.lwvri.org/join_form.html today to renew your membership. Your dues help support the work we do to improve voter access and education throughout the state.

We thank you for your continued support!

East Bay Members-at-Large Begin Voter Registration Drive

On National Voter Registration Day, September 24, East Bay Members-at-Large (MALs) held their first voter registration session for the year at the headquarters of the East Bay Community Action Program in Riverside. Members Robin Covington, Mary Chace, Naomi Kennedy, Carolyn Rosenthal and Susan Escherich kicked off what we plan to be a year long effort. On December 7, eight members will register voters from 12 noon to 8 pm at East Providence’s popular Winterfest. East Bay MALs also plan to staff a registration table at East Providence’s main library the first Thursday of every month from now until the 2020 election. If we have enough volunteers, we may expand our efforts to Warren and Barrington.

For further information, please call Susan Escherich at 401-433-4896.
While almost all the action in the 2019 legislative session centered around the ultimately successful passage of the Reproductive Privacy Act, your League also testified in support of bills to allow early voting, to establish a citizen redistricting commission, to make house and senate rules more responsive to the membership, to calculate the residence of prisoners as where they lived when they were arrested, to improve access to RI Open Meetings Act (RI OMA) and Access to Public Records Act (APRA), to support risk limiting audits of general assembly elections, to place the Board of Elections under the Administrative Procedures Act, and to repeal voter id.

Unfortunately, none of these bills made it out of committee except for those on the chambers’ rules.

In the Senate, we testified to improve gun safety by limiting the number of rounds for semiautomatic weapons, to ban concealed weapons on school grounds, and to ban military style assault weapons.

League priorities this coming year will focus on the LWV People Powered Fair Maps™ Initiative, and will concentrate on efforts to protect democracy by working to enact a bill allowing in-person early voting, to expand citizen input on redistricting, to expand civic education to all RI schools, and to continue efforts to protect open and accessible government meetings and records. We will continue to promote gun safety for all citizens, particularly children, and work to protect women’s health.

Mary Chace, Faye Zuckerman, and Susan Escherich
LWVRI Advocacy Committee

Blithewold Tea Fundraiser

The Providence's League's fundraising tea was held at Blithewold on Monday, September 23. Carrie Taylor, director of the Lippitt House Museum in Providence, spoke on the history of suffrage in RI, focusing on the expansion of voting rights to all citizens. It was a very long, slow path in RI as we were the last state to abolish the property qualification though not the last state to ratify the 19th Amendment having done so on January 6, 1919. After the discussion, we all took a quiz on women and politics which Martha Frutchey of the Providence League aced, and Ellie Brown of the Women's Fund took second place. Both took home prizes.

A near capacity crowd of members and friends of the League attended the high tea. Three sponsors, Blithewold, Capital Grille and Penzeys spices, plus our member Barbara Feldman, provided prizes and small favors for the attendees.

Liz Head
LWV Providence President
A 50-State Approach to People Powered Fair Maps™

The June 27, 2019, decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in three partisan gerrymandering cases (including Rucho v. League of Women Voters of North Carolina) was a call to action for the League of Women Voters. When the court decided to take a hands-off approach to redistricting, the League decided to jump into a people powered fair maps campaign to ensure fair representation across the country.

Because the Supreme Court has said they won’t hear any more of these cases, state legislators have a green light to continue this undemocratic process that silences voters. We don’t have an equal playing field when it comes to election maps across the country, and the redistricting process set to begin in 2021 is in danger.

At the League of Women Voters, we aren’t backing down.

There are other paths to creating fair maps nationwide – and the League of Women Voters is the best organization positioned to accomplish this. We do not have to rely on the Supreme Court to solve partisan gerrymandering.

That’s why we are launching a 50-state strategy to tackle redistricting reform across the country. We know this campaign is not ‘one size fits all’ - and there is a role for all of us to play in building power for all people nationwide. The League has a rich history and deep expertise in the field of redistricting, and we will build this 50-state campaign upon the strengths of our field.

Through this campaign we will engage in many different activities. Some states will use multiple strategies to defend existing systems, implement recent reforms, or look for opportunities to put the power of redistricting back into the hands of the people, not politicians. The focus areas of this campaign will include:

- Education/Advocacy.
- Organizing and Mobilizing.
- Partnership Building.
- Ballot Initiatives/Referendums.
- State Constitutional Option/Litigation.
- Federal Legislative Fixes.

This 50-state redistricting campaign is intended as a powerful collaboration between national, state, and local Leagues with an aim of building power in communities across the country and positioning LWV as the premiere on-the-ground leading organization fighting for fair redistricting.

This campaign will launch in the fall of 2019 and is expected to be a signature national campaign for the League through 2022.

Learn more about the People Power Fair Maps™ initiative at:  
www.lwv.org/redistricting/people-powered-fair-mapstm
Coming Up—League Events

Wednesday, October 30th, 7-8:30pm

Medicare for All: Behind the Slogans
Come discuss "single payer," versus "the public option," versus other proposals, hosted by the Providence LWV. Dissect the reality behind the rhetoric, over tea and cookies.

For more information, contact Liz Head, emhead603@hotmail.com, (401) 351-2269

Friday, November 1st, 9:30-11:30am

Politics without Rancor
A course introducing the League of Women Voters, covering a brief history of the organization, its core missions and philosophy, and the current activities of the League nationally, in the state of RI, and in local chapters, hosted by the South County LWV.

$10, Registration available for current OLLI members through URI. To become a member, visit: uri.edu/olli/membership-in-olli

Wednesday, December 4th, 6pm

Defending Democracy: The Information, Cyber and Physical Threats to the 2020 Election Cycle
A presentation by Dr. James Ludes, VP, Public Research & Initiatives for Salve Regina University and Executive Director of the Pell Center, hosted by the Newport County LWV.

At the Newport Art Museum, further information available at: www.lwvri.org.