

THE VOTER

News for League of Women Voters Minneapolis Members and Friends



Grassroots Program Planning Meeting Highlights Key Issues

BY ELLEN VAN IWAARDEN



Fifty-five LWVMpls members gathered on Zoom Saturday, January 21, to plan the program topics for the 2023-24 program year. In keeping with our attention to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the meeting began with a short exercise in breakout groups. The question considered was: "When you

hear the acronym DEI, what are the first thoughts that come to mind?"

First in small groups, and then in a general discussion, members shared their perceptions of what DEI means to them and their hopes for what DEI would look like in LWV in the future. Members were asked to incorporate those thoughts and dreams into the discussions of program topics.

Choosing our program topics each year is a grassroots process to ensure that we are learning about issues of real concern to the membership. Each year we choose the topics for our local organization, the League of Women Voters Minneapolis. We also provide our membership's thoughts and opinions on the topics chosen by the League of Women Voters Minnesota (LWVMN) or the League of Women Voters US (LWVUS).

This year we reviewed the LWVMN's program and legislative priorities. With expert leadership by Julaine Heit, our members offered a number of suggestions for priorities they would like to see added to the LWVMN priorities.

Then the group moved on to choosing our own LWVMpls program topics.

During lively discussion in small caucus groups, the members chose these seven general topic areas:

- City Government
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- Education
- Voting and Democracy
- Climate Change
- Public Safety
- Health Care

The results of the program survey offered one more topic, Housing and Homelessness. The small groups also prioritized more particular issues under these general topics. A recap of the Program Planning meeting is available in the Member Resources section of the website and includes those sub-issues.

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From the President: Restore the Vote

COLLEEN MORIARTY, PRESIDENT



The Restore the Vote bill, one of the bills that LWVMN supports and LWVMpls has long been lobbying for, cleared the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Walz on March 3. This bill allows Minnesotans to vote when they leave

prison. Previously all conditions of incarceration and probation had to be satisfied to allow those Minnesotans to vote.

Some 29 states have passed policies similar to what is now law in Minnesota. Why is this important? This bill impacts some 50,000 Minnesotans who have been disenfranchised because of current state rules for people with felony records. This rate varied among judicial districts. In the Sixth Judicial District, it was 3.3 years. In the Seventh Judicial District, it was 7.4 years, Hennepin County was 3.3 years and Ramsey County 5.9 years. It was this uneven justice that triggered a call for reform.

The Sentencing Project estimates that of the 5.18 million Americans without voting rights, three quarters are living within a community and not incarcerated.

This issue had been rightfully identified as an issue that affects communities of color and raised serious state constitutional and democratic concerns. We welcome this reform and look forward to more ways to engage communities in democracy and voters' rights.

Who Supported Restore the Vote and What's Next?

BY DEBORAH JINDRA

LWVMN has long lobbied to restore the vote. The problem: Minnesotans lost the right to vote when they were convicted of a felony and did not have that right restored until they completed their sentence. This meant that not only did they have to be released from prison but also released from any probation, parole, or supervised release. Many Minnesotans were denied the right to vote while living in their community, caring for their families, working jobs, and paying taxes — even if they had never spent any time in prison or only served a short jail sentence.

Restoring the right to vote clears up the ambiguity around who is eligible to vote and also allows people who are living and participating in their communities to have their voices heard at the ballot box. It does this by making the process clear: the right to vote is automatically restored to any convicted felon, “upon completion of any term of incarceration.” In other words, once out of prison, an individual’s right to vote is restored.

Restoring the right to vote for those living in the community will engage more people in the democratic process, make the law clear, and save resources. Ultimately, restoring the vote makes all Minnesota communities safer and more just.

While testifying in support, Michelle Witte, Executive Director LWVMN, stated SF26 (Restore the Vote) will make our election system less complicated and will reduce election administration burden and costs. There was significant confusion and frustration among the public, among individuals convicted of felonies, and among election judges and administrators on when re-enfranchisement occurs.

The Governor’s signature on Restore the Vote creates a bright, clear line that is easy for voters and election judges to understand. It reduces election confusion, will improve the integrity of our elections, and will further enfranchise all formerly incarcerated Minnesotans, including those who are currently eligible to vote but are either reluctant to participate or do not participate because of fear or confusion about our current law.

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Legislative Interviews

BY KITTY WESTIN, LWVMPLS ADVOCACY/ACTION DIRECTOR

LWVMpls has been conducting legislative interviews with policy makers who represent Minneapolis in the Minnesota House and Senate over the past several weeks. Each year LWVMpls, in partnership with the LWVMN, invites elected officials to “sit down” with LWV members to discuss legislative priorities and the outlook for the legislative session.

These interviews are enormously helpful in a number of ways:

- They give a platform to our representatives to talk about what they are working on and what they are wishing for Minneapolis and Minnesota.
- They give constituents a chance to meet and talk with the people who represent them.
- They allow our members to see where their elected officials stand on issues important to LWVMpls.

“It was a wonderful opportunity to get with the LWV to discuss policies being considered at the state legislature. In addition, it is rewarding to have robust and rich discussions with individuals so deeply committed to our democracy.”

- PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE
BOBBY JOE CHAMPION

As Advocacy/Action Director for the League of Women Voters Minneapolis, I am privileged to work with the hardworking dedicated staff who help schedule and coordinate the interviews. I get to sit in on every interview and get to know more about the



passionate people who have been elected to serve in the State House and Senate. I also get to listen and learn from LWV members who care deeply about our city and state.

LWVMpls member Kathleen Oganovic has enthusiastically participated in several of the interviews: “I enjoy getting a chance to talk with legislators for a few moments on Zoom during this very busy legislative season. It is a great way to hear about what the Representatives and Senators are working on, and it also lets them know about LWVMpls positions, including our position on the End-of-Life Options Act.”

Advocacy and Action define the LWVMpls, and I am proud of our members who step up to volunteer and help defend democracy and empower voters!



From the left: Julaine Heit (front), David Heit, and Katherine McIntyre Anderson diligently working with a precinct; Mary Eichinger and Pat Werner happily ready to start precincts on check-in; Marie Smith, Katie Heit Gardner, Richard Schmidt cheerfully finishing up a precinct

Election Night Project November 2022

BY ROSEMARY LAWRENCE AND JANET MIDTBO, ELECTION NIGHT PROJECT CO-CHAIRS

Free and fair elections don't just happen. Many, many election workers and volunteers pull out all the stops to make sure every vote is counted and securely handled. As it has for a number of years, LWVMpls contracted with Minneapolis Elections and Voter Services (MEVS) as a CORE (Charitable Organizations Recruitment for Elections) organization for our unique Election Night project.

A little information about the project: LWV volunteers do not tabulate or report vote totals. That's actually done by the machines in every precinct. LWV volunteers do staff two check-in locations where Minneapolis' 137 precinct workers bring a total of 2,192 items, 16 items from each precinct.

Items range from things people might expect precincts to turn in, such as voted ballots and USB memory sticks containing results, to other important items like the electronic poll books (on which voters sign in to vote), results tapes (printed from each machine after the polls close), and election day registration cards.

But that is not all that comes in on election night. More seemingly mundane items include used voter receipts (the slip of paper voters turn in to get a ballot), spoiled ballots, plus nine more items. These all are delivered in envelopes labeled with ward and precinct and are signed by the required number of judges from each precinct.

These efforts prepare materials for some of the MEVS staff's final election work. The process seems to run more smoothly every year thanks to well-trained and

hardworking precinct judges and LWV's CORE volunteer judges. Thanks also to the much appreciated direction and support of MEVS staff.

On election night more than 70 LWV volunteers worked together to carefully make sure items were brought in and properly labeled and signed before other volunteers sorted each item by ward and precinct. This year's volunteer contingent comprised both experienced workers and rookies. They included LWV members, spouses, and friends of LWV. The City paid LWVMpls over \$7,000 for their efforts, making it a valuable project for both the City of Minneapolis and LWVMpls.

COVID had some lasting effects on the project including flow and spacing in some areas, and many volunteers wore masks although they were optional this year. A big thank you to everyone who participated including those who were on standby, available to jump in when we did have a few last minute illnesses and emergencies. It was a great effort by everyone.

We look forward to working with the City of Minneapolis and the dedicated LWVMpls volunteers in 2023 when there will be a November citywide general election. Yes, we're doing this again! We're proud to be part of this project that plays a small but valuable part in the integrity of our elections and in our democracy.

LWVMN 2023 Convention

FROM LWVMN



Attention members!
The LWVMN Convention will be held in person in New Ulm, June 2-3. Registration is now open. Please visit our

Convention 2023 webpage: www.lwvmn.org/convention-2023 for all the details and to register. We are excited to offer a mix of business and social opportunities and are very grateful to our LWV New Ulm hosts! We've tried to make the prices affordable, but any members or local Leagues should reach out to Executive Director Michelle Witte if they have funding needs that prohibit attendance.

We hope to see you there!



Tuesday, April 4 at 7 PM
HELD VIA ZOOM

Craig Freeman, Community Connection Manager of the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, will address our April topic, Housing and Homelessness. The Collaborative is a network of congregations dedicated to assuring that all people have a home. Freeman will talk about the partnerships working to provide housing for people without homes in Minneapolis and the Twin Cities area. In particular, he will describe two Beacon projects in downtown Minneapolis: their work to house men just released from prison and housing for Native Americans in partnership with the Red Lake Nation.

Restore the Vote, *continued from page 2*

All levels of LWV should inform the public of this change and work with election officials to educate voters who may be affected by this restoration of voting rights.

The Sentencing Project is an organization that advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice. Their report issued prior to the recent bill at the Minnesota Legislature stated: "Over 55,000 Minnesotans are currently locked out of our democracy, representing 1.3% of the state's voting eligible population. Minnesota denies the vote to more of its people with a felony conviction than three other states in the Upper Midwest. People of color are disproportionately impacted, with Black Minnesotans disenfranchised at over four times the state rate. Latinx Minnesotans are disenfranchised at nearly twice the state rate. Historically, Jim Crow felony disenfranchisement laws—like Minnesota's—were used to dilute the power and voice of the Black community."

Restore the Vote is a coalition of faith based, direct service, civic engagement organizations as well as labor unions and public safety and legal professionals "who believe voting is a human right. Restoring the right to vote for people living in the community who are on felony probation or parole is the right thing to do for our communities, our democracy, and our state." Find out more at restorethevotemn.org.

LWVMpls' role in the future? Attorney General Keith Ellison was quoted in the *StarTribune*, "This is not the end, this is the end of the beginning, the next stage is to help people know what their rights are. There's a whole public awareness campaign that starts right now." Our members should pick up Ellison's challenge to educate themselves on this historic restoration of voting rights and work in their communities to make sure potential voters are aware of this change.



Democracy in Action Award for Exceptional Service to League of Women Voters Minneapolis

Since 1971, LWVMpls has given an end-of-year award to an outstanding volunteer. After three years of not presenting the Bess Mlnarik Award (due to COVID), we have created a new recognition for exceptional service to the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, called the Democracy in Action Award.

The committee of previous award recipients is seeking recommendations for the 2023 award, which will be presented at the Annual Meeting in June. Please consider recommending a member who has shown exceptional dedication, leadership, or provided significant service to LWVMpls. Any information you can include would be helpful. Previous Bess Mlnarik honorees are not eligible. Email your suggestion to Dot Lilja, dorothylilja@gmail.com, or any of the committee members — Jennifer Johnson, Marilyn Dean, Julaine Heit, or Rosemary Lawrence — by April 15.

Previous award honorees are: Bess Mlnarik, Margaret Ueland, Rosemary Booth, Louise Sheeley, Dimitra Mitchell, Betsy Sterrie, Mary Sandbo, Marguerite Benson, Shirley Ungar, Margaret Bracken, Peggy Lucas, Carol Pidcock, Jan Hively, Mary Lou Hill, Janet Midtbo, Barbara Flanigan, Kay Kessel, Karlynn Fronek, Polly Keppel, Donna Bening, Karen Ringsrud, Barbara Dols, Peggy Pluimer, Barbara Kimer, Florence Gray, Catherine Shreves, Deborah Jindra, Susan Reinhart, Ann Duff, Alice Moormann, Mary Lou Loud, Kathy Kolb, Patricia Werner, Claire Olson, Pamela Telleen, Patricia Kovel-Jarboe, Ann Pugliese, Joan Niemiec, Carol Green, Kay Schimke, Joan Higinbotham, Janet Gendler, Margit Berg, Marion and Don Hall, Nancy Witta, Julaine Heit, Marilyn Dean, Rosemary Lawrence, Jennifer Johnson, and Dorothy Lilja.

Grassroots, continued from page 1

The meeting closed with a real appreciation by those attending of the depth and breadth of our members' knowledge on key issues for our city, state, and nation. Please join us next program year and add your voice and expertise to our planning group.

The LWVMpls Board considered the eight general program topics identified in program planning at its February meeting. The Board's recommendation of these

topics will go to the membership for discussion and a vote at the LWVMpls Annual Meeting in June.

The Program Committee welcomes your ideas as we begin to plan the specifics of our 2023-24 Program year. If you have ideas and/or would be interested in helping with the program work, please contact VOTE@lwvmpls.org.

City Adopts New Position on Police Union

BY CAROLYN TREVIS

In 2021, the Reimagining Public Safety Committee recommended and the LWVMpls adopted several positions related to public safety, including:

- LWVMpls supports the action by the City of Minneapolis to negotiate changes in the police contract that addresses concerns including file retention, investigators interviews, and including supervisors in the bargaining unit.

In late summer 2022, the City held several listening sessions regarding the negotiations for a new labor contract. LWVMpls members were among the many community members who participated, and we were able to clearly advocate based on this and other positions.

On October 31, 2022, the City filed a petition with the Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Service (BMS) to clarify the bargaining unit. The BMS is the state agency responsible for determining appropriate bargaining units under state law. Under the current agreement,

officers, sergeants, and lieutenants are all part of the same bargaining unit, represented by the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis (the Federation). This means that rank and file officers are governed by the same contract as their supervisors, creating concerns about conflicts of interest and accountability.

The City's position now is that rank and file officers and their supervisors should be in separate bargaining units. While the position is pending, the BMS has ordered the City and the Federation not to engage in any bargaining on a new labor agreement, to maintain the status quo terms and conditions. There are no bargaining sessions scheduled. During this time, the parties continue to operate under the terms of the current labor agreement until a new agreement is made.

A full list of our public safety positions can be found in our Program for Action and in our Public Safety study.

Thank You to Donors (October 2022 - January 2023)

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MISSION

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

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Welcome New Members

(October 2022 - January 2023)

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Emma Nelson

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Important Dates

for April - May 2023

Civic Buzz

Housing, Tuesday, April 7, 7 PM on Zoom

Public Safety, Tuesday, May 2, 7 PM
in person at Plymouth Congregational Church,
1900 Nicollet Ave. S., Minneapolis

Speakers: Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara,
Chief of Staff Christopher Gaiters, and
Inspector Katie Blackwell.

LWVMpls Board of Directors

Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 7 PM on Zoom

LWVMpls Board of Directors

Wednesday, May 24, 2023, 7 PM on Zoom

Units will meet at their regularly scheduled times in April and May 2023. Please check in to see if meetings will be held in person or virtual. For full information, visit our website: www.lwvmpls.org.