



# The Michigan VOTER

A Publication of the League of Women Voters of Michigan  
600 W. St. Joseph Street, Suite 3G, Lansing, MI 48933-2288  
office@lwvmi.org  
www.lwvmi.org  
517.484.5383 Fax: 517.484.3086

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## Coalition Launches Campaign for Comprehensive Election Reform

*Amendment would make ballot more secure, accessible*



Between two jobs and four kids, Angela Willson has little time to spare. So Willson figures she should be able to have the option of voting absentee in elections—without giving a reason. “Allowing all registered voters to choose to vote absentee would make my life a whole lot easier,” said Willson, a nurse anesthetist from Grosse Pointe Park. “And it would help our state line up with 37 others that allow all registered voters to cast their ballots on or before Election Day.”

Willson made her comments on January 22, 2018 at the kickoff for the **Promote the Vote** campaign, an effort to place on the November ballot a constitutional amendment to provide comprehensive election reform for Michigan. Citing the need for an accessible and secure ballot for all, the coalition of organizers (which includes the League of Women Voters, the ACLU of Michigan, the state and Detroit branches of the NAACP and the Michigan League of Public Policy) announced that it filed ballot language Monday with the Secretary of State.

In addition to no reason absentee, the amendment would give military members more time to vote; let citizens register closer to Election Day; allow straight party voting, automatically register citizens when they do business at the Secretary of State’s office, protect a secret ballot and add audits for election results. The group called the reforms “common sense” designed to give more individuals a secure and accessible ballot. “We’re all better off when more Americans—Republicans, Democrats and independents—participate in our democracy,” said Judy Karandjeff, president of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. “Providing a system that works for all isn’t hard; it’s just common sense.”

The changes mirror reforms enacted in 40 states that make voting more accessible. Once the ballot language is approved, the coalition has to collect approximately 316,000 signatures to get the measure on the November ballot. “Putting voters first means making sure that our system is fair and has integrity,” said Ismael Ahmed, a longtime community activist. “Under this amendment, our votes would be protected because our elections could be audited.”

Updating the voter rolls and making the system more secure is good news to Michelle Mills, who had to cast a provisional ballot in 2017 because of inaccurate information at her polling site. “We need a system that works for all,” she said.

*For more information, go to [www.promotethevotemi.com](http://www.promotethevotemi.com).*

### MISSION STATEMENT

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

## LWVMI Files Federal Lawsuit to End Gerrymandering in Michigan

On December 22, The League of Women Voters of Michigan and 11 individual voters filed a lawsuit against the State of Michigan in federal court in Detroit to end unfair, partisan gerrymandering of Michigan's Congressional, State Senate and State House districts. The lawsuit is about striking down the current district maps that the League and others say are unconstitutional. If it's successful, the state Legislature would be required to redraw the current maps in a fair fashion.

"Michigan's State House, Senate and Congressional districts are among the worst in the nation when it comes to partisan gerrymandering. Today's lawsuit aims to fix the problem and restore voters' rights to choose who best represents them," stated President Judy Karandjeff.

The lawsuit was filed against Secretary of State Ruth Johnson, and clearly lays out the problem with partisan gerrymandering in Michigan:

- Michigan's current electoral maps were drawn in a secretive partisan process with little discussion or debate before being quickly passed through the Legislature.
- Despite Democrats' regularly winning a majority of the votes in State House, State Senate and Congressional elections, they hold a minority - sometimes a super-minority - of the seats, a direct result of partisan gerrymandering.
- Objective analysis demonstrates that the current, gerrymandered Michigan districting plans systematically crack and pack Democratic voters.

"Ending partisan gerrymandering is critical to preserve our democracy and ensure every vote counts," said Sue Smith, director of the League's Redistricting Program. "For too long, Michigan voters' rights have been harmed as a result of partisan gerrymandering."

The lawsuit asks the federal court to declare the current districts to be unconstitutional partisan gerrymanders, and to ensure that the districts are redrawn in a fair fashion. Sixth Circuit Judge Eric Clay, Eastern District of Michigan Chief Judge Denise Page Hood, and Western District of Michigan Senior Judge Gordon Quist have been assigned to the case.

LWV is seeking donations to help defray some of the costs for the lawsuit. Attorneys have been providing, and will continue to provide, pro bono counsel, and they have covered costs for preparing and filing the lawsuit. Expenses will be incurred for expert witnesses, discovery, etc. that need to be paid. Your contribution will be kept in a separate account and used only for these expenses. Donations can be made to the LWVMI Education Fund (via paypal on lwvmi.org) or can be mailed to the League office. Please note that the donation is for the lawsuit.

## 2018 LWV National Convention: Chicago



Michigan Leagues are encouraged to send a delegation to the national convention June 28-July 1 in Chicago. Registration is already underway for this exciting event. Visit the LWV Forum site for details.

## Planning Ahead: 2019 and 2021 LWVMI Conventions

Paula Bowman, LWV NW Wayne County,  
LWVMI Convention Chair

The LWVMI Board of Directors has announced the dates and venues for the next two state conventions:

May 17-19, 2019—Celebrating LWVMI's 100th year, the convention will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Livonia, Michigan.

May 21-23, 2021—After a successful 2017 convention at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing, the Board chose this same venue for 2021.

We have a good list of members who have already volunteered to be on the convention committee for 2019 (thank you for signing up at the end of the 2017 convention!) so I'll be in contact with them in early 2019 to begin planning.

## LWVMI Endorses Redistricting Ballot Proposal

The League of Women Voters of Michigan congratulated the Voters Not Politicians group (VNP) that submitted its petitions for the Independent Redistricting Commission Ballot Proposal to the Secretary of State's office on December 18<sup>th</sup>. During the signature collection process, the LWVMI Board stated it would consider supporting the proposal once VNP submitted the requisite number of signatures to the Secretary of State's office. At a special LWVMI Board meeting, the state Board voted to support the VNP ballot proposal.

LWVMI's Redistricting Position was updated in 2012. The language of the VNP ballot proposal conforms with that position. The ballot proposal is about who will draw the redistricting maps in 2021 and thereafter. If the ballot proposal passes, the maps will be drawn by an Independent Redistricting Commission, not the Legislature. The process of certifying the petitions and negotiating the 100 word ballot proposal language could take several months.

## Michigan Voters Depend on VOTE411

2017 was not a big election year – no presidential, gubernatorial or mid-term elections. Leagues in Michigan, however, still used the League's on-line voter guide, VOTE411, to provide non-partisan information for 233 candidate races and 65 ballot proposals. Even in an “off” year election, voters counted on the League to provide valuable information about the elections in their communities, including; up-to-date information about polling places and requirements for voting, and information about opportunities to learn more about candidates—such as by attending one of the hundreds of candidate debates and forums hosted by the League this year.

LWVUS reports that VOTE411 helped over one million voters find election information in 2017. Voters in Michigan viewed VOTE411 41,585 times, a 94% increase over 2015. In addition to VOTE411, several Michigan Leagues published a print version of their voter guides, reaching thousands more voters.

2018 is shaping up to be a year of heated contests in Michigan and all over the country. Michigan Leagues will continue to provide the objective information on which voters have come to depend. This year, we have contracted to partner with MLive, a large source of on-line news in Michigan as well as a publisher of 8 newspapers. MLive will link directly to our VOTE411 site, so that more voters will have quick access to the information they need to make educated decisions.

## Action Counts!

Are you emailing your legislator when you receive an Action Alert from LWVMI? Please join other League members and take this quick step to support or oppose legislation on which LWVMI has taken a position.

Every email or call that is made to a state legislator in support or opposition of legislation **is counted** and we trust, considered. Currently, the number of emails sent via LWV Action Alerts is too small— help us increase the League's voice and take 60 seconds to send an email!



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Founded in 1920, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government.

The LWVMI welcomes tax-deductible contributions to the LWVMI Education Fund and encourages interested persons to name LWVMI as a beneficiary in their wills.

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All attempts to make this list as accurate as possible have been made. If you believe there is an error, please contact us at [office@lwvmi.org](mailto:office@lwvmi.org) or 517-484-5383.

*Thank  
 you* 



# Two Leagues Take Big Steps Forward

At it's December, 2017 meeting, the LWVMI Board of Directors welcomed the **Jackson Area League** as the 23<sup>rd</sup> independent League in Michigan. In 2015, Jackson County League members, led by Mary Lee Clark, became a Geographical Unit of the Lansing Area League, which mentored the Jackson members through the process of achieving their independence in December. Special thanks were given to Lansing Area Co-Presidents, Beth Moore and Camilla Davis for coaching the group through the process. The Jackson League has been officially recognized by the LWVUS.

Also at its December meeting, the Board congratulated members of **Macomb County** who have advanced to the "Member-At-Large" League status. Led by Macomb residents Kathy Poore, Nance Halle and Maria Rivera, the Macomb group was mentored by Tom Wells, president of the Grosse Pointe League. The Macomb County MAL League is now on track to becoming an independent League soon. The concept of guiding, nurturing the community groups to take the next steps in developing Leagues successfully followed the path outlined by the LWVMI MLD (Membership Leadership Development) program.

Please join the LWVMI board in congratulating all members of LWV Jackson Area and LWVMI Macomb County State MAL Unit in their hard work and progress



\* \* The League of Women Voters is where hands on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. \* \*

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