



League Links

November 2023

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ChapterSpot and Grants

Chapter*What*?

You may have heard that the new, centralized dues system run by LWVUS will use a platform called ChapterSpot. To learn more about that platform and about the dues collection process LWVUS anticipates having in place in 2025, you can check several resources on the League Management website.

- For FAQs about the New Membership System, [check out this LWVUS info page](#).
- LWVUS offers "office hours" for Q&A about the new dues system on the third Wednesday of the month from 3-4pm Eastern. [Use this link](#) to sign up for the December 20th session:
- For ChapterSpot FAQs and a transcript of the Q&A from the last office hours session, [click here](#).
- For details about the entire Transformation process, [click on this information page](#) on the LWVUS website.

One practical aspect of the new membership system is that we will all need to develop the habit of supporting our local League separately from paying our

dues. Once dues are centralized, our payments will be split automatically among local, state and national levels of the League. If we wish to give a specific amount just to our local or state League, we will need to make a separate payment. We can start practicing right now! Please give as generously as you can to Empower Voters and Defend Democracy!

The 2023 Grant for Town Hall Presentations on New Voting Rights ends in December.

- One report is due for **each** presentation. Leagues can earn up to \$600 for the town halls they present. Please send all reports no later than Dec. 15 so we can pay you before the end of the year.
- The link for reporting can be found on the LWVMI website – “Member Resources: - [LWV Only page](#) (ask your President for the password).

Reports for the Grant for Election Promotion are due by December 1.

- Up to \$2,000 can be reimbursed to local Leagues for election-related services and materials.
- The final report plus the Expense Report with attached receipts must be submitted by December 1. These reports also can be found on the [LWV Only page](#) of the website.
- Check out the photos below of the Mt. Pleasant LWV’s electronic billboard which was seen by thousands on the highway near Soaring Eagles Casino.

Paula Bowman and Denise Hartsough



Voter Service Updates

Early Voting a Success in Michigan!

For the first time in Michigan’s history, voters went to an early voting site, requested and completed a ballot and fed it into a tabulator before Election Day! Clerks and election workers oversaw a smooth early voting period that began in some communities on Saturday, October 28. A total of 4,627 voters cast ballots during the early voting period. While allowing voters to cast ballots that will be counted just like absentee and Election Day in-person ballots, clerks also identified important processes to be improved and perfected before early voting opens statewide, a critical goal of the pilot. We are grateful to those jurisdictions who opted to offer early voting pilot sites ahead of the 2024 election!

Election Day itself went relatively smoothly. While there were some reports of issues in several communities, Promote the Vote (PTV) worked with coalition

partner organizations, local election officials, and the Bureau of Elections to address them. PTV will continue to work with these parties and other stakeholders to ensure that the same issues don't arise again in 2024.

Vote411 Update

We are pleased to report that LWVMI will pick up the \$6,000 cost of Vote411 software for the 2024 year. Local Leagues will not have to pay to use the system for the next election cycle. A special thanks to all of the Vote411 Administrators for their excellent work this year!

Last Call for Grant Reimbursement Reports

We are so pleased our local Leagues are able to receive funding from grant funds in our Education Foundation account. Just a reminder. To receive your funds, be sure to complete the reports **no later than December 1, 2023**.

Per the Co-President's report above, links to all of the reports/forms are on the website at www.lwvmi.org under the Members tab, LWV Only. Questions regarding the final reports can be directed to me or Sara Weertz, Project Manager, at saraweertz.lwvmi@gmail.com.

Voter Services Network Meetings

As mentioned at the October 26th, meeting, there will be no meetings in November or December. However, we will continue meeting on the 4th Thursday of the month beginning on January 25, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

A special thanks to all voter service network members for their excellent work this year! Wishing you a safe and Happy Thanksgiving!

Judy Florian
VP for Voter Services
jflo@comcast.net

Advocacy Update

Highlights of Legislative Action Taken in 2023

The League of Women Voters of Michigan has seen a record number of bills become law, have committee hearings, or be introduced because of the positions we have adopted. The Legislature just completed legislative action for 2023. Bills are still being prepared for the Governor to sign or veto. Highlights are below.

Health Care

Bills to include mental health and substance abuse health care coverage have moved. SB 27 passed the Senate and in the House Insurance & Financial Services Committee: HB 4707 is on its 3rd reading in the House.

Bills passed by the House and Senate and signed by the Governor put many of the Affordable Care Act provisions into state law, such as allowing people up to age 26 to use their parents' health insurance and protecting coverage for people with pre-existing conditions: PAs 156 -163 of 2023.

Several bills repealed old anti-abortion laws after passage of Proposal 2022-

3. MI House and Senate passed the bills, and were signed by the Governor: PA 11, 12, 13 and PA 31 of 2023.

Bills repealed restrictions on reproductive health care when the House and Senate passed SB 474, SB 476, SB 477, HB 4949, HB 4951, HB 4953, HB 4954, HB 4955 and HB 4956 and were ordered enrolled to the Governor. They removed 1) the prohibition for state funding for health care entities that provide abortion care, 2) the criminal punishment of pregnant people for actions taken during pregnancy, 3) the ban on private insurance coverage for abortion care, and 4) TRAP laws (targeted regulation of abortion providers) that created unnecessary regulations on abortion providers. They did not repeal the 24-hour waiting period or prohibition of Medicaid funding for abortion, nor did they introduce a bill to repeal parental consent.

Social Services

The earned income tax credit was increased from 6% to 30% of the federal credit for working families. The House and Senate passed the bills and the Governor signed PA 4 of 2023.

Access to free meals for students was passed by the House and Senate in the education budget bill. The Governor signed the budget bill that includes free breakfast and lunch to all of MI students in public schools. Michigan School Meals Program: PA 103 of 2023.

Civil Rights

Gender identity protections were passed by the House and Senate, then signed by the Governor to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act: PA 6 of 2023.

Racial discrimination based on hair was banned by passage of PA 45 of 2023.

Juvenile Justice

The House and Senate passed HB 4625, HB 4628, HB 4629, HB 4633, HB 4636, HB 4637, HB 4639, HB 4640, SB 418, SB 421, SB 425, SB 426, SB 428, SB 429, SB 432, SB 435 and SB 436 implementing many recommendations to reform juvenile justice and ordered them enrolled to the Governor.

Firearm Safety

The House and Senate passed bills to protect victims of domestic violence from firearms. SB 471, HB 4945 and SB 528 were ordered enrolled to the Governor. The U.S. Supreme Court case, *U.S. v. Rahimi*, is testing 1994 federal law that prohibits people under domestic violence restraining orders from having firearms.

Bills were passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor requiring safe storage of firearms if accessed by a minor, exempting purchase of storage and safety devices from sales and use taxes, requiring background checks for purchasing a firearm and penalties if violated: PA 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 of 2023

Bills were passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor prohibiting purchase of a gun if under an extreme risk protection order, known as "red

flag” laws: PA 35, 36, 37 and 38 of 2023

HB 4127 and HB 4128 are moving in the Legislature; they will prohibit firearms at polling places and absentee ballot counting board meetings.

On August 16, 2023, the MI Capitol Commission voted to ban “concealed carry” on State Capitol grounds. Legislators with a concealed carry permit may still carry a gun on Capitol grounds. Commissioners had banned openly carrying firearms in the Capitol in 2021. Metal detectors have also been installed.

Environment

Bills establishing clean and renewable energy and the role of the Public Service Commission, SB 271, SB 273, and SB 502, were passed by the House and Senate, and ordered enrolled to the Governor.

Bills siting solar, wind and energy facilities, HB 5120-21, were passed by the House and Senate and ordered enrolled to the Governor.

Financial Transparency

As required by passage of Proposal 2022-1 that LWVMI supported, SB 613-616 and SB 374 were passed by the House and Senate and ordered enrolled to the Governor. If signed, the Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, MI Senators and MI Representatives must file a report with certain financial information starting April 15, 2024. The form must be available in March 2024.

Election

There are too many bills that have been signed into law and are winding their way through the process to mention. Most of the new laws, PA 81-88, implement Proposal 2022-2. Other new laws make changes in the challenged ballot process and allow paid transportation to the polls: PAs 184-185 of 2023. There are bills heading to the Governor that allow 16-year-olds to pre-register to vote and automatic voter registration: HB 4569 & HB 4983. Bills regulating artificial intelligence (AI), HB 5143 & HB 5144, also passed the House and Senate and are going to the Governor. A bill to move our Presidential Primary to February 27 also became law, PA 2 of 2023. LWVMI will be working with the Promote the Vote coalition partners, ACLU, NAACP, League for Public Policy, and others to educate everyone on the new laws in 2024.

In conclusion, the LWVMI Advocacy Committee and LWVMI Board have had a very busy year! Over 2000 bills have been introduced in the MI House and Senate and LWVMI has a position on 214 of these bills. Over 2000 bills have been introduced in the MI House and Senate and LWVMI has a position on 214 bills. Over 60 bills signed into law will take effect on February 13, 2024. A complete list of our legislation is on the LWVMI website, and another update is available [here](#).

Now is the time to celebrate and look forward to these new laws going into effect and making a difference for Michigan citizens. Congratulations!

Judy Karandjeff
LWVMI Vice President for Advocacy

LWV Research Leads to Michigan Women's Hall of Fame

It began as an effort to salute hard work by the Grand Traverse LWV encouraging a successful YES Vote to fund a new library in the mid-1990s. Award-winning author Heather Shumaker wove this story into her 2022 book, *Beyond Books: Stories of Traverse Area Libraries 1960-2020*, which included another story of dedicated women who left their mark on the Traverse City landscape.

The Traverse City Ladies' Library Association started in 1869 when Traverse Township was just a scruffy little logging community. These ladies provided library services and a large public meeting hall to the community for more than 30 years. For this effort, the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, which "honors distinguished women, both historical and contemporary" with Michigan connections, is awarding them this ultimate recognition.

Now the Traverse City LLA ranks up there with Mary Free Bed Guild, Aretha Franklin, Helen Milliken, Jennifer Granholm, Sojourner Truth, Betty Ford, Judith Karandjeff, Rosa Parks, and other luminaries.

[Visit MWHF](#) to see the honorees, who will be inducted at a dinner in Lansing, December 6th.

Using research developed for *Beyond Books*, GTA League members Anne Magoun and Ann Swaney submitted the nomination for the LLA. As one of the founders said: "Our aim is not a selfish one. All the toil and endeavor of these years has not been for our own aggrandizement or pleasure, but to accomplish a good work for our community ..." (Martha E. Cram Bates, *Grand Traverse Herald*, 12/12/1878). They would have been good LWV members, right?



Observer Corps Network News

What is the best way to record information while observing government meetings? How do we share, in a meaningful way, what is taking place? Which government groups should we be observing? What should we do with

what we learn, and how should we summarize what is taking place so the goal of transparency is reached? What if something comes up that a local League may want to advocate for? These and more are some of the questions the Observer Corps wrestle with as they meet each month. We are a group of 108+ observers from 20 local leagues around the state of Michigan. And our mission is to make sure there is transparency in government, learn about how government functions, and pay attention to issues that come up which relate to positions the League holds in order to advocate supporting or opposing action.

“Sunshine” or openness in government refers to two distinct areas: access to public records and access to public meetings. In 1966 the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) defined what the public has a right to know and how they can exercise that right to obtain government-held information.

For many years the LWV has been a champion of openness in government, supporting initiatives to expand open government requirements and opposing proposals aimed at limiting access to public information. Observer Corps programs are only one way for Leagues to ensure that “sunshine” or government transparency regulations are followed in their communities. (“Observing Your Government in Action, Protecting Your Right to Know, LWVUS)

Next LWVMI Observer Corps Meeting - November 29th at 3pm on Zoom
For information contact Lynne Kochmanski, LWVMI Observer Corps Director at lynne.kochmanski@gmail.com

Will Michigan’s Redistricting Maps Have to be Redrawn?

State Legislative district maps in the Metro Detroit area will have to be redrawn if the Plaintiffs in the *Agee v Benson* lawsuit are ultimately successful. The lawsuit was tried in the Western District of the Federal Court on November 1-3 and 6-8, 2023 in front of a three Judge panel. The Judges’ decision will be announced in January 2024. The losing side is expected to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. It’s not clear whether the Supreme Court will decide to hear the case. While the U.S. Supreme Court decided several years ago that partisan gerrymandering cases did not belong in the federal courts, the Court has been considering a number of racial gerrymandering cases recently.

Issues

The Plaintiffs claim that:

1. the maps for the following districts are unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment: House Districts 1,7,8,10,11,12 and 14; and Senate Districts 1,3,6,8,10 and 11
2. the Redistricting Commission violated Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act when it drew the maps for House Districts 1,7,10,12 and 14; and Senate Districts 1,3,6 and 8

Trial: 14th Amendment Claim

Plaintiffs’ Argument

The Plaintiffs’ first witness was Commissioner Rebecca Szetela. She

described the Commission's map drawing process in Southeastern Michigan as one that was dominated by consideration of the racial makeup of the area. Further, that the Commission was told that the consideration of Communities of Interest (third of the seven ranked criteria required by the Michigan Constitution) could be used as a pretext for increasing the percentage of the Black Voting Age Population (BVAP). That since Communities of Interest were whatever the Commission decided they were, they could be used to justify how maps were drawn, when the real reason was race. She also claimed that partisan fairness information (fourth of the seven ranked criteria required by the Michigan Constitution) was not available until late in the map-drawing process.

Defense Argument

Commissioner Anthony Eid was the first witness for the Defense. Eid testified that he strongly disagreed with Commissioner Szetela's testimony. That the Commission considered many other variables, such as Communities of Interest, partisan fairness and equal population when drawing the maps, not just the BVAP. He pointed out that one of the Metro Detroit districts had been drawn in response to comments by the Bengali Community at the Commission's Metro Detroit Public Hearing on the draft maps. Another district map reflected the concerns of the LGBTQ community in Detroit. Further, that he had shared publicly available partisan fairness measures with the rest of the Commission early in the map-drawing process.

The Commission's Voting Rights Consultant, Bruce Adelson, testified that he strongly disagreed with Commissioner Szetela's characterization of the map-drawing process.

Trial: Violation of Federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) Claim

Section 2 of the VRA requires that "minorities have an equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice". It does not require that the percent of minority voting population be 50% plus one. It also does not require that "their candidate of choice" be a minority. If too many minority members are placed in a specific district it is considered "packing" which is illegal. Therefore, in order to determine the appropriate percentage of minority voting age population to use in drawing "VRA districts", a statistical analysis of relevant previous elections must be computed for each VRA district.

The Commission hired Dr. Lisa Handley as a consultant to do the analysis. She determined that a Black Voting Age Population (BVAP) of 35-40% was sufficient in Wayne County General Elections, for Blacks to usually "elect a candidate of their choice". Less than 50% is sufficient because of the history of Whites supporting the minority's "candidate of choice". Using the lower percentage not only avoids "packing", it also provides Blacks with greater influence in Lansing because it provides for more VRA districts.

Plaintiffs' Argument

Former state Senator Virgil Smith and former state Representative LaMar Lemmons III, both testified that the BVAP used in drawing the Detroit VRA Districts was too low. In some of the VRA Districts, no Black state Representatives were elected in the 2022 General Election. Further, that the current districts which combine parts of the City of Detroit with northern suburbs are not a Community of Interest. That the Blacks who've moved

north of the City into Macomb and Oakland Counties have nothing in common with the Blacks who still live in the Detroit and the Whites in those Counties are hostile towards the Blacks who live in the City.

Defense Argument

Dr. Lisa Handley testified she had made a number of presentations to the Commission and had spoken on the phone numerous times with the Commission's General Counsel, Julianne Pastula, re the statistical analysis Handley had performed for the Commission. Further, that as she had explained to the Commission in one of her presentations, she could not include Primary Election data in her Analysis because there was insufficient Primary Election data available. When asked about the 2022 election results, she commented that in those instances where more than one minority candidate ran in the primary, thus splitting the minority vote so that no minority made it to the General Election, no district configuration could have provided an equal opportunity for minorities to elect a candidate of their choice.

Redistricting Commission

Once the current lawsuit is resolved, the Redistricting Commission will go into dormancy until the next Commission is sworn into office in 2029, unless another lawsuit is filed in the interim. If that occurs, the Michigan Constitution requires the Secretary of State to reinstate the Commission so that they can defend their maps.

Susan Smith
LWVMI Redistricting Chair

Examining Positions Through a DEI Lens

Since September, a team of 7 Michigan League members have been working on updating LWVMI positions using a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens. LWVUS had started this process in 2022 with national positions and provided guidance to state Leagues to do the same with state positions.

The committee suggested minor changes to 7 positions, 6 of which have been approved by the LWVMI Board. Most of the changes have been corrections of terms to the new industry standard, For example, "substance/abuse addiction" in the Health Care position will now be called "substance use disorder". We are grateful to these committee members for their expertise and the insight they provided to this Position Review Committee: MerriKay Oleen-Burkey (Kalamazoo), Shirley Madden (Manistee), Cathy McAdam (Grosse Pte), Patty O'Donnell (Leelanau), Paula Bowman (NW Wayne), Marie Bonkowski (Leelanau) and Maria Woloson (Oakland Area and Chair).

Maria Woloson
LWVMI VP Program

All Certified!

We can happily report that the 73 counties in Michigan that had elections on November 7th have all certified. We are grateful to the many LWV members around the state who stepped up after this local election to observe the Boards of Canvassers do their work. Even traditionally busy counties (Wayne, Oakland, Macomb) completed their work within 8 days after the election, so most BOC observers only spent one or two shifts at their county offices. Regardless of the duration, the League was still the eyes and ears of the public, and usually the only ones watching the process.

Thank you all for helping to keep up the transparency check we should all expect from our government workers. A special thank you to LWVMI Project Manager Sara Weertz for all her work on the SUG link and follow-up record-keeping.

Paula Bowman

LWVMI Membership

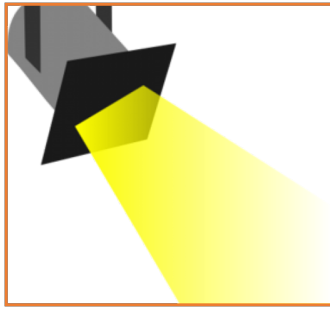
Membership Leaders' Network

The Membership Leaders' Network met on Zoom on Wednesday, November 8. Our meeting began with open discussion about how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are being incorporated into League work, and methods for recruiting new members and retaining them. Later Miranda Grunwell, Community Education Program Manager at Disability Network Southwest Michigan, talked with us about "Disability Language and Etiquette." The topic was timely since the fall DEI program was addressing the accessibility of polling locations for all persons with disabilities. There is a recording available for this meeting if you did not receive it.

The Membership Leaders' Network will take a holiday in December and our next meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 10th. All League members are welcome to attend Membership Network meetings. If you would like to be added to the list, contact MerriKay (moburkey30@gmail.com).

DEI Fall Program: Accessibility of Polling Locations

On November 15th the LWVMI DEI Team sponsored a virtual fall DEI program on accessibility of polling locations. The presenters were Kenia Flores, the Voter Access and Election Protection Fellow, at Detroit Disability Power and her partner on the polling location audits project Sarah Blahovec from The Carter Center. They shared the results of the accessibility audits of 261 polling locations in Metropolitan Detroit on election day in November 2022, and explained what is needed to field polling location audits should our Local Leagues choose to carry them out next year. A recording of this DEI program along with digital handouts and resources are available upon request (moburkey30@gmail.com). Kenia and Sarah will be offering more in-depth audit training in 2024. Look for the dates and times for those virtual trainings in future *League Links*.



Local League Spotlights

Congratulations to Donna Hornberger, a longtime member and past president of the **LWV of Grand Traverse Area**, for being recognized by the local media as one of the 'Influential Women of Traverse City Area.' Donna is a community leader who has volunteered her time to many organizations. Having learned a lot about county government when she ran

for office as a county commissioner, she chose to put that knowledge to use by becoming active in LWVGTA!

LWV Of Northern Lower Michigan held a program for members on November 8th to learn about Odawa tribal governance, the many services provided in the community, and how the tribe was formed. Presenters for this program included Tribal Chairperson Regina Gasco-Bentley and Historian and Archivist Eric Hemenway.

LWV of Grosse Pointe / Harper Woods, LWV of Detroit and Grosse Pointe War Memorial sponsored a program on November 13th entitled: "Sunshine Laws: Your Right to Know." The attendees were informed about what bodies are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), how to file a FOIA request for records owned by the public, and steps to take if a local governmental body has violated the Open Meetings Act (OMA).

Local Leagues

Berrien/Cass Counties
Copper Country ([with Gogebic County Geographic Unit](#))
Dearborn/Dearborn Heights
Delta County
Detroit
Eastern UP MAL State Unit
Flint Area
Grand Haven Area
Greater Grand Rapids Area
Grand Traverse Area ([with Crawford County Geographic Unit](#))
Grosse Pointe
Holland Area
Jackson Area
Kalamazoo Area ([with Calhoun County Geographic Unit](#))
Lansing Area
Leelanau County
Livingston County
Macomb County MAL State Unit
Manistee County
Marquette County
Midland Area
Mt. Pleasant

Northeast Michigan (formerly Alpena County)
Northern Lower Michigan
Northwest Wayne County
Oakland Area
Saginaw County
Tecumseh/Lenawee County MAL State Unit
Troy
Washtenaw County

For more information go to www.lwvmi.org
or check out Facebook pages for state and local LWVs

LWVMI Leadership 2023-2024

Co-President: Paula Bowman (NW Wayne County)
Co-President: Denise Hartsough (Kalamazoo Area)
VP Voter Services: Judy Florian (Grosse Pointe)
VP Advocacy: Judy Karandjeff (Lansing Area)
VP Program: Maria Woloson (Oakland Area)
VP Membership: MerriKay Oleen-Burkey (Kalamazoo Area)
Secretary: Carla Barrows-Wiggins (Oakland Area)
Treasurer: Tom Wells (Grosse Pointe)

Directors

Voter Services: Carolyn Vertin (Tecumseh/Lenawee)
Advocacy: Connie Mitchell (Dearborn/Dearborn Heights)
Membership/DEI: Shirley Madden (Manistee County)
Observer Corps: Lynne Kochmanski (Washtenaw County)
Membership/DEI: Cathy McAdam (Grosse Pointe)
League Links: Courtney Winell (Greater Grand Rapids Area)

Calendar



November 2023

November is Native American Heritage Month
November 23: Thanksgiving (LWVMI and LWVUS Offices Closed)
November 24: Native American Heritage Day
November 28: [Giving Tuesday](#)

December 2023

December 12: LWVMI's Firearm Safety Network presents a Public Forum with Michael Waldman, President and CEO of The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Virtual Discussion of the Second Amendment (7:00 pm) [Register here.](#)

Connect with us! League of Women Voters of Michigan
Phone: 517-484-5383
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