Michigan Election Laws—Not Moving Forward
Judy Karandjeff, LWV Lansing Area, LWVMI President

Voting can’t be taken for granted! As Michael Waldman in his book, The Fight for the Vote, and Ari Berman in his book, Give Us the Ballot, note, voting has evolved from the founding of our country. Sometimes we have made progressive strides such as when we passed the 14th, 15th, and 19th U.S. Constitutional amendments and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but other times we have restricted voting through photo IDs or poll taxes. Our history is mixed.

All of the gains we made occurred when the people acted—the Congress, State Legislatures, Presidents, Governors did not lead, they responded! Just think of the Civil War, the Suffragette Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. But the gains faced opposition. “At every step of the way, entrenched groups, fearing change, have fought back and tried to reduce the opportunity for political participation and power,” states Michael Waldman, President of the Brennan Center for Justice.

Many states are adopting measures to increase access to voting, but in Michigan we have been adding new restrictions, as you will see on page 2. No measure to make voting easier has been adopted.

Additionally, Michigan has one of the most decentralized voting systems in the United States. According to the Secretary of State’s website:

Of the eight states that administer elections on the local level, Michigan is the largest state both in terms of its population and geography to do so. Involving 83 county clerks, 274 city clerks and 1,242 township clerks, Michigan's elections system is administered by 1,599 county and local election officials making it the most decentralized elections system in the nation.

Today, the League must continue to safeguard and improve access to voting in Michigan.

Our work continues so more people can wear these  
And not these
# Highlights of Michigan’s Election Laws

**Judy Karandjeff, LWV Lansing Area, LWVMI President**

Sec. 1. Every citizen of the United States who has attained the age of 21 years, who has resided in this state six months, and who meets the requirements of local residence provided by law, shall be an elector and qualified to vote in any election except as otherwise provided in this constitution. The legislature shall define residence for voting purposes. (Note: Elector means “a person who has the right to vote in an election.” Age changed with 26th U.S. Amendment. A court case ruled that the 6 months residency requirement was too long.)

### Michigan’s Voter Registration Laws (MI Compiled Law)

- Register to vote 30 days prior to an election (MCL 168.500d)
- Show a photo ID to register to vote in person or sign affidavit (MCL 168.497c)
- Reside in Michigan 30 days before registering (MCL 168.495)
- Re-register if you move within state (MCL 168.506)
- Allow voter registration when getting driver’s license (MCL 168.500a)
- Pre-register if you are at least 17 1/2 and will be 18 by election day (MCL 168.509r)

### Registration Reform Possibilities

- **On-Line Voter Registration**
  - 32 states plus the District of Columbia offer online registration
  - Michigan does not!

- **Permanent Portable Voter Registration**
  - 21 states and D.C. allow address changes on election day.
  - Michigan does not!

### Michigan’s Voting Laws (MI Compiled Law)

- Show a photo ID or sign affidavit when you vote (MCL 168.523)
- Get an absentee voter ballot if you meet specific criteria (MCL 168.759)
- Sign a form affirming you are a citizen when you vote (MCL 168.523)
- Vote in person the first time if you registered by mail (MCL 168.509t)
- Vote without straight-ticket voting (MCL 168.736e)
- Have address on driver’s license and voter registration match (MCL 168.509z)
- Able to vote if an ex-felon (MCL 168.758b)
- Able to vote if homeless and list an address (according to the National Coalition for the Homeless, individuals living on the street or in a shelter have a right to vote, and are required to have a mailing address to register to vote)
- Military get an absentee ballot (MCL 168.759a)
- Polls open 7a.m to 8 p.m. (MCL 168.720)
- Placed on inactive file, if a voter does not vote for six consecutive years (MCL 168.509r)

### Voting Reform Possibilities

- **In-Person Early Voting:**
  - 37 states (including 3 that mail ballots to all voters) and the District of Columbia, any qualified voter may cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day.
  - Michigan does not!

- **No-Reason Absentee Voting:**
  - 27 states and the District of Columbia permit any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering an excuse.
  - Michigan requires an excuse!
Redistricting in Michigan: Should Politicians Choose their Voters?
Sue Smith, LWV Ann Arbor Area, LWVMI VP, Program

The League of Women Voters of Michigan continues to educate voters on the problems that result when the Legislature, no matter which party is in control, draws the congressional and legislative district maps. The result is that politicians choose their voters instead of the other way around.

The League’s position on redistricting calls for a Redistricting Commission that is independent of the Legislature and a process that is transparent, fair and provides for public input. Seven states already have an independent commission.

In cooperation with local Leagues, our speakers’ bureau of trained League members has given over 70 educational presentations at Town Halls and civic organization meetings. We continue to make presentations to a variety of organizations in response to requests.

The League is also working in coalition with other non-partisan groups such as Common Cause, the Michigan Non-profit Association, the American Association of University Women, the NAACP, APIA Vote, ACCESS, the Sierra Club, Clean Water Action and others to extend our redistricting educational efforts to an expanding universe of voters.

Changing Michigan’s redistricting process would require amending our state Constitution. Such an amendment could be put on the ballot by either the Legislature or a citizen’s initiative petition.

April Workshops Attract Many

If success is gauged by the numbers of attendees, LWVMI’s April workshops scored home runs. On April 16th, LWVMI Voter Service Director Eva Packard gave an instructional session on using VOTE411. This was beneficial to new users, as well as those who needed a refresher. Materials included a detailed manual authored by Eva. League volunteers all over Michigan (and the US) will be working hard to master this tricky, but worthwhile product this election year.

Ninety-six participants from 17 Leagues learned about current LWVMI Advocacy efforts at the April 30th workshop. Our speakers were former MI Senator Gretchen Whitmer, Sally Williams from MISOS Elections Division and Craig Mauger from Michigan Campaign Finance Network. League presenters, Judy Karandjeff, Susan Smith and Linda Hoff provided the playbook for advocacy that is pertinent to League members around Michigan.

Those who attended definitely feel more prepared to tackle the League’s work in 2016.

Forum Moderator Training

In response to a need for training additional League members to become candidate forum moderators, LWVMI Board members are working on training sessions in three parts of the state. A date has already set for a session in SE Michigan: Saturday morning, July 16th in Dearborn (details to League presidents will follow).

Dates and venues are also being established for a session in the west side of Michigan and even the Upper Peninsula. Stay tuned for details!

VP for Advocacy, Linda Hoff, shares LWVMI’s Advocacy initiatives

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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.
LWVMI Adopts Strategic Plan

At its April, 2016 meeting, the LWVMI Board of Directors adopted a 2016-2018 Strategic Plan:

Our Values: LWVMI will demonstrate ….
- Respect for all
- Non-partisanship
- Democratic principles
- Transparency/openness
- Integrity
- Civility
- Diversity
- Informed leadership and members
- Volunteerism
- Empowerment

Our Vision: LWVMI in the next three years will be seen…
...as a “go to” organization
...as a respected source of balanced, factual information on public policy
...as an advocate for, and protector of, voter rights
...as a relevant, respected and influential voice advocating for change
...as committed to empowering local Leagues, LWV members and communities
...as a growing and strengthened presence promoting civic engagement and civil discourse
...as a key player in the campaign for redistricting

Our Goals
- 1: Program
  Assure LWVMI positions needed for advocacy are relevant and up to date.
- 2: Advocacy
  Advocate on issues for which LWVMI has positions, with emphasis on priority issues.
- 3: Voter Service
  Educate to create a more informed and engaged electorate.
- 4: Voter Protection
  Protect the right to vote, including making voter registration and voting more accessible and electoral districts more representative.
- 5: Membership and Leadership Development
  Expand LWVMI and local League capacity for promoting and sustaining organizational growth.
- 6: Development
  Ensure LWVMI development capacity to effectively meet program and staffing needs.
- 7: Communication
  Communicate effectively with internal and external audiences.

A Lasting Gift

Florence Belle Brotherton was the first president of the LWV of Michigan from 1919-1921
She and her husband Wilbur were both active in the suffrage cause and Detroit civic affairs. During her life, Brotherton was recognized by the National LWV as one of thirtyone “American women who had done the most to advance the suffrage cause.” Belle Brotherton worked tirelessly to leave a legacy of equal voting rights for all citizens.

The Belle Brotherton Legacy Circle recognizes LWV members and friends who have made a notable financial contribution to the LWV of Michigan. Our Legacy Circle members have made an investment in our future through a significant major gift of $5,000 or more in one calendar year or a planned gift to the LWVMI in their will or trust.

You may make your donation or leave your legacy to one of two funds, the LWV of Michigan (would be used for League operations) or the LWVMI Education Fund. (tax deductible, used for educational activities.)

If you would like assistance in leaving a gift to the LWV of Michigan in your estate plan, contact the LWVMI office. If you have already made arrangements for a legacy gift, let us know so that we can welcome you to our Belle Brotherton Legacy Circle and express our appreciation. Letting us know about your plans helps us guide our work into the future.

Did You Get Your Letter?

League members and friends of the League should have received a letter in May concerning the need for funds to support the print voter guides that the League will be publishing this fall. LWVMI plans to distribute 90,000 copies of our Voter Guide all over Michigan. Large and small financial gifts are needed to fund this ambitious project that we know is welcomed by voters trying to make good decisions on election day. Your gift will help fund this needed resource.
League Advocacy Success Stories
Suzanne Dixon, LWV Holland Area, LWVMI Director of Natural Resources

Looking for a few good outcomes through advocacy?
- When the U.S. State Department held a public comment period to reauthorize nearly 100 year old pipelines under the St. Clair River, LWVMI urged the State of Michigan to respond in opposition. The State did, and the request was withdrawn.

- LWVMI supported an organizational letter from Michigan Environmental Council, in response to proposed legislation, opposing net-pen aquaculture facilities in the Great Lakes. The concentrated fish waste, disease and genetic issues from escapement are a threat to the Great Lakes. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture followed with their own opposition. There have been no hearings on this bill.

- The Department of Environmental Quality proposed a rule change that would deregulate 500 chemicals currently on Michigan’s list of toxic air chemicals whose emissions are monitored for citizen safety. LWVMI sent a letter opposing this action to the Department of Environmental Quality. The Department subsequently announced they were dropping the plan due to citizen response.

- LWVMI opposed the AK Steel Permit request to increase volatile organic compound emissions. AK Steel has withdrawn their permit application.

- LWVMI opposed a Marathon permit request which would increase sulfur dioxide emissions to an already overburdened community. This request was to meet new EPA standards for decreased sulfur in fuel. The DEQ negotiated reduced emissions from Marathon based on public comments.

Your voice matters. The Senate Energy and Technology Committee has been holding hearings for months on SB 437 and SB 438, bills opposed by LWVMI. Into their third Substitution, the Committee approved moving the bill package to the Senate floor with a fourth Substitution on May 25, 2016. While these bills propose a “Clean Energy Goal” of 35% by 2025, they do not call for using all “renewable energy” and include cutbacks in “energy waste”. They allow new and expanded incineration as “renewable”.

The House has their own package of bills (HB 4297-4304) going in the wrong direction. It has remained on the House floor since December as their members try to resolve issues on renewable energy. Michigan deserves an energy plan which protects ratepayers from utility monopolies.

New Leagues in Michigan’s Future

These are exciting times for the League in Michigan. As a result of growing interest by those who want to participate in our mission, five new areas in Michigan are in the beginning stages of becoming a League.

Neighboring, established Leagues are acting as mentors, providing the League members in the new areas with the tools and counsel they need to grow and flourish. We are inspired by the enthusiasm in the new League areas and grateful for the time and attention given by the mentoring Leagues.

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<th>New League Area</th>
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Voter Guides for the Primary Election are coming!

Leagues all across Michigan are using VOTE411, the League’s on-line voter guide program, to provide non-partisan candidate information to voters. Voters can read a candidate’s responses to League questions, free of ‘spin’ or critique.

The state League is handling all the Michigan candidates running for federal and state legislative districts in the August 2nd Primary: 38 candidates for Michigan’s 14 Congressional districts, 409 for our 110 State House districts, and 10 to fill the State Senate District 4 vacancy. Local Leagues are handling Primary races in their communities – mostly county officials and commissioners, township offices, a few local judicial races, and ballot proposals. Together, this will make a complete voter guide for most of the voters in our state – at least the ones with a local League presence.

VOTE411 hopes to be ‘live’ in most Michigan areas by the end of June – before the first absentee ballots are sent out to local residents. The League’s voter guide will receive added exposure in SE Michigan because our VOTE411 guides for Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw and Livingston Counties will appear on the Detroitnews.com website.