



2025 Students Inside Albany

The 2025 Students Inside Albany Conference was held May 18-21 with 42 attendees representing 40 local Leagues, MAL Units and ILO's. The students came from all over New York State from Long Island to Buffalo and Plattsburgh to Binghamton. They ranged from sophomores to seniors in high school. They were energetic and enthusiastic to learn about the New York State government.

On Sunday evening, Erica Smitka, LWVNYS Executive Director, presented information on how the New York State Government works. She explained the roles of the various branches of the New York State government and the differences between the state government and the other levels of government, e.g., national and local.

On Monday, the students toured the state Capitol and heard about whose faces are on those engraved stones and the secret of the fireplaces in the Senate Chambers. Back at the hotel, NY Assemblymember John McDonald III and NY Assemblymember Rebecca Kassay talked with them about effective lobbying, how to approach legislators, make your arguments and be persuasive. The students were attentive and eager to ask questions. Both Assemblymembers were excited for the afternoon to have their student shadows join them and learn more.

On the way to the Capitol that afternoon, the students had a tour of the Chambers of the Court of Appeals and heard about the different levels of the judiciary in New York State from and were allowed to explore the chamber and take pictures posed as future judges and lawyers.

Continuing up the hill to the Capitol and Legislative Office Building, the students were directed to find their Assemblymember's offices and shadow their legislator. All the students were escorted onto the Assembly floor and introduced on the floor of the Chamber. They sat with their representatives at their desks and viewed the chamber in session.

That evening, Dan Clark, Reporter with the Times Union, and Alexander Gault, Watertown Daily Times and Johnson Newspaper, talked with the students about their coverage of state politics. They discussed how they decide what to cover, how to report quickly for social media sites, and also how they started their careers in the media.

On Tuesday, LWVNYS Campaign Director, Clyanna Lightbourn, presented how we approach political activism to make a difference. She discussed with the students her current work including Democracy During Detention Act, and how she goes about lobbying and speaking to legislators. We also had Kayla Mumtaz, Legislative Affairs and Community Engagement Specialist of Alliance for Quality Education, present information to the students on the methods they use to advocate for and educate others on issues important to their organization. The Alliance for Quality Education reaches the public using different techniques than the League so it was great for students to be able to compare.

The students shadowed their Senator on Tuesday. Unfortunately, the Senate was continuing their rules initiated during the pandemic, so the students were not allowed on to the floor of the Chamber, but watched session from the Gallery. A few students were escorted onto the floor of the Chamber for a short time for a closer look and pictures and later joined the rest of us in the Gallery. We then had the opportunity to hear from *Students Inside Albany* alumni, Leah Goldman, who shared how lifechanging the program was for her and ultimately led her to her current position as Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for the NYS Senate Majority.

On Tuesday evening, Meghan Keegan, Albany Common Councilmember, and Assemblymember Gabriella Romero spoke to the students about running for office. They outlined how to gather signatures and work with constituents, working with their colleagues, fundraising and participating in forums. The students had many questions about the exact procedures and were encouraged to consider running for office at the local level and continue to speak with their representatives.

On Wednesday morning, Erica Smitka engaged the students in a discussion of what they saw in the Assembly and Senate. Much of the discussion surrounded questions on procedures and voting in both Chambers and the role of leadership in each Chamber. The students were also asked if their opinions of the political process had changed and they all answered that they would be interested in influencing public policy and civic education in the future.

As a final method for learning how to make their voices heard and how to influence public policy decision-making, voting in NYS was discussed. The process for registering to vote and to vote itself was presented to the students and they were invited to complete a voter registration form if they hadn't done so already. The options of ways to vote for those going away to college in the fall were also discussed.

As a culmination of the conference, the students were presented individually with a certificate for attendance at the Conference. A few students noted that they had been offered internships in the legislators' offices for the summer.

Just for fun, the students also went bowling one night at a local bowling alley and one evening many of the students and chaperones walked up to the Empire State Plaza to view the lights and stroll on the plaza.

Some quotes from students' evaluations exemplify the impact of the program:

- "[My state government] feels more approachable. I liked how we learned to be effective and educated citizen lobbyist."
- "I had no idea what the government was like before this. It made me want to help in my community and the state."
- "I [now] know my voice matters and my representatives want to hear my concerns"
- "I think I would run for assemblymember."
- "I definitely was surprised at how much the state dictates in our daily lives."
- "It pushed me out my comfort zone and showed me how to represent important issues I care about."

Thanks to our volunteer chaperones: Mary Rosch (LWV of Albany), and Ann Leiter (LWV of Central Nassau). We couldn't host this program without the tremendous work and support of these volunteers!



Pre and Post Conference Survey Results

Question	% Correct Pre	%Correct Post
1) What does the Open meetings or Sunshine law provide?	71%	81%
2) What does the term grassroots lobbying mean?	69%	86%
3) What are the three executive branches of the government?	55%	50%
4) Can you register to vote before you turn 18?	90%	100%
5) What does FOIA stand for?	95%	100%
6) What does the FOIA law provide?	74%	81%
7) Voters elect members of the Senate and Assembly to a term of how many years?	45%	2%
8) Is there a limit to how many terms a Senate or Assembly member can serve?	74%	93%
9) How many seats are there in the NYS Assembly and Senate?	23%	90%
10) How many votes are needed to re-pass a bill that has been vetoed by the governor?	83%	86%
11) The NYS Governor is elected for a _____ year term?	59%	79%
12) What year did women get the right to vote?	43%	38%
13) What is a special interest group?	100%	98%
14) Explain what is meant by the term checks and balances?	95%	98%
15) How often does the NYS Legislature meet?	50%	95%
16) "To advocate" means what?	72%	98%
17) What is the title of the New York State's Chief Fiscal officer?	43%	67%
18) The name of the person currently holding this position is?	0%	14%
19) Which party has majority control in the Assembly?	76%	98%
20) What is the name of the presiding officer in the Assembly?	60%	74%
21) The name of the person currently holding this position is?	0%	10%
22) What is the name of the presiding officers in the Senate?	43%	52%
23) Persons who currently hold that position?	2%	12%
24) What are the basic qualifications for NYS legislators required by the State constitution?	83%	81%
25) What is the highest court in New York State?	55%	93%

