

## THE COMMUNICATOR

### A Call to Action: Defending Democracy and Empowering Voters



By **Terrie E. Griffin, D. Min., M.Div., M.H.S.**  
President, LWVPA Board of Directors

Dear League Members,

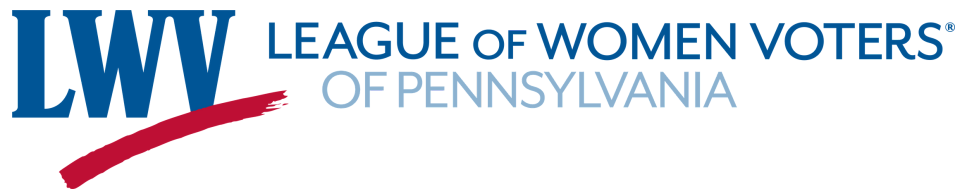
Since the 2020 presidential election was held, with the largest voter turn-out in nearly a century, we are now more than ever witnessing actions to disenfranchise tens of millions of Americans from voting in future elections. There's been nothing like this since the end of Reconstruction. Southern states effectively reversed the 15th Amendment's prohibition on denying the vote based on race by enacting poll taxes, literacy tests and other restrictions that disenfranchised nearly all Black men. Decades later, with the aid of voting rights activists and faith communities working together, it took an act of Congress to prohibit such laws with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Today, there are attempts to dismantle the Voting Rights Act and voter suppression remains an unfortunate reality. While states temporarily expanded mail and early voting due to the coronavirus pandemic, currently there are 250 (or more) new laws proposed in 43 states to limit mail, early-in person and Election Day voting.

These actions are likely to disproportionately affect urban communities of color. Those who support this legislative action say their rationale is to eliminate the possibility for wide-spread fraud through election integrity. However, in the 2020 presidential election there was no evidence of wide-spread voter fraud that would have changed the outcome of the election.

The possibility of disenfranchising tens of millions of Americans must be met with deliberate action that **"defends democracy and empowers voters!"** This is more than a motto for the LWV. This is our **"Call to Action."** We must break down barriers by: protecting voting rights and ballot access, advocating and litigating voting rights cases, and publishing our positions on social and print media. We are against discriminatory voter ID's and for engaging in and partnering with grassroots organizations, promoting civic education in communities of color, urban and rural areas, among senior citizens, in public housing, within our sororities and social clubs, and high schools and colleges (particularly among high school seniors and first time voters). **THIS IS ACTION WE CAN DO!**

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There's more we can and must do. With racial discrimination on the rise in our country and communities, let's begin by asking ourselves difficult questions and discussing serious solutions. Is there a need for equity, cultural competence and more sensitivity in our "in-reach" (within our local Leagues) and our "outreach" (in our relationships with partners and potential funders, etc.)? If so, how do we engage with each other authentically and with sensitivity? I believe we must listen to each other and not merely hear one another. It's hard work but our commitment to inclusivity and transparency will enable us to accomplish our mission, goals and objectives that will prove beneficial for everyone.

These are just a few action steps I'm proposing for your consideration as we continue working together and moving forward **"Defending Democracy and Empowering Voters."**

Yours in League,

Terrie E. Griffin, President – LWVPA

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## Update from Executive Director By Meg Pierce



The State office has had a busy month planning for our [2021 Virtual Convention](#), supporting local leagues and Members at Large, fundraising, and building a new website (launch coming soon)! We are also thrilled to welcome a new Policy and Communications Fellow, Gabriela Hartney. Learn more about Gaby in her bio on the next page!

A reminder that ALL members are invited to attend the 2021 Virtual Convention, and that [early bird pricing is available only through April 18](#). Members are encouraged to take advantage of these discounts by registering early.

I am pleased to share the three Convention headline speakers who will address the key issues of democracy protection, League history, and League future at Convention: Acting Secretary of State Veronica Degraffenreid, LWVUS Board President Dr. Deborah Turner, and activist and author Dr. Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins. We are honored to have these accomplished women join us and look forward to learning from their unique perspectives. [Register now!](#)

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## LWVPA Welcomes Gaby Hartney

Gaby recently joined the League as a Policy and Communications Fellow. Gaby started her path in public service during undergrad, first as an intern for NJ State Senator Chris Connors and later as an intern for Senator Cory Booker. She also spent time as a translator at a refugee camp in Greece, working with African refugees at the camp. Gaby spent time in Paris studying French politics, particularly French and African relations, and mastering the French language. After graduation she served an AmeriCorps VISTA year as the Recruitment Manager at YouthBuild Philadelphia. Gaby has a B.A. from Arcadia University and is currently pursuing an MPA from the University of Pennsylvania. Welcome, Gaby!



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## Call for LWVPA State Board Nominations

The nominating committee for the state League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania has begun the board recruitment process for the [State Board of Directors](#). We are asking you to nominate yourself or others around the League for consideration for positions. Currently, a nomination is a suggestion to the committee that you are interested and an open invitation for more conversation on the topic.

Help lead us to build-out and build-up our League from the local to the state level. Nominate yourself or a few people to give us a deep well to engage and expand our leadership pipeline.

### **Directions: How to Nominate for LWV PA Board of Directors**

LWVPA seek highly motivated members passionate about the critical nonpartisan role that the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania plays in democracy and who understand and exemplify our values and mission. Those elected will serve in the next 2-year term (June 2021-June 2023).

Please input your nominations to this [form](#).

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## Apply for Chairmanship of Legislative Reapportionment Commission

From our friends at Draw the Lines....Pass it on. On March 26th, the four current members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC), the group that will draw Pennsylvania's state house and senate voting districts this year, announced they are seeking applicants for the fifth member and chair of the commission.

This is an opportunity to appoint a chairperson who can ensure an open and consensus-driven process that considers input and mapping proposals from Pennsylvanians across the state. In fact, 280+ Pennsylvanians have already told us they will be raising their hand to apply. Anyone can apply and who better than a member of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. Here's a [link](#) to apply for this position. Applications will be accepted until April 9th.

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## Advocacy Team Update: People Powered Fair Maps Update By Carol Kuniholm, VP of Government and Social Policy

The redistricting world has been very active and will be increasingly so in the months ahead.

**Nationally:** HR 1, the For the People Act, passed the House of Representatives. Provisions in the bill would impact Congressional redistricting in every state. LWVUS supports this bill strongly and encourages us all to contact our US senators to ask their support. You can do that online [here](#) or call and leave your own message. Senator Bob Casey: (202) 224-4254; Senator Pat Toomey: (202) 224-6324

**Here in Pennsylvania:** LWVPA supported legislation, LACRA, the Legislative and Congressional Redistricting Act, has been introduced as House Bill 22 and Senate Bill 222. Both bills are in their respective State Government Committees.

[March toward Transparency](#), a joint advocacy effort by LWVPA and Fair Districts PA, is off to a very strong start. Over 600 volunteers have been arranging constituent meetings with legislators. As of mid-March, all senate districts and all but 18 house districts were covered, with some success in gaining co-sponsors already reported.

On March 16, legislative leaders announced appointment of four of the five members of the Legislative Reapportionment Commission. For the first time in PA history, there will be women on the commission: Senate Majority Leader Kim Ward and House Minority Leader Joanna McClinton. You can read the details [here](#). The four legislators named to the commission now have 45 days to name a fifth or that decision will go to the PA Supreme Court.

Another promising development: the [PA Redistricting website](#) has been radically updated, with maps dating back to 1906 and date dating back to 1931. The site now provides information about projected Census dates as well as all data currently available from the Census Bureau.

LWVUS has announced a national Day of Action on April 29. The date was originally meant to coincide with release of Census Data to the states. While that release is delayed until possibly late September, the Day of Action will now be an occasion to insist that maps matter. Here in PA, local Leagues and Fair Districts PA leaders are planning local and regional events to highlight some of PA's gerrymandered maps and call attention to public demand for redistricting reform and fair districts maps.

A milestone to celebrate: the Fair Districts PA volunteer speakers bureau hit the 1000 mark in early March: 1000 informational events, attended by over 42,000 Pennsylvanians, to explain redistricting, gerrymandering and the PA legislative process. Thank you to all the local Leagues who hosted events and to the League members who are among those very active speakers.

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## Advocacy Team Update, Continued: Prison Gerrymandering By Carol Kuniholm, VP of Government and Social Policy

The Census Bureau continues to count people as part of the electoral districts where they are incarcerated, rather than in their home communities. This distorts representation at local and state levels, giving prison districts undeserved strength in the state legislature and reducing the influence of communities whose populations are most impacted by incarceration.

The practice defies most state constitutions and statutes, including the Pennsylvania election code (25 Pa.C.S. §1302(3)), which says:

*"[N]o individual who is confined in a penal institution shall be deemed a resident of the election district where the institution is located. The individual shall be deemed to reside where the individual was last registered before being confined in the penal institution, or if there was no registration prior to confinement, the individual shall be deemed to reside at the last known address before confinement."*

Some states have addressed the Census Bureau practice through legislation or litigation. In PA, both have been attempted, so far with no success.

LWVPA and Fair Districts PA are partnering, [Decarcerate PA](#), the [Abolitionist Law Center](#), [Straight Ahead](#), [Free the Ballot](#), [Pennsylvania Council of Churches Advocacy](#) and the [ACLU](#) of Pennsylvania in a series of six forums about gerrymandering, prison gerrymandering and the impact of both on PA prison policy.

The first two took place in Northeast and Northwest PA during the last week of March. Dates and registration links for the remaining four are below:

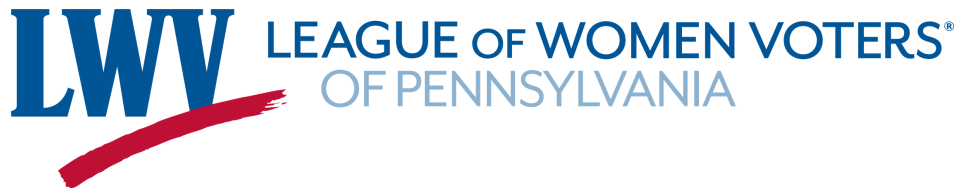
- [Southeast PA, April 6, 7 to 8:30 pm](#)
- [Southwest PA, April 10, 11am to 12:30 pm](#)
- [North Central PA, April 15, 7 to 8:30 pm](#)
- [South Central PA, April 17, 11am to 12:30 pm](#)

You can find more background information on prison gerrymandering, implications and solutions at the [Prison Gerrymandering Project](#).

Join us on Zoom to learn how prison gerrymandering affects your region:		
NORTHEAST PA	MARCH 22	7 PM
NORTHWEST PA	MARCH 25	7 PM
SOUTHEAST PA	APRIL 6	7 PM
SOUTHWEST PA	APRIL 10	11 AM
NORTHCENTRAL PA	APRIL 15	7 PM
SOUTHCENTRAL PA	APRIL 17	11 AM

UNFAIR DISTRICT LINES  
TAKE AWAY POWER FROM IMPACTED COMMUNITIES

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## League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh Announces New Website By Amy Kleissas, Civic Education Director and Ruth Quint, Webmaster, LWVPGH

There is a colorful and imaginative infographic for everyone on the new and improved website of the LWVPGH. If you are a voter looking for information on voter registration, mail-in and in-person voting procedures and candidate positions on issues, you will find it here. One of the exciting innovations is the first digital edition, Facts for Citizens, previously available only in print form. This pamphlet is a directory of election information and government officials for residents of Allegheny County. A new Harrisburg Watch page describes the Pennsylvania legislative process and how a voter can track a bill moving through the levels of state government.

High school, college and university teachers are in luck. The new website offers an extensive Voter Resource and Civics IQ Library with infographics titled Who's Got the Power, Checks and Balances in the US Government, and The Bill of Rights among many other topics. A unique infographic describes how to separate the real from the fake in the information directed at voters.

All the infographics on the website can be downloaded, shared, and used as posters or hand-outs by educators, members of the media, community groups and anyone interested in informing themselves and others on issues related to voting, government, and informed citizenship. Visit the website [here!](#)

## UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR ALL MEMBERS:

### **PA Superior Court Candidates Forum**

*Tuesday, April 6, 6:00-7:30PM*

Join this moderated forum with the candidates for the PA Superior Court, hosted by Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, in conjunction with LWVPA and others.

**Register [here](#).**

### **Women in Public Leadership Series: Conversation with PA House Minority Leader Joanna McClinton**

*Thursday, April 15, 12:00-1:00PM*

Join the Temple Master of Public Policy Program, the Department of Political Science, and LWVPA for a candid discussion on what it means to be a public service leader. Our upcoming guest is PA House Minority Leader Joanna McClinton.

**Register [here](#).**

### **PA Commonwealth Court Candidates Forum**

*Monday, April 19, 6:30-8:00PM*

Join this moderated forum with the candidates for the PA Commonwealth Court, hosted by Pennsylvanians for Modern Court and the Dauphin County Library System, in conjunction with LWVPA and others.

**Register [here](#).**

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