

The purpose of this document is to dispel some myths about LWVUS advocacy. We hope this document will be helpful as we continue to work together at all levels of the League and create the strong success of our advocacy efforts across the country.

- **A local League can do voter service or advocacy, but not both.**

The LWV is both an advocacy and a voter service organization, and our strength comes from those twin missions. We believe in informing voters and we believe in advocacy based on well-informed public policy positions. We keep them separate but we do both.

Voter services activities are designed to provide citizens with unbiased, factual information that they can use as a basis for reaching their own decisions. Voter services activities must be separate from advocacy and lobbying. It is also important to distinguish between advocacy and lobbying.

Lobbying includes action that transmits a point of view on a specific piece of legislation to elected officials or their staffs, as well as action urging the public to contact their legislators about a specific piece of legislation. Lobbying activities must be funded through general operating funds (501(c)4).

Advocacy activities, on the other hand, can sometimes be funded with tax-deductible monies. This is the case even when only one side of an issue is presented, as long as no call to action on a particular piece of legislation is issued. Such activities can include: (1) developing public policy briefs that analyze issues and provide detailed information and recommendations for addressing them through specific reforms and (2) providing forums for discussing issues and educating policymakers and the public.

- **Advocacy is not important if a local League has a good voter service program.**

On the contrary, the League was born in advocacy and advocacy is an important part of the League's public service. Our communities need the League's no-nonsense, fact-based approach to advocacy on issues ranging from environmental protection to government procedures. Through community meetings, letters-to-the-editor, lobbying of elected officials, and careful development of advocacy arguments, the League helps improve our communities and remains relevant throughout the year.

- **Advocacy is hard, difficult and scary.**

It's not that hard – action alerts and other materials from the state and national boards provide a number of advocacy opportunities, and nearly every community is considering important public policy issues on which the League can take action. Advocacy can be as simple as responding by email to action alerts or as fulsome as conducting a campaign that includes a League study, community meetings, work with the media and direct lobbying. Check the national or state League websites for action opportunities, model letters-to-the-editor, issue background papers or advocacy tips. And make advocacy a regular part of your board meetings.

- **There are a lot of League rules for advocacy.**

Well, no. There are only two fundamental rules. One, act on the basis of a League position. Two, consult with the appropriate level League board. Each level of League – local, state and national – has its own positions and advocacy must advance those positions. And each level of League is responsible for overseeing action at its level. So if you want to take action at the national level, it must be consistent with an action alert or other communication from the national board, or that board must be consulted (see the discussion of the request form, below). For state-level action, the state board is responsible. And for local action, the local League board makes the call.

- **Local and state Leagues can't use LWVUS positions for action at the local and state level.**

Most LWVUS positions are vertical positions and can be applied at the local and state levels. Local and state Leagues are in the best position to apply these positions since you are knowledgeable about the proposal at the community level and the League position. However, if you have any questions about the substance of the position and/or whether other Leagues have used it to apply to similar local or state initiatives, you should contact the League Advocacy staff.

- **You have to study an issue to take action.**

If there is a LWVUS position or state position on an issue, a local League does not have to re-study the issue but can use the existing vertical position. Some government positions are not vertical since they apply to the appropriate branch of government – federal, state or local.

- **Leagues can contact Members of Congress who do not represent them if they chair Committees or introduce legislation on issues of concern to that League.**

Leagues can only contact those elected officials who represent them at the local, state and federal level. At the federal level, this would include your Representative, Senators and the President. So, if an issue of concern to a League is under the committee jurisdiction of a member of Congress who does not represent your League, you should not contact them. It is never appropriate for a League to lobby another League's Member of Congress.

- **You don't have to respond to an Action Alert as a League.**

State and local League Presidents or their designee should, in response to an action alert, contact their Members of Congress in behalf of their League. Individual League members should respond as individuals. The same goes for action alerts from a state League.

- **Advocacy of League positions makes the League seem partisan.**

Having a fact-based position and doing advocacy is not polarizing if it's done in the League manner of providing information and explaining our positions. Civility does not mean not having an opinion.

The League's positions are developed through a process of study and member consensus. They reflect basic concerns about ensuring a working democracy that is responsive to the needs of all. Not everyone will agree with League positions – after all, League members probably don't always agree with all the League's positions – but our positions aren't based on the latest fad or what will please partisans on either side. The League's positions are based on a careful consideration of public policy issues by our members.

The League never supports or opposes candidates for elected office and does not support or oppose the political parties.

Sometimes candidates accuse the League of being partisan as a way to avoid participating in a League-sponsored debate. The public sees through this. For a fair debate, there is no better sponsor than the League of Women Voters.

- **The online state/local Leaders request form is difficult to navigate and responses aren't timely.**

The online state/local Leaders request form is designed to be an easy way to consult with the national board about a federal issue that hasn't been the subject of a recent action alert. Filling it out provides the LWVUS board and staff with the necessary information for a decision. We try to respond within 24 hours and appreciate the opportunity to confer with local and state Leagues on issues of mutual concern. The information that we receive is helpful to know what issues state and local Leagues are working on. The form helps us as we all work to fulfill the League's goal of speaking with one voice.