

Affordable Housing Study Reports

2. League Positions on Affordable Housing

The League of Women Voters has a long history of interest in affordable housing. LWVUS's first housing positions were adopted almost 40 years ago. Today its primary position on housing reads that the League will "support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."

The Massachusetts League was quick to use the national position to take action on affordable housing in the Commonwealth. In 1969 LWVM strongly supported the initiation and passage of what has come to be known as Chapter 40B, the law designed to increase the supply and improve the distribution of affordable housing statewide. LWVM has consistently supported measures to ensure adequate funding for this and other affordable housing programs. Many local Leagues continue to be involved in supporting subsidized housing in their communities after studying local housing needs.

Although LWVM is studying affordable housing, it is important to remember that any positions adopted at the state or local level must be consistent with LWVUS's current positions. The following reviews the national positions that deal with housing issues. The full text of the League's national positions are in the LWVUS guide to public policy positions, "Impact on Issues," available online on the LWVUS website. (Go to www.lwv.org and type "Impact on Issues" in the Search box.)

LWVUS Positions on Housing

Housing is addressed primarily in the positions on Meeting Basic Human Needs, Equality of Opportunity and Urban Policy.

The Meeting Basic Human Needs position says:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that one of the goals of social policy in the United States should be to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty.

Persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate or for whom jobs are not available have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and access to health care.

The federal government should set minimum, uniform standards and guidelines for social welfare programs and should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families. State and local governments, as well as the private sector, should have a secondary role in financing food, housing and health care programs. Income assistance programs should be financed primarily by the federal government with state governments assuming secondary responsibility.

The Criteria for Housing Supply section of the position specifies many considerations applying to programs and policies necessary to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family. It reads:

- The responsibility for achieving national housing goals rests primarily with the federal government, which should:
 - a. assure that our economic system is functioning to produce and maintain sufficient decent housing for citizens at all income levels;

- b. compensate for any failure or inadequacy of the system by building, financing, renting and selling homes to those citizens whose housing needs are not being met;
 - c. give a variety of incentives to local jurisdictions to encourage them to provide within their boundaries an adequate supply of decent housing for low- and moderate-income groups;
 - d. withhold federal funds from communities that fail to encourage such housing.
- State and local governments should assist by establishing effective agencies to aid, promote, coordinate and supplement the housing programs of the federal government and the private sector.
- Government at all levels must make available sufficient funds for housing-assistance programs.
- When families or individuals cannot afford decent housing, government should provide assistance in the form of income and/or subsidized housing.
- Government programs providing subsidies to the building, financing and insuring industries for housing for lower-income families should be evaluated in terms of units produced rather than in terms of benefits accruing to these industries.
- Government at all levels should develop policies that will assure sufficient land at reasonable cost on which to develop housing and that will assure fulfillment of other goals such as access to employment, preservation of open space, environmental cleanliness and beauty, and other aspects of a suitable living environment.
- Regional and metropolitan planning should be promoted to prevent haphazard urban growth, and housing for low- and moderate-income families should be provided as a part of all planned neighborhoods or communities.
- Lower-income families should not be segregated in large developments or neighborhoods. As their economic status improves, lower-income families should be enabled to continue to live in the same units as private tenants or as homeowners, if they are so inclined.
- Housing should be designed to meet human needs and should be built with amenities that will encourage economic integration within apartment buildings as well as within neighborhoods.
- Publicly assisted housing should be included in viable, balanced communities, with provision for quality public services and facilities, including schools, transportation, recreation, etc., that will encourage integration and stability.
- Zoning practices and procedures that will counteract racial and economic isolation should be promoted.
- State and local governments should adopt and enforce:
 - a. uniform building codes with standards based on performance;
 - b. housing codes to protect the health and safety of all citizens.
- State and local tax structures should be examined and revised to:
 - a. benefit communities that build housing for lower-income families;
 - b. encourage private owners to improve their homes;
 - c. reduce speculative land costs.
- Government, industry and labor should encourage innovative building techniques to reduce the cost of housing production.
- Rights of tenants to negotiate for proper maintenance, management of facilities and services should be protected.
- Housing programs should be administered by individuals trained for the jobs and sympathetic with the needs of their clientele.
- Citizen groups should participate in the development of publicly assisted housing programs by:

- a. evaluating performance;
- b. activating nonprofit sponsorships;
- c. supporting legislation;
- d. developing public awareness of housing discrimination and need.

The Equality of Opportunity position states:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability....

In addition to giving the responsibility of ensuring that there is equal opportunity for access to housing on government at all levels, the Equality of Opportunity position, in its **Fair Housing Criteria**, extends that responsibility to the private sector as well, including builders, lenders, and realtors.

The last position that is concerned with housing is **Urban Policy**, which states that “the League is committed to an urban environment beneficial to life and to resource management in the public interest.” One of the **Economic Development Assistance** guidelines under this position supports expanding “middle-income housing while not diminishing attention to low-income housing needs as an important strategy.”

Sources

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts. “Where We Stand,”
<http://www.lwvma.org/bhn.shtml>

League of Women Voters of the United States. “Impact on Issues, 2004-2006. A Guide to Public Policy Positions,” <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home§ion=ImpactIssues&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentFileID=1228>.