



THE MASSACHUSETTS VOTER

April 2004

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

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Presidential Selection – Primaries to Election: Kit Available to Local Leagues



By *Melissa Mae Williams*,
Program Assistant

As a part of the Vote! 2004 Campaign, the League of Women Voters' Citizen Education Fund has produced an all-in-one kit covering the selection process for electing the President of the United States. The kit – which includes a script, PowerPoint slides and handouts – is designed to make it easy for local Leagues, teachers, and others to provide a succinct overview of the process and why every vote counts.

A number of organizations in the Boston-Metro area have made use of this presentation, including a public senior housing complex, the YWCA, Pfizer, the Chinese Progressive Association, the Pine Street Inn, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.

At the four presentations given in

Chinatown, the presenters worked with translators and interpreters. Most of the questions the adult education class at the Chinese Progressive Association had were about the process of delegate nomination and the Electoral College.

Membership and Training Vice President Erin Pastuszynski, who gave the presentation at the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, said that the presentation “was fun to do and not at all difficult,” and she “hopes other League members will step forward” to present this to other groups. Ms. Pastuszynski gave the presentation to a group of almost 70 people, who were largely non-citizens in adult education classes.

At the ABCD – an organization serving low-income residents in Boston through a city-wide network of Area Planning Action Councils, Neighborhood Service Centers, Head Start and Child Care Centers, and many other neighborhood programs centered in downtown Boston – Melissa Williams, Program Assistant, gave a presentation to a group of 75. Among the attendees were high school students, “volunteer grandparents,” new citizens and members of adult education civics classes. The audience at ABCD was excited to get involved and discussed ways they could more directly participate in the election.

Council 2004: Involving Every Citizen – Vote 2004

By *Erin Pastuszynski*
VP Membership & Training

Council 2004 offers every League member information, training, and a chance to recharge League batteries and make some valuable League connections. To be held on May 15, 2004 at the Mansfield Holiday Inn, the theme of the day will be “Involving Every Citizen: Vote! 2004 and Beyond.”

Morning workshops and our luncheon – which will feature awards for Leagues with membership growth, recognition of local League Voter Service chairs, and a guest speaker – will bring the Council theme to life. The afternoon business meeting will provide perspective on the League's activities this year and its plans for next year, including the proposed budget.

For more information, visit www.lwvma.org, or see the Council 2004 flyer on page 8. Registrations are due by May 5, 2004.

Workshops Offer New Skills and Knowledge

Council 2004 has a workshop for every League member, from those who have just joined to long-time members. Members interested in voters services can learn about the Vote! 2004 Campaign or brush up on the new requirements of the Help America Vote Act. The moderator training session will instruct beginners in the basics of moderating and provide a refresher for veterans. The demand for League moderators has never been greater, and this is a fulfilling way for League members to provide a valuable community service.

Interested in the State League's study of voting systems? The Voting Systems study committee will present the next phase of their work in its workshop. Considering doing a local study exploring an issue of importance to your community? Council

has a workshop that will help you develop your game plan. Struggling with whether to address an issue through citizen education or by advocating a League position? Explore all the considerations and consequences from the viewpoints of Voter Service and Program/Action.

Another Council workshop will help League members lobby effectively and engage others in the legislative process. A special session will provide support and information for incoming and current local League presidents.

Senator Barrios to Focus on Youth and Minorities

The Massachusetts League will welcome State Senator Jarrett T. Barrios as the Council's guest luncheon speaker. Sen. Barrios, now in his sixth year in the State legislature, will share his thoughts on “Involving Citizens in Elections and Government.” Sen. Barrios will speak of his experiences energizing citizens to participate in the political process, from elections to passing legislation.

“I'm looking forward to the opportunity to talk with your members about the importance of engaging youth and minorities in the political process,” said Senator Barrios. “Whether you're lobbying on a bill, writing a letter to the editor, or rallying outside the State House, we can all take comfort in knowing that the bedrock of our democracy is citizen participation.”

Sen. Barrios's district includes Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Charlestown, and parts of Revere, Allston-Brighton, Saugus and Somerville, and he focuses his work on housing, childcare, schools and healthcare access.

The son of a carpenter and a social worker, he came to Cambridge at the age of 17 to study at Harvard College. After graduating with high honors and working for the Boston

(continued on page 3)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Madhu Sridhar
LWVM President

Making Democracy Work

The Making Democracy Work awards event, our 5th annual Online Student Essay Contest, honoring the winners from grades 4 to 12, was one of the most exhilarating and uplifting experiences. It was the next generation of voters and leaders sharing their vision of the biggest and determining event in American politics – choosing the US President. Over one thousand students from all across Massachusetts submitted essays on the qualities necessary in a great leader and how to encourage citizens to be part of the process of choosing a leader who will have a direct impact on their future, their education, their health care, their quality of life, and their security.

At our country's founding, Thomas Jefferson proposed that the Constitution be rewritten for each successive generation. The idea expresses a fundamental truth about self-government: each generation is responsible for forging a new relationship between citizens and their government – for making democracy work.

Making Democracy Work – these three words say a lot about what motivates us in the League. Making democracy work is what citizenship is all about. And it's the process that League members understand better than anyone else. It's our mission.

What is a healthy democracy? It is a place where people feel a sense of belonging and ownership, where they join together to address common concerns. It is a place where citizens are engaged in setting directions for the future, through the ballot box and through myriad other avenues for making their voices heard. It is a place where citizen participation helps to ensure that, at all levels, government is responsive to people's needs and

aspirations. Representative government and citizen participation are mutually reinforcing.

Our first test for the health of our democracy is voter turnout. In a healthy democracy, citizens vote. Our system is founded on the principle of consent of the governed. This principle is weakened when half the voting age population does not vote. Interestingly enough, voter turnout rates are often higher in other countries around the world than in the United States. According to the Federal Election Commission, in recent parliamentary or presidential elections, 81 percent of registered voters in Argentina actually voted, as did 73 percent in Canada, 76 percent in the Czech Republic, and 78 percent in Ghana. In the U.S. 2000 election, only 67 percent of the registered voters actually voted.

One of the most disturbing implications of the declining turnout figures is that a relatively small proportion of the American electorate now has the power to determine who is president. Less than 25 percent of the voting-age population elected George W. Bush in 2000, and Bill Clinton was reelected in 1996 with the support of only 23 percent of all voting-age U.S. residents. When one out of four Americans is deciding who is president, it's difficult to be confident that the candidate elected reflects the will or the priorities of the American public.

Making democracy work means strengthening the American system of representative government and reinvigorating citizen participation. Democracy is not a thing. It is a process. And the Leagues across the state are committed to making it work.

In this presidential election year, we are demonstrating this commitment by launching a year long Vote! 2004 Campaign. This Campaign aims to increase voter participation and awareness

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is a statewide, grassroots, nonpartisan, political organization. Membership in the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (\$45 per year; not tax deductible) includes subscriptions to the state and national Voters. Individual subscriptions to the Massachusetts Voter, which is published six times a year, are \$12.50 per year.

Diversity Policy of LWVM

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is committed to reflect, in its principles and practices, the diversity and pluralism in our state. In both its principles and practices, the League of Women Voters will promote inclusion: there shall be no barrier based on race, ethnicity, national origin, creed, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age in leadership, staffing, membership, or participation in any League-sponsored activity. The League acknowledges that pluralism and diverse perspectives are necessary for responsible and representative decision making, as well as fundamental to the values the League upholds.

especially among groups that are historically underrepresented in the electoral and political process – 18-24 year olds, new citizens and ethnic and racial minorities. We believe that a vibrant and healthy democracy needs all voices.

The League's mission is to reach out to the young and old, new and long-time residents, people of all backgrounds, all genders – all of the people in Massachusetts who together strengthen our democracy.

Democracy is a promise that each of us, as citizens, makes to one another: to participate...to debate...to vote. Democracy means engaging in the struggle to find the common good. We in the League are determined to engage in this struggle, and we are determined to make democracy work.

Electronic Voting in Massachusetts: Problems & Prospects

By Michael Frishman
LWVM Board Director

At the Electronic Voting in Massachusetts: Problems and Prospects conference held on February 2, 2004 at Suffolk University Law School, Madhu Sridhar, President of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, set the stage when she said, "As the 2004 election draws near, debate over electronic voting is heating up around the country. The question on people's mind is – will the new voting technologies enhance or undermine the integrity of our democratic system of government? She emphasized that, "Integrity of election process is fundamental to the integrity of democracy."

Our 2000 election shook the faith that our votes count and are being counted accurately and in several states practice and technology both became suspect. Today the potential for mischief and chicanery becomes a more and more real threat as black box technology becomes increasingly common in the voting place.

Alex Brown, from the Institute of Electronic and

Electrical Engineers, expressed the other theme for the day as he introduced the first speaker: that technology itself should not be a major problem – the real need is for trust and transparency, both in registration and election day procedures and in the mechanics of voting, counting and certifying the vote.

MIT Professor of Political Science Stephen Ansolabehere, also of the Cal Tech/MIT Voting Project, presented an abbreviated history of voting fraud. It is as old as voting itself, but it has not been much of an issue in the U.S., Ansolabehere says, since the introduction of voting machines and the secret ballot in the early part of the 20th Century when the public and media began demanding reform. Most studies find that fraud is generally minor and even then usually without potential to alter the results of the election. It is undercount (damaged or uninterpretable votes) that is the greater concern: four to six million of the 100 million votes cast in 2000. The speakers throughout the day enumerated the suspect and questionable polling place practices in Florida as well as new and poorly implemented voter qualifications – the Florida law making convicted felons ineligible to

vote and voting lists that disqualified many voters with names similar to those on the felon list that was used.

The technical experts discussed the pros and cons of paper ballots and lever machines, punch cards and touch screens, adaptive technology for the handicapped and DRE's (direct recording electronic voting machines) that leave no permanent record for recount and have closed source programming with potential for mischief. Various sure systems were suggested – but these keep getting more complex and fallible as you add layers on layers to meet every possible objection. Various assurances that DRE's are secure were also offered. The conference agenda and speaker list, a summary of the day and audio recordings of this conference are now available at the conference web site (which will remain active throughout 2004). The site (www.evote-mass.org) also has an extensive collection of links to references and resources on this issue. At the least, reading of a much more comprehensive summary is well worth the effort – we should all be knowledgeable about the how as well as the why of our most precious right.

Boston League and News Anchor Hughes Discuss "Making a Difference"



l to r: Gloria Ganno, LWV Boston; WBZ News Anchor Lisa Hughes and LWVM members: Kerry Costello, Jude Hutchins, and Marie Foley

*By: Kerry A. Costello,
President, LWV of Boston*

The League of Women Voters of Boston (LWVB) was pleased to host a community forum in January with WBZ-TV 4 anchor Lisa Hughes. The evening focused on women making a difference in their communities, especially as local activists.

Participants raised several topics they felt merited more in-depth coverage by major media channels in Boston. The impact of the USA PATRIOT Act on our civil rights was a topic of lively discussion. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 ("HAVA") and the potential pitfalls of using computerized voting machines were also subjects that League members felt warranted more citizen education.

Audience members urged Ms. Hughes to encourage WBZ-TV to advocate for same-day voter registration and to promote voting on election days as a public service to its viewers. The recent Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision on same-sex marriage and the need for a focus on positive news stories happening in urban neighborhoods were discussed.

Ms. Hughes also appeared at meetings of the Braintree Area League and the Framingham League and the League's Natick Unit. These appearances are part of a partnership between WBZ-TV and the Massachusetts League to promote citizen participation in the upcoming 2004 election.

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League Supports Commission to Study Education Cost

*By Mary E. Frantz
Education Program Specialist*

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has recently submitted an amicus brief in support of the plaintiffs in the Hancock v. Driscoll education finance case. The brief asks the Court to direct the establishment of a nonpartisan commission to study how much it would cost to adequately educate all students to the standards set by the state's Constitution.

Hancock v. Driscoll is essentially a continuation of the McDuffy v. Secretary of Education case in which the Supreme Judicial Court in 1993 ruled that the state has a constitutional duty to ensure that all children in Massachusetts are provided an adequate education "without regard to the fiscal capacity of the community or district in which such children live." In response, the Legislature passed the Education Reform Act of 1993, which directed the Board of Education to adopt curriculum frameworks that describe the skills, competencies, and knowledge that define the standard of adequate education. In addition, the 1993 Act established a foundation budget that defines the minimum funding level needed to provide an adequate educational program.

In Hancock v. Driscoll, attorneys for the plaintiffs (students from 19 Massachusetts school districts) have gone back to the Supreme Judicial Court arguing that the Commonwealth is failing to meet its constitutional requirement because the foundation budget is inadequate. Fact-finding lasted from June through December 2003 in a trial before Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford. Over the course of the trial, over 40 nationally renowned and local expert witnesses testified about the lack of resources to implement and teach the curriculum frameworks that have been developed over the past 10 years. The plaintiffs have requested relief in the form of a nonpartisan 21st Century Foundation Budget Commission to determine the resources and funding necessary to teach to the curriculum frameworks, which the Court has accepted as the definition of an adequate education.

Judge Botsford will report on her findings to the Supreme Judicial Court. The SJC will then hear oral arguments in late spring or early summer and an SJC ruling is expected in the fall.

The amicus brief submitted by the League informs the Court of developments in the state of New York where the courts have ruled in a similar education finance case (Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York). In February 2003 the League of Women Voters of New York submitted an amicus brief in the New York case in which it discussed the central role that public schools play in preparing student for their civic responsibilities. As in Massachusetts, the relief requested by the New York plaintiffs was the establishment of a commission to determine the resources needed. The New York court granted this request and in February 2004, the New York commission released "The New York Adequacy Study: Determining the Cost of Providing All Children in New York an Adequate Education." The New York study was included as part of the Massachusetts League's amicus brief. The League supports the relief requested by the Hancock plaintiffs and believes that the New York

study's findings are relevant and informative to the Hancock court's decision whether to conduct a similar study in Massachusetts.

The League is a strong advocate for equal educational opportunity and equitable funding for all students. As member of the Council for Fair School Finance, the coalition that has supported both the McDuffy and Hancock cases, the League has been a party to these cases. In filing an amicus brief in the Hancock case, the League is again acting on its commitment to this important goal.

The New York study can be found on the website of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (<http://www.cfequity.org/>). Information about Hancock v. Driscoll is available at <http://www.goodschoolsformass.org/>.



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Council 2004: Involving Every Citizen (continued from page 1)

City Council and on local campaigns, he obtained his law degree with honors from Georgetown.

Returning to Cambridge, he practiced law at the firm of Hill & Barlow where he was awarded the "Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year" in 1997. First elected in 1998 to the State House of Representatives, he was elected to the State Senate in 2002.

Sen. Barrios is Chair of the Committee on Public Safety and Vice-Chair on Committee of Health Care. Senator Barrios also sits on the Committees of Human Services and Third Reading, and is a founding member of the Latino American Caucus.

Be sure to join us on May 15 to hear Sen. Barrios and to attend the morning workshops and afternoon business meeting.



Do you know some voters who would like to receive e-mail reminders about state and federal elections? There is a wonderful new service from the League of Women Voters. Go to www.votinginfo.info, click the subscribe button and follow the simple instructions.

Making Democracy Work... ‘Engaging the Next G



Jennie Osber (gr 4-5 3rd place) and sister at entrance to Faneuil Hall.



Emerson College Select Chorus performing at LWVM Awards Ceremony at Faneuil Hall, Boston.

The League of Women Voters' 5th annual Online Student Essay Contest culminated in an exhilarating and uplifting event. How exciting to listen to the next generation of leaders and voters. Share our pride: photos from the Making Democracy Work event and excerpts from some of the winning essays follow:



Patricia Ho (gr. 4-5 1st place) reading her essay at historic Faneuil Hall podium.

“If the president is open minded, he won't say ‘I only like my idea and I won't do yours.’ He would listen to the other person's idea, think about it, and say ‘That sounds like a good idea.’ If the president is an excellent listener, he will have better ideas for improving the country.” *Patricia Ho, 1st place in the grades 4-5 grouping*

“The three most important qualities a president should have are justice, leadership, and honesty. With these qualities, the president can gain the trust of the people. That way, he can govern effectively.” *Andrew Hong, 2nd place in the grades 4-5 grouping*

“A president with experience will do what is right, not what is easy. It may be easy to listen to the polls, but a great president would do what is right for our nation.” *Jennie Osber, 3rd place in the grades 4-5 grouping*



Devin Merullo (gr 6-8 1st place) reading his essay at the historic Faneuil Hall podium.

“Your best friend is about to host a party. He is asking his attendees whether he should serve pizza or hot dogs. You really want to have pizza at the party, however you don't think your vote will make a difference. You decide to not tell him about your choice. Three other attendees also think the same way as you. Come party time, hot dogs are served. It turns out that four people had voted for

Next Generation of Voters... Students Speak Out

hot dogs, and two people had voted for pizza. If you and your friends had told the host that you wanted pizza, that would have been served, for pizza would have attained six votes. Your vote truly does count!" *Devin Merullo, 1st place in the grades 6-8 grouping*

"In order to make our society work, each and every person must use his or her individual strengths (in this case simply filling out a slip or pulling a lever). Our country is like a huge jigsaw puzzle, each citizen, one piece of the puzzle. When put together, the pieces form a nation. But many times that puzzle is not complete- unfinished and not a whole. Though you may think that if you don't vote it won't matter because you are but one person, think again. That one person adds up into many voices that will not be heard." *Caroline Komenecky, 2nd place in the grades 6-8 grouping*

"The thing that bothers me is that you have to be 18 or older to vote. I think that's not very smart because most adults have no clue about how the voting process works, while we are studying it in school. I think there should be some sort of test that students can take to earn the right to vote." *Raymond Feliz, 3rd place in the grades 6-8 grouping*



Special Speaker Ron Bell, Executive Director of Dunk the Vote, Keynote Speaker Marion Just, Professor at Wellesley College and JFK School of Government, and LWVM President Madhu Sridhar



Jaime Alexandra Gaudet (gr 9-12 1st place) reading her essay at historic Faneuil Hall podium

"A president must be endowed with emotional intelligence. The ability to exude sympathy, feel empathy, and stay levelheaded in the most dire and trying of circumstances is the most honorable attribute a leader can have. To be able to balance the mind and the heart in a deliverance of articulate and compassionate choices is the leader who will forever benefit human life." *Jaime Alexandra Gaudet, 1st place in the grades 9-12 grouping*

"The United States is stretched to its limits by involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. We must learn to compromise with the European Union so they can "take up the slack" when our foreign policy deals with Iraq and Afghanistan. All attributes are important but compromise, I believe, is the most important to contributing to the President being an excellent leader." *Coire Jones, 2nd place in the grades 9-12 grouping*

"Mainly we need a good president who would respect his people's wishes who we can rely on and make our community society a better place for everyone to live in." *Geraldine Legros 3rd place in the grades 9-12 grouping*



All Student winners with Speakers at LWVM Awards Ceremony at Faneuil Hall, Boston.

THANK YOU to the wonderful judges for our 5th Annual Online Student Essay Contest. The contest drew the largest number of participants ever! Our volunteer judges have all been generous with their time and scoring skills over the past months. We couldn't have done it without you!

Barbara Anthony
Ellen Barber
Christy Barbee
Anita Barker
Joan Brinckerhoff
Nancy Brumback
Lynn Cohen
Kathleen Quinn Copeland
Pat Costello
Roberta Demers
Heidi Elsinger
Pat Facey

Carrie Flood
Carma Forgie
Sharon Fradkin
Michael Frishman
Elisabeth Goodman
Mary Ann Hardenbergh
Barbara Hill
Patricia Johnson
Susan Boleyn Kadar
Karen Kavet
Dona Kemp
Harriet Klebanoff

Deborah Krau
Christina L'Bassi
Christina Lehrich
Mary Leite
Margaret Lynch
Kelly Marcimo
Sharon McLaughlin
Barbara Morrison
Dorothy Perkins
Susanna Place
Deborah Romeo
John Russell

Cheryl Schiarizzi
Florence Seldin
Jane Sibley
Katherine Strehle
Margaret Thorne
Enid Thuermer
Elizabeth Von Klemperer
Gertrude Webb
Elizabeth Wright
Marina Zellner

Spotlight on Local Leagues, March 2004

By Lora Goldenberg
LWVM Bulletin & Minutes Reader

In the late winter and early spring, many Local Leagues focus on local issues and citizen education activities.

The **Lexington** and **Beverly** Leagues both sponsored "How to Run for Office" training. In **Lexington**, which has a representative town meeting, the focus was on becoming a Town Meeting Member. The **Milton** League sponsored a mock election where residents could try out the town's new voting machines. The **Westford** League's February bulletin had a comprehensive two-page spread that included information on the presidential primary and party affiliation, an election calendar, a voting FAQs section designed specifically for 18- to 24-year olds, and lists of all of the seats up for election at the Annual Town Election.

The **Bedford** League is planning a public warrant review and a review of how to be an effective participant in its open town meeting. A new League-sponsored publication on town meeting procedures, written by Bedford's Town Moderator, and an updated version of the Bedford's Know Your Town publication will debut at that event. The **Waltham** League wrote a letter to the editor of its community newspaper congratulating the voters for the high turnout at their city election in November.

The **Acton Area** League sponsored a high school student to attend the Harvard Model Congress. The **Arlington** League helped support a student attending the National Youth Leadership Forum.

The **Martha's Vineyard** League is sponsoring a forum entitled "Island Health: Systems and Insurance." The Acton Area League held a forum on "Trash in Acton." The **Williamstown** League held a Susan B. Anthony Birthday Bash with Dr. Mary Grant, President of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, on the "Effect of State Budget Cuts on Public Education."

The **Grafton** League will hold a forum on the cleanup and future development of the Fisherville Mill site, a superfund site in their community. The **Newton** League is co-sponsoring an informational meeting on sustainable design for municipal buildings, using the new Newton North High School as a model. The **Cape Cod Area** League held a wind energy forum, which reviewed the "players," the permitting process, and the effect on the environment.

Leagues have taken on local budget issues in a variety of forums. The **Concord-Carlisle** League is taking on the school budgets and building maintenance issues. The **Newton** League is monitoring the Community Preservation Act projects selected for funding. The **Lexington** League has held discussions on user fees in the school and general issues of public school funding.

The **Andover-North Andover** League has been asked to "formulate and facilitate" a town budget forum in Andover. Selectmen, Finance Committee members, School Committee members, and the Town Manager would present and explain the process of preparing the town budget. Attendees would then break into small groups to discuss and prioritize the allocation of discretionary funds and to suggest efficiencies, reductions, and revenue enhancements. The **Wellesley** League is holding update meetings on the school budget, the community preservation projects and budget, and school transportation.

Single-Member or Multi-Member Districts and the Problem of Gerrymandering

By Bernadette Buck
Chair, Voting Systems Study

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports single-member districts to carry out the one person, one vote concept. (Where We Stand)

Recently, a panel of Federal judges ordered Massachusetts House leaders to redraw the Boston legislative map. The three-judge panel criticized "the House's willingness to overlook the racial implications of its single-minded effort to protect incumbents at virtually any social cost." The law forbids diluting minority voter power by carving up the map to pack blacks and Latinos in concentrated districts, or by separating them unreasonably from each other.

Gerrymandering has long been an issue in redistricting. Some argue that only an appointed, bipartisan commission can effectively address the problem; indeed, the League supports such a solution. Meanwhile, the current Voting Systems Study has uncovered that of all possible voting systems, those that use single-member districts – districts from which only one legislator is elected – are most susceptible to gerrymandering.

LWVM has been a strong proponent of contiguous, compact single-member districts. While it has been difficult to determine the exact reasoning behind the original 1965/67 position, single-member districts do have several advantages. They ensure that legislators are located as close as possible geographically to their constituents. The constituency can easily identify the appropriate legislator and hold him or her accountable for both performance legislatively and for constituent service. These factors may promote strong ties between legislator and constituents.

Many people remember Massachusetts's use of multi-member districts in some areas in the past with a sense of dismay. Those districts used at-large plurality voting as their voting system, and there were problems with strategic "bullet voting" which can lead to unpredictable results or can give too much power to certain constituencies if they coordinate their efforts. It was also thought that such districts violated the one person, one vote principle; however, they have since passed constitutional muster and are currently used in the North Carolina and Georgia legislatures. Most importantly, the results would tend to be less representative than single-member districts are; e.g. an African-American population that would have an easy majority in a single-member district could fail to win any representation if joined with neighboring districts that are predominantly white.

Yet the Voting Systems Study is considering some systems that require the use of multi-member districts. Why?

Because these systems may confer other advantages, and some of the problems can be addressed. Any of several proportional representation systems, all of which require multi-member districts, would ensure that the African-American population in the example above could win representation approximately proportionate to its voting strength. These systems, because of their ability to reflect the opinions of the electorate more proportionally, might encourage voter turnout and participation in government. Indeed, the data show that both voter turnout and the percent of women and minorities in legislatures tend to be higher in countries with proportional representation.

What about gerrymandering? Here, proportional representation seems particularly useful. In multi-member districts with proportional representation, the ability to gerrymander is reduced by the system itself: candidates with multiple points of view can be elected

from the same district. It remains possible to gerrymander the "last" seat – that is, in a four-person district, a clever line drawing could affect the outcome of the fourth legislator chosen – but overall the system is less susceptible to gerrymandering. By contrast, in single-member districts, every legislator is the "last" legislator and every race can be rigged through gerrymandering.

The Voting Systems Study Committee cannot predict which of these various concerns the League membership might find most important. Right now, there is a League position in favor of single-member districts, which our organization stands behind. However, we hope that all League members will use the opportunity presented by this study to consider proportional representation systems in detail in order to understand whether the multi-member districts they must use might be acceptable.

The actual mechanics of several proportional representation systems will be described in Workshop II of the Voting Systems Study, or you may refer to the annotated bibliography previously published in the VOTER. For questions, please contact Bernadette Buck, Voting Systems Study Chair, bbuck@lwvma.org or 617-523-2999.

Glossary for Voting Systems Study

Gerrymandering – the act of drawing district lines to influence the outcome of elections. For example, certain constituencies can be concentrated in a few districts ("packing") so that they win representation in only a few places, or split among districts ("cracking") so they have little hope of winning.

Redistricting – the periodic re-drawing of legislative district lines to ensure that each district is roughly equal in population. Required every ten years after the census. Currently the Massachusetts legislature performs this task; the League's position is that a bipartisan commission should be appointed for this purpose.

Voting system – the method used to select winners of a race. In the U.S., the most common system is single-member district plurality, but several other systems are widely used throughout the world.

Single-Member Districts – legislative districts from which only one legislator is chosen.

Multi-Member Districts – legislative districts from which more than one legislator is chosen. All proportional and semi-proportional representation systems use at least some multi-member districts.

Proportional Representation – voting systems which ensure that parties and political groups receive representation in the legislature in proportion to their share of the vote. For example, a group receiving 25% of the vote should receive close to 25% of the seats.

Semi-proportional Representation – voting systems that have some characteristics of plurality-majority systems together with some characteristics of proportional representation.

Plurality – the most votes. In plurality voting systems, the winning candidate is the one who received the most votes, even if the candidate did not receive a majority of the votes.

Majority – half the votes plus one.

At-large Plurality – a voting system used in a multi-member district where all voters can vote for up to the number of legislators being chosen. For example, in a three-member district, all voters may vote for up to three. By contrast, all of the proportional and semi-proportional systems would allow each voter to vote for only one or two.

Bullet voting – a strategic method of voting where voters cast fewer votes than allowed in an effort to ensure that the votes they do cast have a greater effect. For example, if allowed to vote for up to three candidates, a bullet voter might select only one, hoping that not voting for others gives a better chance to the one.

Corrections Reform in Massachusetts

By Patricia Muldoon
Program Specialist, Administration of Justice

Good News for Correction Citizen Review Board (H.4457)

H.4457, sponsored by Rep. Kay Kahn, will improve the transparency and public accountability of the criminal justice system by creating an independent review board to observe and report on various aspects of the correctional system. The bill lists the League as one of the appointing agencies to the board. The good news is that H.4457 has made it past several hurdles to the House Committee on Bills in Third Reading. The next step is debate on the House Floor. You can help to move the bill on to the Floor by contacting Rep Robert DeLeo, Chair of the Committee on Bills in Third Reading and urging him to move H4457 on to final passage in the House. Call 617-722-2410 or email Rep.RobertDeleo@hou.state.ma.us. Snail mail address is Room 20, State House, Boston, MA 02133. Please contact him now.

Reform Mandatory Minimum Sentences (S.167)

The mandatory minimum sentencing bill, passed in 1988, resulted in many new people being sent to prison for long terms for nonviolent drug-related offenses. Even though those convicted of violent crimes could be eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentences, those in for drug offenses must usually serve their full terms. This happens regardless of the circumstances surrounding their crime and of any steps they may have taken while in prison to rehabilitate. Prison cells are now replacing detox and mental health facilities as housing for the sick, according to the new DOC Commissioner, Kathleen Dennehy. Most drug offenders serve 2- to 5-year sentences; some serve as many as 15 years. This situation would be mitigated by S.167, introduced by Sen. Cynthia Creem. S.167 would make individuals with mandatory minimum drug sentences eligible for parole after serving two-thirds of their sentence in prison, matching the current eligibility standards for those convicted of violent crimes. It would:

- Improve prospects for rehabilitation and re-integration of offenders to the community. Right now, most drug offenders are released from medium- or high-security prisons directly to the community without parole. Reform of mandatory minimum laws should provide for a portion of the sentence to be served in the community with parole supervision.
- Mitigate disproportionate impact on minorities. Mandatory drug sentences have a disproportionate impact on minorities. 80% of those convicted under mandatory minimum drug sentences are minorities; 34% of individuals convicted of other crimes are minorities.
- Mitigate the cost of over-incarceration and freeing up funds for other critical needs. Incarceration costs the state 10 times the amount needed to supervise a person on parole. The Commonwealth spends about \$4000 a year to supervise a person on parole, less than one-tenth the cost of incarceration. Sen. Creem estimates that passage of this bill could save the Commonwealth \$10-15 million annually.

Limiting the Use of Solitary Confinement as a Punishment

Most Massachusetts prisons have control units where correctional officers (guards), not judges, sentence inmates to solitary confinement for 23 to 24 hours a day. At the Disciplinary Detention Unit in MCI-Cedar Junction, solitary confinement can last for years. Prisoners there are denied educational or therapeutic programming. Yet inmates in control units are more likely than the general population to have histories with the Departments of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Considerable evidence shows that long-term mental impairment, psychotic states and suicidal behavior results from sensory deprivation.

H.1180 – Treatment of Mentally Ill Prisoners:

Prisoners who attempt self-mutilation or suicide can be punished with up to two years in solitary confinement for each offense. Isolation facilitates mental deterioration, often creating never-ending cycles of self-destructive behavior. H.1180, sponsored by Rep. Byron Rushing, would protect prisoners who attempt self-injury from being punished with isolation and make it mandatory that they receive emergency medical treatment.

H.2493 – Recidivism Reports:

One of the best measures of the effectiveness of correctional policy is the recidivism rate, meaning the percentage of inmates who are reincarcerated after release. These figures are not calculated consistently to compare with national averages. DOC's latest report from seven years ago states that almost half of ex-inmates were returned to prison within three years of leaving. H.2493, sponsored by Rep. Gloria Fox, would require annual reports on recidivism rates, including statistics on those released from isolation. Now that the Disciplinary Detention Unit has been in use for over 10 years, legislators should know how much this "program" is costing the state and what results it is yielding.

Mercury Products Bill Still Needs Support

By Mary Jane Morrin
Program Specialist, Natural Resources

Mercury products legislation on Beacon Hill (S-692 & H-2482) is part of a regional strategy set by the New England Governors, to reduce mercury emissions 75 percent by 2010. The force behind this bill is the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, which is a coalition of Massachusetts organizations committed to establishing new government policies to protect our health from toxic hazards. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts is a member of this coalition.

The good news is that the many phone calls that our legislators received from members of the coalition resulted in getting this bill released from the Natural Resources Committee with a favorable recommendation. The bad news is that in the process, one of the major components of the bill, the phase out of mercury-added products, was dropped from the legislation.

To restore the phase out provisions of the bill in the Ways and Means Committee and in the Senate, please contact your Senators and Representatives – especially those on the Joint Ways and Means Committee – to ask them to restore the mercury product portion of the bill. See if your Senator or Representative serves on the Joint Committee on Ways and Means by going to the web page of the general court: www.state.ma.us/legis/commenu.htm and clicking on the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, or call the League office at (617) 523-2999.

In other environmental news, on Saturday, April 3, the League co-sponsored 'Toxics Action 2004,' the Toxics Action Center's 18th annual environmental leadership conference. The conference offered more than 40 workshops to learn skills and strategies to win the fight against toxic pollution in our communities.

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*Thank you for supporting the League of Women Voters
with your membership or donation!*

League Leaders Meet with State Government Leaders

League's Annual "Day on the Hill" Held at the Statehouse in February



House Speaker Thomas Finneran and LWVM President Madhu Sridhar



LWVM Program Specialist Patti Muldoon and Representative John Rogers



The League of Women Voters
of Massachusetts

INVITES ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND

Council 2004

Saturday, May 15, 2004
8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Mansfield Holiday Inn

Involving Every Citizen Vote! 2004 and Beyond

8:30 a.m.

9:15 a.m. - 10:40 a.m.

Registration

Workshops

Presidents' Workshop
Voting Systems Study
Effective Citizen Lobbying
Moderator Training

10:50 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Workshops

Vote! 2004
Education or Advocacy?
How to Do a Local Study
Are You Ready for HAVA?

12:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Luncheon and Guest Speaker



Senator Jarrett T. Barrios (Cambridge),
Middlesex, Suffolk & Essex District

"Involving Citizens in Elections and Government"

2:00 p.m.

3:30 p.m.

Call to Order for Plenary Session

Adjourn

Registration fee (includes lunch): \$48.00, check or credit (MC, VISA, AMEX)
Registration deadline May 5, 2004 – Call your local League President, visit www.lwvma.org,
or call 617-523-2999 to register and sign up for workshops.



Senator Therese Murray and LWVM President Madhu Sridhar



LWVM President Madhu Sridhar and Governor Mitt Romney