



THE MASSACHUSETTS VOTER

September 2005

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

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Fall Conference 2005 Empowering Voters: A force for change

By Robin Rich
Assistant Executive Director

In the wake of the 2004 Presidential elections, the League launched the Empowering Voters Project to advocate for beneficial electoral reform and to educate the public about registration and voting. The Presidential elections demonstrated the continued need for public education about registration and voting, as well as for more transparent and equitable voting laws and procedures. "Empowering Voters: A force for change" will be the focus of the League's Fall Conference 2005 on Saturday, October 22, 2005. Speakers and panelists will address the issues of electoral reform, voter turnout and disenfranchisement, and election law.

Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, will be the featured speaker in the morning at Fall Conference. As a prominent member of the Election Protection Commission of 2004, Arnwine brings unique experience in the field of election law and protecting voters' rights. Currently, the Lawyers' Committee has organized a National Blue Ribbon Commission on the Voting Rights Act to conduct regional hearings throughout the nation to assess obstacles to voting.

As the luncheon keynote speaker, Gracia Hillman, Chair of the Elections Assistance Commission, will be able to provide detailed insight into the Help America Vote Act and how it has changed election laws. Hillman is a long-time advocate for open and equal access to voting and also a former Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of the United States, the Congressional Black Caucus

Foundation, and the National Coalition on Black Voter Participation. Much of Hillman's work has dealt with minority communities and voting, and she worked on the 25-year extension of the National Voting Rights Act.

Following Arnwine's address, a panel, moderated by LWVM Program & Action Vice President Cathy Dowd, will discuss various obstacles to voting for different sectors of society. Bill Campbell, President of the City Clerks Association of Massachusetts and Woburn City Clerk, will address issues at the polls and with the electoral process. Giovanna Negretti, Executive Director of *¿Oíste?* The Massachusetts Latino Political Organization, will speak on voter turnout and participation among Latino voters. Jessy Tolkan, leader of the New Voter Project, will address youth voting issues, and Professor Paul Watanabe of the University of Massachusetts-Boston will discuss electoral issues that face the Asian community.

Several current workshops will be available at Fall Conference, with topics such as: Bringing Voting into the 21st Century with the Empowering Voters Project, Voter Education Equals Empowerment: the Empowering Voters Project Education Agenda, Membership & Training 101: A Potpourri of Diversity, Training and Recruitment, Universal Healthcare: The Possible Dream, and Justice Behind Closed Doors - What's the Public Got to Do With It?

The Conference is open to the public. A registration form and flyer can be found on the back page of this issue of the *Voter*. Additional information can also be obtained by visiting www.lwvma.org or calling the LWVM office at 617-523-2999.

Empowering Voters Project Gains Traction on Beacon Hill

By Cathy Dowd
Program & Action VP

The advocacy agenda of the Empowering Voters Project (EVP) has been gathering steam over the summer and is poised to be brought to Beacon Hill this fall. At Convention on May 14, LWVM formally adopted the "Empowering Voters Project," (EVP) as our state League's priority action item for the next two years. The EVP advocacy agenda aims to bring voting into the 21st century in Massachusetts and to eliminate needless restrictions and avoidable obstacles that discouraged up to 58 percent of willing voters from going to the polls in 2000. Our legislative goals include removing restrictions on absentee voting, Election Day registration, expanding the recruitment of

poll workers, posting of the Voters Bill of Rights, and measures to ensure unbiased elections administration.

With the co-sponsorship of the two chairs of the Election Laws Committee

(Senator Edward Augustus and Representative Anthony Petrucci), the absentee voting amendment, which would allow anyone to vote absentee for any reason, has been scheduled for the Constitutional Convention (ConCon) to be held September 14, 2005 at 1 p.m. To gain support for this amendment, League members and staff have been personally visiting the office of every representative and senator who has not already signed on to the bill, as well as meeting with the secretary of state's staff, the town clerks association and the city clerks association.

Before the ConCon, we will conduct a lobbying and media blitz and hope to involve as many of you as possible in this effort.

Concurrently, we have been working closely with Sen. Augustus and Rep. Petrucci on the other items on our legislative agenda, and



are hopeful that most of them will be included in an election reform bill to be filed this fall. We have completed draft legislation, and are working with all stakeholders to gather their suggestions and win their support for our efforts. As with the absentee amendment, we anticipate mounting a lobbying and media campaign around the filing of this bill, and hope to have all of your support in gaining visibility for these issues.

"We believe this package of initiatives clears the way for an easier and fairer voting environment, said Madhu Sridhar, President of LWVM. "It is a benefit to all who believe that the best laws and lawmakers are those elected by the most number of informed voters." Sridhar cites the League's emphasis on encouraging participation and on the right to vote, claiming the League is in a unique position to address the problems associated with voting today.

Announced in March at the LWVM's "Day on the Hill," the EVP advocacy agenda attempts to increase turnout by making voting easier and more convenient, and to eliminate a number of specific difficulties identified in recent elections, including the following issues reported by the Election Protection Coalition (a group of voting rights groups including the League, which monitored the 2004 election) as among the most problem-

(continued on page 6)

FALL CONFERENCE 2005

Empowering Voters: A force for change

October 22, 2005
Burlington Marriott

See flyer and registration on the back page of this Voter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Madhu Sridhar
LWVM President

LEAGUE LEADS THE WAY ON REMOVING CONDITIONS FOR ABSENTEE VOTING

Almost 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson suggested that the Constitution could be rewritten by 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.

America is changing; our communities are changing; we are changing. It follows that our institutions and the way we participate in those institutions must also change. To promote a strong, vital and functioning democracy, we must be receptive to the needs of the times and be willing to address changes needed for ALL to participate.

The first test of the health of our democracy is voter turnout. In a healthy democracy, every effort is made to allow qualified citizens to vote. Our system is founded on the principle of consent of the governed. This principle is weakened when eligible voters who want to vote can't vote. And we need to change that. That is why the League has launched the Empowering Voters Project. In this message, however, I want to focus on one element of the project, and that is the reform of absentee voting.

Absentee voting provides a means for qualified voters to participate in elections. Currently, qualified registered voters can vote absentee only if: they will be absent from their city or town on Election Day, they have a physical disability preventing them from voting at the polling place, or their religious beliefs prevent them from voting on Election Day.

We believe these restrictions are unnecessary and complicate what should be a straightforward process. Removing these restrictions and making absentee voting unconditional will allow people to vote who otherwise won't make it to the polls. Citizens will be able to vote without the barriers of work schedules, child care, transportation and other time or lifestyle constraints. We need voting practices that match our current lifestyles and work habits. The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy, and voting should be as easy and accessible as possible. The act of voting is what is valuable, regardless of where one does it.

The history of absentee voting has its beginnings in the seventeenth century when farmers and frontiersmen were needed to work or protect the land. Most of us aren't farmers now, and how and where Americans work has changed drastically. The absentee voting laws in Massachusetts haven't changed for almost 30 years.

As part of the Empowering Voters Project, the League drafted a Constitutional amendment to remove the conditions from absentee voting. This amendment S. 2034, co-sponsored by the two chairs of the Election Laws Committee - Senator Edward Augustus and Representative Anthony Petrucci, would allow anyone to vote absentee for any reason and has been scheduled for the Constitutional Convention (ConCon) to be held

September 14, 2005 at 1 p.m.

Massachusetts has one of the most restrictive absentee ballot laws in the United States, not to mention a law that is not enforceable. Twenty-four states have provisions for absentee voting without conditions. These include California, Florida, Wisconsin, Washington and Arizona.

There are some arguments that have been put forward against unconditional absentee voting including fraud. Concerns about potential fraud should not be an excuse for raising barriers against qualified voters. Real fraud, of course, should be publicized and prevented. But concern about fraud can never be an excuse for disenfranchising lawfully registered voters or creating hardships for them to participate in the electoral process. The goal should be fraud suppression, not voter suppression. We've not been able to find any evidence that those states that allow unconditional absentee voting have a higher incidence of voting fraud than those states that put conditions on voting by absentee ballot. Voter disenfranchisement is a greater problem than voter fraud.

We acknowledge that unconditional absentee voting may increase the cost of running elections in Massachusetts. It was also once argued that poll taxes were necessary to cover the costs of elections. Our nation rejected poll taxes because it was a device to systematically disenfranchise certain groups from voting. The League believes that to ensure that elections in Massachusetts continue to run smoothly, city and town election officials, who are on the front lines in administering elections, must have adequate funding to carry out their vital responsibilities.

Some argue that voting at your local polls builds a sense of community. It's true that the act of voting is the noblest expression of the democratic process. But that's true no matter where you do it. Voting in a public setting is not in any way superior to voting privately; what is important is the ability to exercise your right to vote regardless of the circumstances that may otherwise prevent you from participating in the electoral process on Election Day.

Concerns have also been expressed that by voting early through absentee ballot, voters may miss out on late revelations or important information that's made available just days before an election. However, more voters voting absentee may actually encourage candidates to get pertinent and relevant issues-oriented information out earlier, which would benefit the electorate at large.

At a time when our country is working to secure democracy around the world and feels that it is our obligation to monitor free and fair elections so that citizens around the world can participate in electing their leaders, we must do everything we can to increase participation in democracy at home.

Let me conclude by saying that voting is a right and not a privilege. Making voting easy and

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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 in leadership, staffing, membership, and participation in any League activity. There shall be no barrier based on race, ethnicity, national origin, creed, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, attribute, or age.

The League acknowledges that pluralism and diverse perspectives are fundamental to the values the League upholds and are necessary for responsible and representative decision-making.

accessible for eligible voters is a must for our democratic process to survive and thrive. It's time to address outdated laws that limit participation. The time is NOW to support a measure that will make voting easy and accessible, a measure that will encourage civic engagement and a measure that is inclusive.



League of Women Voters® of Massachusetts

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LWVM Creates Strong Presence at Statehouse on Priority Issues

By Robin Rich
Assistant Executive Director

With a number of significant issues before the Massachusetts legislature this session, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has been at the Statehouse testifying, lobbying, meeting with legislators, and participating in press conferences. Through these activities, the League has created a strong presence at the Statehouse as we advance our advocacy agenda.

Since April, the League has given testimony 15 times on topics ranging from access to emergency contraception to capital punishment to electoral reform issues. This demonstrates clearly the unique nature of the League of Women Voters as a multi-issue advocacy organization. The topics of these testimonies can be found in the information box accompanying this article, and complete copies of the testimonies are available on the League's website, www.lwvma.org.

League representatives fanned out in the statehouse to contact legislators in an effort to gather support for S.2034 a constitutional amendment to remove the conditions for absentee voting which the League proposed as part of its Empowering Voters Project to make voting more accessible and easier. The League visited almost all legislators' offices to present information about the absentee voting amendment and to respond to questions. The amendment is scheduled to be heard at this fall's Constitutional Convention.

Madhu Sridhar, President of the state League and Cathy Dowd, Vice President for Program and Action, held numerous meetings with the co-Chairs of the Joint Election Laws Committee and their staff, the leadership of the Town and City Clerks Associations, and Senate President Travaglini to forward the League's priorities.

The League co-sponsored a press conference regarding H.1881, a resolution to protect the civil rights of citizens of Massachusetts, which supports the basic rights of citizens and asks the U.S. Congress for a full re-examination of the U.S. Patriot Act.

The groundwork has been set for a busy fall advocating on public policy issues that will affect the lives of Massachusetts citizens in important ways. The League will be activating local Leagues across the state and members, through our grassroots lobbying coordinators, to lobby their representatives and senators and drive the League's agenda to success!

EMPOWERING VOTERS PROJECT

Election Day Registration – LWVM Executive Director Risa Nyman testified July 19, 2005

- The League supports Election Day registration at the polling place for all elections.
- The League supports the intent of S.465, S.444, H.3441, and H.70. These bills were proposed by Senator Dianne Wilkerson, Senator Cynthia Stone Creem, Representative Jeffrey Sanchez, and Representative Gloria Fox, respectively.

Election workers – LWVM Executive Director Risa Nyman testified July 19, 2005

- The League supports expanding the pool of potential election workers by allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to work at the polls. The League supports in favor of removing requirements that poll workers be registered in the precinct where they work.
- The League supports S.466, proposed by Senator Dianne Wilkerson, and H.128, proposed by Representative Byron Rushing.

Unconditional absentee voting – LWVM President Madhu Sridhar testified April 5, 2005

- The League wrote a constitutional amendment that would remove the conditions to vote by absentee ballot. This is scheduled to be heard at a Constitutional Convention this fall.
- The League supports S.2034, written by the League and filed by Senator Edward Augustus.

OTHER LEAGUE PRIORITIES

Universal Healthcare – LWVM specialist Judy Deutsch testified July 20, 2005

- The League of Women Voters established several standards which our health care system should meet, including universal coverage; access to a basic level of quality care for all Americans; reduction of administrative costs; advancement of medical research and technology; reasonable total costs; and financing through general taxation.
- The League supports S.755, filed by Sen. Steven Tolman, because it clearly meets all of those standards.

Capital Punishment – LWVM member Toby Frost testified July 14, 2005

- The League of Women Voters opposes the reinstatement of the death penalty under any circumstances.
- The League opposes S.988, S.987, H.3834, and H.884, filed by Senator Brian Lees (S.988 and S.987), Governor Mitt Romney, and Representative Bradley Jones, respectively.

Ensuring Patient Safety – LWVM member Barbara Sullivan testified July 13, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports increasing the available staff to hospitals to help ensure that Massachusetts have equal access to adequate health care.
- The League supports the intent of H.2663 as proposed by Representative Christine Canavan.

Partial Implementation of the Monan Commission Recommendations – LWVM Specialist Terra Saks testified June 28, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports the recommendations of the Monan Commission and the efforts to reorganize courts to make them more efficient.
- The League supports H.876, filed by Representative Alice Peisch.

State-wide Civil Rights Resolution – written testimony submitted June 22, 2005

- The League supports the protection of basic civil rights for all citizens and requests that the Patriot Act be fully researched and debated in Congress.
- The League supports resolution H.1881 proposed by Representative Cory Atkins.

Private Attorneys Providing Public Counsel – LWVM Committee Member Dotty Burstein testified June 14, 2005

- The League supports efforts to provide private attorneys with equitable pay and access to health insurance so that they can continue to provide public counsel.
- The League supports H.992 proposed by Representative Brian Knuuttila.

Education Study Commission – LWVM Specialist Mary Frantz testified June 2, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports creating a commission to conduct a study to determine the resources necessary to meet state standards.
- The League supports S.299, filed by Senator Jarrett Barrios.

Education Funding Formula – LWVM Specialist Mary Frantz testified June 2, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports simplifying and making more equitable the provisions relating to the distribution of state aid and the

requirements for spending by local governments.

- The League supports S.350, filed by Senator Pamela Resor, and H.1209, filed by Representative Geoffrey Hall.

Department of Corrections Citizens Review Board – LWVM Specialist Patti Muldoon testified May 18, 2005

- The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports the establishment of a system of checks and balances for the Department of Correction (DOC) by creating an ongoing citizens' advisory board.
- The League supports H.1912, filed by Rep. Kay Khan.

Access to Emergency Contraception – LWVM Specialist Elizabeth Dunn testified April 13, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports timely access to emergency contraception.
- The League supports S.1319 and H.1643, proposed by Senator Pamela Resor and Representative Douglas Petersen, respectively.

Marriage Amendment – written testimony submitted April 12, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports the protection of the civil rights of all citizens of the Commonwealth.
- The League opposes H.653 as proposed by Representative Emile Goguen.

Independent Redistricting Commission – LWVM Specialist Cathy Dowd testified April 5, 2005

- The League of Women Voters supports the establishment of an independent bipartisan redistricting commission.
- The League supports S.12, filed by Sen. Richard. T. Moore.



The LWVM welcomes its new Board at Convention 2005 (from left to right) Director Michael Frishman, Director Pat Costello, Membership Director Marcia Hirshberg, Program & Action VP Cathy Dowd, Membership & Training VP Carrie Crossland, Citizen Education VP Bernadette Buck, President Madhu Sridhar, Director Jo-Ann Berry, Director Mona Schwartz, Director Debbie Winnick, Treasurer Erica Davidson, and Secretary Lindsay Acomb. The new Board will serve from 2005-2007.

6TH ANNUAL ONLINE STUDENT ESSAY AWARDS CEREMONY MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK: Lessons Learned from the Presidential Election



The Boston Children's Chorus, under the direction of Darren Dailey, performs at the Faneuil Hall event for the 6th Annual Online Student Essay Contest.



Pulitzer Prize winning columnist Ellen Goodman addresses the question posed by 6th Annual Online Student Essay Contest winner Amelia Hammerl, third place winner in the 6th to 8th grade division.



Patriots Trail Girl Scout Troop Color Guard members carry the U.S. and Massachusetts flags into Faneuil Hall to open the awards event.



Senator John Kerry, keynote speaker, congratulates winners of the 6th Annual Online Student Essay Contest.

FIRST PLACE GRADE 4 – 5 Matthew Rayla

"This next idea definitely benefits my community and family. My problems start in Middle School, kids don't behave, they just don't fit in. So that might come to cause the things that are happening at school like how in high school some kids don't have many friends. They've been bringing guns to school and just going crazy and shooting like it's not a big deal, but it is because it can put many people in danger."

SECOND PLACE GRADE 4 – 5 Benjamin Kim

"Have you ever wondered about the 2004 election? Well I have. Would you feel scared if we had a careless president? I would because the president might be asleep when terrorists are attacking the U.S.A.!"

THIRD PLACE TIE GRADE 4 – 5 Rika Matsuo

"Instead of the government giving lots of money to endangered species, the government is giving lots of money to the war in Iraq. War is a terrible thing, and I think this is unfair to animals out there suffering."

THIRD PLACE TIE GRADE 4 – 5 Matt Lucas

"Making learning more exciting is easy for everyone. I'd put in brand spanking new high tech plasma screen computers and lots of them too. I'd also get the newest smallest projectors. Also I'd buy a faster Internet service like only three seconds!"

FIRST PLACE GRADE 6 – 8 Janette Myette

"The Internet is the next source that I would consult and probably the first source that most of my generation (teens and pre-teens) would think of. Why shouldn't a person look on the Internet? While searching for good sites, most people commonly come across 'unofficial' sites that can throw you off course and possibly transmit viruses to your computer."

SECOND PLACE GRADE 6 – 8 Jacob Rubin

"Debates do concentrate on the candidates' positions but can cause partisan rancor. Oftentimes this comes from a provocative question that results in an over-the-top answer. The answer, without the question, is then played again and again on news broadcasts, defaming the candidate for nothing a normal person wouldn't do."

THIRD PLACE GRADE 6 – 8 Amelia Hammerl

"The candidates criticize each other, and say that they could do things better. They never seem to talk about exactly what they would do, only what the other candidate is doing that is wrong. No one really needs to hear this, because they can figure out what is bad for themselves."

FIRST PLACE GRADE 9 – 12 Dan Whitman

"While this may be unfair, smaller states argue that an abolishment of the Electoral College would result in their diminished significance in American politics. Indeed, campaigning would greatly change. Now, candidates spend little to no money in populous areas—those states almost always go one way."

SECOND PLACE GRADE 9 – 12 Rachel Singh

"Today, most Americans view their government as a democracy, which is a crucial discrepancy between public understanding and the founding principles of American government. This is most clear when the Electoral College does not reflect the choice of the majority."

THIRD PLACE GRADE 9 – 12 Yicheng Li

"All this does not mean that the Electoral system ought to be canned outright – only that there is work yet to be done. Perhaps the most enticing alternative is the Maine-Nebraska system. Here, state-winners receive two votes automatically, while the rest are distributed accordingly by the Congressional districts. This would also mean the third parties get a fighting chance."

Convention 2005: League Celebrates 85th Anniversary

Happy 85th Birthday League of Women Voters



LWV Marion-Mattapoisett-Rochester President and former LWVM Board member Claire Russell accepts the Unsung Hero Award at Convention 2005 from LWVM President Madhu Sridhar.



Keynote speaker Congressman Barney Frank and Lucy Wilson Benson, former LWVUS and LWVM President and Under Secretary of State for President Jimmy Carter, chat during the banquet at Convention 2005.



LWVM President Madhu Sridhar, LWVM past Presidents (from left to right) Florence Rubin, Nancy Carapezza, Lucy Wilson Benson, Susan Wiltshire, and Risa Nyman, and Congressman Barney Frank present the cake at the League's 85th anniversary celebration at Convention 2005.



LWVUS Director Olivia Thorne discusses national League priorities with LWVM Citizen Education VP Bernadette Buck and League member Cynthia Curtis.



LWVM Executive VP Lynn Cohen gets together with LWV Topsfield-Boxford-Middleton Co-President and former LWVM VP Enid Thuermer and former LWVM President Nancy Carapezza.

LWVM Legislative Action Updates

Healthcare

By Judy Deutsch, Specialist

The healthcare committee did an extensive analysis of all five major healthcare plans now before the legislature. They are: S755, "An Act to Establish the Massachusetts Health Care Trust"; S738, "An Act to Improve Health Access and Affordability"; S2042, "An Act Providing for Health Access, Affordability and Accountability"; HD4367, "An Act to Expand the Availability of Health Insurance"; and HD4368, "An Act to Establish the Commonwealth Care Health Insurance Exchange."

Only S755 purports to cover every resident in Massachusetts with quality health care. It does so through establishing a health care trust that will receive all the monies already being paid into our health care system. That trust will establish a single payer which will pay health care providers, with projected reduction in administrative costs from the present 39 percent to about four percent, thus allowing about \$8.8 billion more to be used for actual health care. We testified on behalf of S755 on July 20.

On July 13, Barbara Sullivan submitted testimony in favor of H2663, "An Act Ensuring Patient Safety", which would increase the available staff to hospitals to help ensure that Massachusetts citizens have access to adequate health care.

Please join us for our workshop at Fall Conference, featuring Peggy O'Malley of MassCARE, "Universal Healthcare: The Possible Dream."

Court Reform

By Terra Saks, Specialist

LWMA continues to work for passage of H876: An Act improving the administration of the judicial branch by implementation of certain recommendations of the Monan Committee. The lead sponsor is Rep. Alice H. Peisch, D, Natick, Weston, Wellesley.

In 2002, Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Margaret Marshall, appointed a Visiting Committee on Management of the Courts, chaired by the Reverend J. Donal Monan, Chancellor of Boston College, to examine the management structure and practices of the Massachusetts court system. The Committee found that administration of the Massachusetts court system is "mired in managerial confusion. The impact of high-quality judicial decisions is undermined by high cost, slow action, and poor service to the community. The administration and management of the Judiciary is uneven at best and oftentimes dysfunctional."

This legislation implements one of the three initiatives recommended by the Monan Committee to commit to a new leadership style and a revised organizational structure. The bill will clarify reporting lines and responsibilities within the court by requiring that the Chief Administrator serve at the pleasure of the Supreme Judicial Court rather than the fixed five-year term under current law. The legislation would broaden the pool of potential candidates for Chief Administrator by removing the requirement that the position be filled by a judge, who may or may not have managerial strengths.

Administration of Justice Committee

By Patricia Muldoon, Specialist

Justice denied, justice restored. The League

shared the victory on public defenders' pay. A crisis building for years ended on July 29th when H.992 was signed into law to restore access to legal counsel for all criminal cases. This spring Dotty Burstein testified on behalf of the League in favor of this bill. Prior to passage, hundreds of Massachusetts lawyers refused to take cases of indigent criminal defendants, leaving at least 80 unconvicted poor people in prison and hundreds more without legal representation. Besides raising rates for court-appointed attorneys, the law also authorizes the hiring of 130 staff lawyers. It caps the number of hours each lawyer can bill, requires stricter verification of indigent conditions, and creates two commissions to study decriminalizing certain offenses and to consider ways to generate money for legal services. The bill is expected to cost over \$30 million a year, although no one knows how much could be saved by the cost-containment measures.

Patti Muldoon moderated the first national debate on prisons and punishment in Alexandria, VA on June 13 and 14. The debate was sponsored by the American Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology and involved prison administrators and accreditors, researchers, victim and prisoner advocates, and system reform advocates from across the country. The dialogue was designed to bring together representatives from many perspectives on the criminal justice systems to see if points of consensus could be achieved. The discussion of how to provide useful oversight of prisons showed that few states have figured this out. There seemed to be universal agreement that improving the justice system will require more non-retributive resources (such as drug treatment centers) so that our country is less dependent on prisons to deal with societal problems.

Please join us for our Fall Conference workshop, "Justice Behind Closed Doors - What's the Public Got to Do With It?," which will provide an update and overview of justice issues with a focus on ways the public can impact how the system operates. We will explore what happens outside of the public eye in Massachusetts and areas that require greater scrutiny.

Campaign Finance Reform

By Mary Anne Kenney, Specialist

The League has been monitoring the progress of the Coalition of legislators and citizen action groups that is drafting a new public financing bill to be called "The Fair Elections Financing Act." The draft bill would create a voluntary campaign finance system which would provide public funding for the legislative candidates only. It provides matching funds for qualified candidates who agree to campaign contribution and spending limits. It requires citizen support of all publicly financed candidates. To qualify for public funding, House candidates must first raise at least 200 contributions between \$5 and \$100, totaling at least \$5,000, from citizens within their district. Senate candidates must raise 400 contributions and at least \$10,000.

The Act sets campaign spending limits at \$44,000 for House Candidates and \$120,000 for Senate candidates, with provisions for doubling the limit if a privately funded opponent outspends a participating candidate. It provides \$833 monthly office holder expenses in off years, above and beyond the current \$600 a month stipend. It has funding sources as well as an annual funding cap equal to the equivalent of \$3 per taxpayer or .01% of the State budget, whichever is less.

Similar public funding bills in Maine and Arizona have dramatically increased the number of small dollar donors. In Maine, the number of political donors increased threefold. League support will be discussed and decided once the final bill has been filed.

Forming a Committee: Campaign Finance Reform is so important to our democratic progress because it deals with our efforts to reduce the undue influence of money in politics, which in turn affects League efforts in other areas such as health care legislation and environmental issues. Please feel free to email me at mkenney@lwvma.org if you would like to be part of this committee. Whatever time, support or comments you have will be appreciated.

Education

By Mary Frantz, Specialist

Over the summer, Mary met twice with Representative Patricia Haddad, the House Chair of Education Committee to discuss Chapter 70 education funding and the League's proposal in S.350/H.1209.

Mary also recently participated in a discussion of Education Funding Reform with Representative Jeff Perry of the Education Committee on the program "Get to Know Your Schools" on Sandwich Community Television.

Empowering Voters (continued from page 1)

atic, including registration problems, provisional ballots and long lines.

These problems result in low voter turnout, a general lack of confidence in the voting system and under-representation among groups most susceptible to these difficulties, including: time-strapped families; workers like those in the medical professions whose hours restrict them from getting to the polls; urban voters who claim to have too few well-staffed polling stations; minority groups or new Americans challenged by language or cultural barriers.

"The fact that elections are won and lost without wide-ranging citizen participation is alarming," said President Sridhar. "It's particularly frustrating when we know that so many of the reasons people don't vote are avoidable."

Dowd points to statistics which conclude that more than half (58 percent) of willing voters (nationally) did not do so in 2000, in part due to registration or polling difficulties. In Massachusetts, 122,000 registered voters failed to cast their ballots in 2000 cited registration problems.

If you are interested in helping to make these important electoral reforms a reality, please contact Cathy Dowd (cdowd@lwvma.org) for more information.

Interested in affordable housing in Massachusetts?

– or –

Want to learn about how the state's fiscal policy affects the funding of your community services?

Join the LWVM committees now being formed to study these important & timely topics!

To learn more about these exciting opportunities, contact the LWVM office at lwvma@lwvma.org or 617-523-2999.

League Engages College Interns in the Empowering Voters Project



The three interns who participated in the Sieglinde Martin summer internship program (from left to right) Libby Johnson, Ellen Rheume, and Saba Baig meet LWVM President Madhu Sridhar and Ed Martin, husband of the late Sieglinde Martin.

By Robin Rich
Assistant Executive Director

In an effort to engage and educate college students about electoral reform and how citizens can influence their government, the League of Women Voters offered four interns this past summer an opportunity to work on the League's strategic new initiative the Empowering Voters Project (EVP).

The interns were heavily involved in doing comprehensive research about voting issues across the country. They compiled extensive information about absentee voting, early voting, Election Day Registration, which served as the basis for testimony and position papers.

Each intern also had responsibility for a special project such as preparation of a PowerPoint presentation on the Empowering Voters Project,

drafting the Voters' Bill of Responsibilities, and compiling an organization guide to help young people become involved in their civic community. The interns attended legislative hearings on election issues and the civil liberties, and they joined us for press conferences on League issues.

The League received a generous gift to fund this special internship program from the family of the late Sieglinde Martin, a long time dedicated and energetic board member from the Andover/North Andover League. The League was grateful that her family chose to honor her memory in this special way.

Many students applied for these internships from colleges in and outside of Massachusetts. We selected three from a very large pool of extremely bright, talented, intelligent and conscientious students. The three who worked as fulltime interns were Saba Baig, Libby Johnson, and Ellen Rheume. All of the interns helped the League tremendously in moving our EVP agenda forward.

Saba Baig, a senior at Amherst College, explained her interest in interning with League as follows: "I am very interested in public interest law and rights and wanted to work somewhere for the summer where I felt I was making a difference, or contributing to making a difference and learning. [The EVP is] a virtuous endeavor, and I hope it is successful in every way because it would be great to see an increase in voter awareness and participation, especially among people my age, who I think will benefit greatly from the changes the LWV-MA is trying to make."

Upon graduating from Amherst, Saba hopes to attend the University of Chicago Law School and study public interest law.

Libby Johnson, a senior at Wellesley College, said "Having studied American Politics for three years I was ready for some practical political experience. I was looking for an organization where I

could apply what I've learned and make a real contribution. The chance to work on the Empowering Voters Project was one of the reasons why I wanted to intern with the League. The project takes the optimistic stand that we can have a voting system that is both accessible and secure."

Libby also hopes to attend law school after graduating next year.

Ellen Rheume, also a senior at Wellesley College, talked about her experience as a League inner. "As a history and political science major, I've spent a lot of time studying elections and election law. It's great to take those skills and do research that can actually have an impact on future elections. Also, interning at the League has helped me understand how an organization can increase voter registration and political participation across the state."

After graduating next year, Ellen plans to apply for a post-graduate program in modern American history.

The League also benefited from the work of Suzanne Plant, who worked as a part-time intern from Bowdoin College during the month of June. Suzanne thoroughly studied unconditional absentee voting and its implications and strategies for implementation during her internship.

"I was amazed at all the work that goes into making democracy work. Everyone, from town clerks to voter registrars to the volunteers at the League work tirelessly because they believe in the power of the vote and understand the importance of having as many people as possible make educated decisions about their government and exercise their power to vote," said Suzanne.

Suzanne will return to continue her studies at Bowdoin this fall.

The League and the students benefited a great deal from these internships. We are working now to find interns for the fall and spring semesters to continue this valuable work.

LWVM Reaches Out to Cambodian American Immigrant Community

By Pat Costello
LWVM Director and
Diversity Committee Co-chair

Pat Costello and Karen Sheridan, members of the LWVM Diversity Action Committee represented the League of Women Voters in a very informative *Public Forum*, "Women's Voices," sponsored by the Lowell Cambodian-American Voting Project on July 26.

The mission of the Lowell Cambodian-American Voting Project is to increase naturalization, voter registration, and voter turnout in the Cambodian-American community; to gain knowledge and to understand the impact local or national politics have on daily life and the well-being of community members.

Costello and Sheridan, as representatives of the League, stressed the importance of voting and explained why citizens should vote, not only as a right, but also as a responsibility to themselves, their families and their community. They emphasized the need to be informed about the issues and the candidate's position on those issues. Holding elected officials accountable and the concept that the elected officials are working for the citizens was also

pointed out to this young immigrant community.

The forum, moderated by Audria Chea of Boston, focused on women's voices on voting. It was well-attended by members of Cambodian-American organizations from Lowell and Revere ranging in age from about 18 to 70, including a few men. Representatives from MassVote and the Women's Union in Boston were also present. One older man who spoke no English was proud of having voted three times with the assistance of his young son.

Questions were asked in English and Khmer, and English answers were translated into Khmer for the others in the studio as well as for viewers. The forum was taped for broadcast on Lowell's Local TV Channel 8, Voice of Cambodian Children (WUML FM 91.5) and the Voice of Khmer-Americans of New England (AM 980). It will also appear on the Internet – in Khmer.

Producers were given copies of several League publications including *Voting in Massachusetts*. The League video on using the Accu-Vote machine was also presented to the producers for future broadcast.

The Diversity Action Committee supports and encourages efforts of local Leagues to develop relationships with other community organizations in the area. Committee members are available for presentations, talk shows or panel discussion. Contact Pat Costello at pcostello@lwvma.org for more information.

EMPOWERING VOTERS PROJECT: A Force for Change

Voter Education Agenda

- Promote reforms for easy and fair voting
- Provide reliable voting information
- Address low participation rates
- Decrease discrimination in voting and at polls



Advocacy Agenda

- Increase voter registration and turnout
- Ensure that voting is equitable and easy
- Boost voter confidence in electoral system and elected officials

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

FALL CONFERENCE 2005

Empowering Voters: A force for change

Saturday, October 22, 2005, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Burlington Marriott



Barbara Arnwine
Morning keynote speaker
Executive Director
Lawyers' Committee
for Civil Rights Under Law



Featured Speakers



Gracia Hillman
Luncheon keynote speaker
Chair
Election Assistance Commission

Panelists

Bill Campbell

President of the City Clerks Association of Massachusetts

Giovanna Negretti

Director, ¿Oíste?, The Massachusetts Latino Political Organization

Jessy Tolkan

Outreach Coordinator, United States Student Association, leader of The New Voter Project

Paul Watanabe, Ph.D.

Professor, University of Massachusetts-Boston

Afternoon Workshops

Bringing Voting into the 21st Century with the Empowering Voters Project
Voter Education Equals Empowerment: the Empowering Voters Project Education Agenda
Membership & Training 101: A Potpourri of Diversity, Training and Recruitment
Universal Healthcare: The Possible Dream
Justice Behind Closed Doors - What's the Public Got to Do With It?

Registration deadline is October 12.

Join the League the day of Fall Conference and get \$10 off your membership fee!

Registration fee is \$25, which includes lunch.

For more information, please contact the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts.

Phone: 617-523-2999 | Fax: 617-248-0881 | Email: lwwma@lwwma.org

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

presents

FALL CONFERENCE 2005

Empowering Voters

A force for change

Saturday, October 22, 2005

9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Burlington Marriott

Schedule

Registration and coffee 9:00 a.m.

Morning keynote address & panel discussion 9:30 a.m.

Luncheon keynote speaker 12:00 p.m.

Workshops 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

For directions: visit www.lwwma.org or by calling the Burlington Marriott at 781-229-6565

Registration Deadline: October 12, 2005

To register, use the form below or call LWVM at 617-523-2999 to make your reservations using a credit card (Visa, Mastercard, or American Express).

Fall Conference 2005 Registration Form

Conference fee: \$25 (includes lunch)

Join the League the day of Fall Conference and get \$10 off your membership fee!

Name _____ Local League _____ Phone _____

Email _____ Names of others attending _____

Payment by check or credit card accepted (Visa, Mastercard, or American Express)

Amount enclosed if paying by check \$ _____

make checks payable and send to: League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
133 Portland St.
Boston, MA 02114

Name as appears on credit card _____ Amount for registration \$ _____

Donation for Empowering Voters Project \$ _____

Card number _____ Expiration date _____

Contact the League with any questions: 617-523-2999 or email lwwma@lwwma.org