

## **League of Women Voters of Iowa Positions**

Our program consists of those governmental issues that the League has chosen for concerted study and action at the national, state, or local level. The program process is specified in the bylaws and includes the following steps:

- Formal adoption (by members at an annual meeting or by state/national convention delegates) of an issue for study.
- Member study and agreement on broad concepts.
- Formulation of a position by the appropriate board of directors.
- Action as directed by the board of directors.
- Annual or biennial re-adoption of the position.

## **State Government Positions**

Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive to all citizens and that protects individual liberties established under the Constitution.

### **The Constitution (1971, 1981)**

The Constitution of Iowa should guarantee protection of people in their rights, delineate the framework of state government, and provide for only major concerns of enduring importance. A good constitution should:

- Assure separation and balance among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, clarifying lines of authority and responsibility;
- Leave procedural and financial specifics to statutory law;
- Be stated in broad terms to provide for adaptation to changing conditions;
- Be consistent throughout;
- Avoid conflict with the federal constitution or laws;
- Be free of deadwood, reasonably concise, and easy to understand.

### **Constitutional Convention (1980)**

If the General Assembly considers implementing legislation for a constitutional convention, the League of Women Voters of Iowa will support measures to:

- Provide adequate funds;
- Require delegates to be qualified voters elected on a nonpartisan basis from districts;
- Limit the length but not the scope of convention proceedings;
- Provide for a preparatory commission prior to convening;
- Locate the convention in the capital city;
- Oppose the placing of provisions for a constitutional study commission in the Constitution.

### **Equal Rights Amendment (1981)**

Support of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Iowa Constitution and a state code that is in compliance with the goals of the Equal Rights Amendment.

### **Apportionment (1956, 1963, 1979, 1981, 1991, 2001)**

Support of:

- Redistricting of all state and local election districts based substantially on equal population;

- Reapportionment of the Iowa General Assembly every 10 years by a non-legislative authority; and
- Anti-gerrymandering provisions in reapportionment procedures.

### **State Budget Process (1993)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports the following policies related to the state budget process:

- Generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) should be used in the budget process and in all state budget reports and revenue projections.
- A state general fund cash reserve should be implemented and maintained, except in extraordinary circumstances as provided by law.
- An economic emergency fund should be established and maintained.
- The Governor and the General Assembly should use the December 15 revenue estimates of the Revenue Estimating Conference in the budget process. If the estimates are later revised, action on the budget should reflect the lower of the two estimates.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes:

- All three branches of state government – executive, legislative, and judicial – should be required to engage in strategic planning.
- A system management review should be created for all programs and functions of state government.
- A system of review of tax sources should be created.
- Such systems should operate on a cycle to guarantee regular, periodic review, and criteria should be established for the evaluation process.

### **Iowa General Assembly (1995)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports the present structure of the Iowa General Assembly (a bicameral legislature of 150 members – a 50-member Senate and a 100-member House of Representatives – and annual sessions of 110 days in odd-numbered years and 100 days in even-numbered years).

- The League opposes term limits for State Representatives and State Senators.
- The League believes certain changes in legislative processes could improve the system and the end product.

### **Legislative Committees**

- The number and function of the committees should be the same in both the House and Senate.
- Interim committees could be more effective if the legislature responded to the work of the committees, if more citizens and resource people were used, and if standing committees were used during the interim.
- Conference committees should be required to adhere to the rules of other committees.

### **Budgeting**

- Biennial budgeting with annual review is preferable to annual budgeting. Biennial budgeting would encourage greater long-range planning, require more accurate financial forecasting, and provide greater stability in funding programs. Whether budgeting is done annually or biennially, the League believes that the budget making and budget review processes should be streamlined.

- The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports the current funnel system of moving legislation through the session.
- The League further believes that three groups have the greatest influence on legislation: lobbyists, political action committees, and the business community. Public interest groups, the Legislative Fiscal and Service Bureaus, and caucus staffs have a moderate impact on legislation, while individuals have the least influence.

### **Local Government Positions**

Support for city and county home rule and for greater local flexibility and intergovernmental cooperation.

### **Structure, Function, and Finance (1965, 1971, 1977, 1979, 1982)**

Action to support:

- Implement home rule for Iowa cities, counties, and joint city-county units of government (including local-option taxation authority);
- Minimize duplication of services;
- Increase area-wide and city-county planning;
- Strengthen inter-local cooperation;
- Increase flexibility of local units of government; and
- Defeat property tax limitation

### **Area Education Agency – AEA (1979, 1985)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes the state should provide equal opportunity for each child in Iowa to receive quality education. To this end, we support Area Education Agencies (AEAs) as service agencies to local school districts.

Action to support:

- Media and education services and programs as needed and requested, plus the required special education services;
- Assistance to local school districts by AEAs for talented and gifted programs, preferably through a weighted funding formula;
- Inservice programs and services by AEAs that do not duplicate programs and services already available through other school corporations;
- Funding of AEAs through a combination of property taxes, state aid and grants, with a higher proportion of the budget funded by state aid rather than property taxes;
- Selection of AEA board members at district conventions of local school boards; and
- No regulatory or taxing powers assigned to AEAs.
- If the legislature grants taxing authority to the AEAs, board members should be selected by district election, reside in the district represented, and be chosen by the electors of that district.

### **County Home Rule (1977, 1982)**

Support of home rule for Iowa counties with constitutional and statutory measures providing for:

- Authorization for local governments to combine (county-county and city-county) with voter determination of the county seat;
- Provisions for optional county and city-county charters;
- Bonding authority;

- Local-option tax authority subject to reverse referendum; and
- Provision that the power of a city should prevail in the event of a conflict between a county and a city.

Implementing legislation should include:

- A variety of methods for creating joint governments;
- Referendum procedures for approving, amending, and dissolving joint local governments;
- A variety of methods for initiating a charter procedure;
- Proportional representation and specified minimum size for charter commissions;
- Referendum procedures for adopting, amending, and rescinding charters; and
- Periodic review.

### **Fiscal Policy Positions: Iowa Tax System (1973, 1974, 1975, 1983, 1988, 1990)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports an equitable and flexible system of taxation. A tax should be evaluated primarily on equity, taxpayers' ability to pay, and adequate yield. A tax should be evaluated secondarily on the size of the tax base, ease of payment and collection, ease of understanding for the taxpayer, flexibility, and a balance between stability and elasticity.

### **Income Tax**

The League advocates a progressive income tax and believes that any increase in state tax revenue preferably should be through income tax, rather than sales or property tax.

### **Property Tax**

The League believes local revenues should be less reliant on property tax and more reliant on state funds. Property tax should be decreased also by reduction in the number of local governmental units. Property tax relief should be granted to low-income elderly and other low-income owners and renters. Property tax exemptions should be removed from income-producing property of churches, profit-making nursing homes, veterans' organizations, fraternal organizations, and labor unions. Cities should be allowed to impose user fees or payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOTS) on tax-exempt properties for services rendered to those properties. Cities should be allowed to charge county, state, and federally owned properties for the city services provided to those properties.

### **Earmarking**

When consistent with other League criteria, earmarking of funds is an acceptable fiscal policy.

### **Corporate Tax**

The League urges a tax treatment for business that would provide equity of imposition and enforcement between in-state and out-of-state corporations. Changes to achieve equity should reinforce the economic stability of the state and provide a favorable climate for business.

### **Tax Incentives**

The League supports tax incentives for efforts and programs to slow the growth in energy consumption, to encourage development of renewable energy resources, and to maximize energy conservation.

### **Fire and Medical Emergency Services (2015)**

- Establish emergency medical services as an essential service, required to be provided statewide.

- Enhance the flexibility of local communities to organize the provision of emergency fire response and emergency medical services by:
  - Reinstating the opportunity to establish benefitted fire districts as was permissible under Iowa law until 1975.
  - Allowing the creation of joint fire and emergency medical service for benefitted districts.
  - Extending current language in the Code of Iowa to authorize counties to operate combined fire or fire and emergency medical districts under voluntary agreements with cities and townships in unincorporated areas of the county.
- Complete a comprehensive census of fire departments and their personnel throughout the state, including mapping of service areas and inventories of equipment.
- Provide stable funding streams for fire and emergency medical services adequate to meet minimally acceptable standards for training and equipment.
- The State of Iowa should work in cooperation with associations representing emergency medical providers and fire service personnel to identify and develop resources for local fire and emergency service providers to assist in the recruitment and retention efforts. These initiatives could include, but need not be limited to, web-based resources for recruitment efforts, information about best practices to recruit and retain volunteers, and a recognition program for employers who support fire and emergency medical personnel in their workplaces.
- The State of Iowa should consider developing incentives available to volunteer emergency services providers to encourage their retention in the volunteer services.
- The State should consider measures to reduce the financial burden on organizations providing fire and emergency medical services.
- The State of Iowa, cities, and counties should consider implementing alternative transportation arrangement for transport of individuals currently transported by emergency medical services providers who do not require ambulance transport.

### **Municipal Finance (1976)**

- The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a wide range of local-option taxes as a means of broadening the sources of revenue available to Iowa cities including: retail sales tax (with the present legal exceptions), hotel/motel accommodations, food/beverage served at commercial establishments, and cigarettes.
- Local-option taxation should be subject to a reverse referendum by the voters.
- The League opposes any increase in the \$8.10/\$1,000 maximum city property tax levy. While local-option taxation may make reductions possible in local property taxes, the League opposes any legislative requirement that a specified portion of the funds raised by local-option must be used to reduce property taxes.
- The League supports an increase in the cities' share of the Road Use Tax Fund as well as legislative study of means to further reduce municipal dependence on the property tax.
- The League supports consideration of present inequities related to the taxation of business and industry, nonprofit organizations, and agricultural land within city limits; increasing and stabilizing the aid from the Municipal Assistance Fund; and increasing the proportion of liquor profits returnable to cities.

### **School Finance (1981, 1989)**

The League believes the state should provide equal opportunity for each child in Iowa to receive a quality education regardless of the property wealth of the local school district. To this end, the League

supports a state-school funding program that provides a minimum spending level for every child in Iowa funded by a combination of state aid and local property taxes.

The League believes the school-funding formula should be designed to generate adequate revenue and to preserve the overall fairness of the state's tax structure. The state should give substantial support to public schools with state aid but should not provide full funding.

The League supports:

- The funding of local school district budgets with a larger proportion of state aid and a smaller proportion of local property taxes;
- The use of various factors to calculate the budgets of local school districts; for instance, enrollment, average per-pupil costs, and unique needs or other special circumstances;
- The allocation of additional funds on a per-pupil basis to meet the needs of special education, gifted, and at-risk students;
- The option for local school districts to supplement their budgets within state-determined limits and to allocate funds in a locally-determined manner; and
- The use of fiscal incentives that encourage school district sharing of services to increase flexibility, educational opportunity, and overall economy.

The League opposes:

- Increased reliance on local property taxes to support the budgets of local school districts.

#### **TIF – Tax Increment Financing (2017)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes efficient and economical government allows governing entities opportunities to utilize Tax Increment Financing tools for urban renewal and economic development. The League further believes TIF is a positive tool for cities and counties to address issues of urban renewal and economic development.

1. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes the Code of Iowa relating to TIF must be amended to include a category specific to alternate energy construction.
2. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes the Code of Iowa referencing slum/blight should be revised to reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century terminology.
3. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes all TIF projects, including urban renewal projects, should sunset in at most 20 years. The League suggests modifying the law to require local authorizing entities a maximum of 50 percent of the school district tax increment for the duration of the project.
4. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes language that allows a 20-year duration for economic development within a TIF district should be amended to require that TIF districts decertify upon project completion. The League further believes that any entity wishing to use TIF in the same area following a project completion must complete a new certification process in its entirety to proceed with a proposal.
5. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes structuring TIF debt is important, and the Code of Iowa must be amended to include TIF debt in the calculation against the constitutional debt limit and must include language related to annual payment, as well as interest incurred against the debt.
6. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes state law for establishing a TIF district must be amended to require detailed communication, including specific plans and outcomes, identifying

costs and an estimated return on the TIF investment, and estimating the impact on other taxing entities, to occur among all affected parties before the required three public hearings.

7. The League of Women Voters of Iowa believes that each TIF plan must identify an oversight procedure requiring the local authorizing entity to annually evaluate the effectiveness of TIF use, including costs, at the local level. The League further believes members of the affected communities must be included in the evaluation procedural process to ensure transparency.

### **Justice Positions**

Promote fair treatment by guaranteeing the rights of all individuals.

### **Rehabilitation of Alcoholic and Other Drug Addicted Offenders (1986, 1988, 2003)**

The League of Women Voters Iowa recognizes there is a difference of opinion as to the definition, cause, and treatment of alcohol and other drug abuse; and that success of treatment for addictions is limited, even with a willing client in a supportive environment.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports:

- Measures which in addition to protecting the community, seek to rehabilitate addicted offenders;
- Separate housing for addicted offenders;
- Licensed addiction treatment programs that:
  - Recognize uniform definitions of success and a means of measuring it;
  - Are monitored and reviewed periodically for positive results and cost effectiveness;
  - Are improved whenever new verifiable data are obtained that indicate need for change.

As an immediate step toward the accomplishment of these goals, the League recommends the formation of a task force made up of service providers, corrections professionals, and the public to discuss and reach agreement on methods of treatment, definition of success, means of measuring success, cost accountability, and methods of licensing and monitoring treatment programs for alcohol and other drug offenders.

### **Capital Punishment (1997)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa opposes capital punishment and its reinstatement in Iowa.

- There is no conclusive evidence that capital punishment is a deterrent. There does not seem to be a correlation between the murder rate and the death penalty in those states which have it.
- The death penalty has a disproportionate impact on minorities and the poor and is enforced with prejudice.
- The death penalty is irreversible, and innocent people are known to have been executed in the past.
- The costs of execution are higher than those of life imprisonment without parole.
- Life imprisonment without parole is a sufficiently harsh sentence.
- It is morally untenable for the state to take a life. Institutionalized killing is inhumane and contributes to a climate of violence.

In the event capital punishment becomes law in Iowa:

- There should be a minimum age of 21 at which an offender is subject to the death penalty.
- Insanity and mental retardation should be considered mitigating factors.

- Special provisions should be made for the appointment of competent counsel in capital cases.
- There should be no restrictions placed on access to the appeals process.
- Guarantees should be in place to counteract the effects of prejudice to provide for automatic review of evidence and trial procedures, and to ensure the penalty is appropriate for the offense.

### **Juvenile Justice and The Welfare of Juveniles (1975, 1976, 1979, 1983, 1989, 1990)**

LWVIA supports a community approach to the prevention of juvenile delinquent behavior by advocating the use of public and private resources to:

- Encourage the development of healthy and nurturing families.
- Assure safety for children in their communities.
- Facilitate the positive attachment of children to their families and their schools/education.
- Encourage children in the formation of positive peer relations.
- Reward children's healthy lifestyle choices.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a community response to juvenile delinquent behavior that advocates the use of public and private resources to:

- Establish and adequately fund a wide variety of treatment options to address children's underlying or contributing problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, suicidal tendencies, illiteracy, etc.
- Encourage coordination among treatment agencies.
- Incorporate restorative justice principles whenever possible.

LWVIA supports a juvenile court system that incorporates the following principles:

- Retains juveniles charged with status offenses, but in a category separate from delinquency;
- Maintains the confidentiality of Child in Need of Assistance petitions and status offense records;
- Includes a requirement for special training for policy and court personnel in handling juvenile matters;
- Permits the establishment of family courts, peer courts, and community courts where feasible;
- Allows offenses other than felony crimes against a person to be expunged;
- Maintains a system of graduated responses to delinquent behavior based on number of prior offenses, severity of instant offense, and age at time of offense; and
- Incorporates restorative justice principles into every appropriate stage of the juvenile justice system.

### **Domestic Violence (2001)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa finds the need for several changes in providing legal and social support services for victims of domestic violence, including a review of existing penalties for perpetrators, and working for more consistent enforcement of present laws. The League also supports increased funding for services in counseling, shelter, and education for victims and their families. In addition, the League encourages businesses to develop programs to educate and support their employees who are involved in domestic violence, and also to assist employees in maintaining continuity in employment when at all possible. Finally, we urge that the Department of Public Safety be required to publish statewide statistics related to domestic violence, a task currently cited only as an option in the Code of Iowa.



In particular the League of Women Voters supports the following additions or changes in legal processes and penalties:

- Waiver of fees for filing for protective services;
- Increase of penalties for all domestic violence offenses and utilization and enforcement of maximum penalties;
- State-funded periodic training for judicial and enforcement personnel;
- Enforcement of penalties for batterers who do not complete required training programs; and
- Booking of domestic violence arrests as domestic violence, not as assault or disturbing the peace, to facilitate the correct compilation of statistics by the Department of Public Safety.

The League of Women Voters also supports continuous and adequate state funding for domestic violence services, including:

- Support of adequate shelter space;
- Educational services;
- Housing subsidies and financial support in the form of rental deposits when victims leave shelter;
- Counseling centering on the welfare of the victim(s), in safe locations, including counseling for affected children; and
- Support for local or area legal advocates to assist victims with legal processes as well as advocates to assist with general assistance in safety, protection, and planning for the future.

### **Sentencing and Corrections Justice Position (2005)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a justice system that is fair and protects the public safety. LWVIA believes that mandatory sentencing has had an adverse impact on Iowa's justice and corrections systems. This adverse impact could be reduced by providing greater flexibility for judges, Iowa Department of Corrections (DOC), and the Iowa Board of Parole to consider unique circumstances in criminal cases while sentencing standards set out in the Iowa Code remain applicable. The sentencing standards consider such factors as the number of offender's prior offenses, age of the offender, and severity of the crime.

The LWVIA supports an indeterminate sentencing structure. An indeterminate sentence is a sentence given by the judge that orders the maximum amount of time that is to be served. It permits the releasing authority such as the Iowa Board of Parole in consultation with the Iowa Department of Corrections to release the offender earlier if it is warranted. The LWVIA supports legislation that considers offenders with special needs. Some examples of offenders with special needs are the mentally retarded, mentally ill, geriatric inmates, and medically needy.

The LWVIA supports Iowa's system of community based corrections (CBCs) for offenders. CBCs should provide treatment, when appropriate, for offenders in the community while maintaining safeguards for the public. Iowa should maximize community corrections by providing adequate funding.

The LWVIA supports adopting sentencing legislation that is based on valid and reliable research. Such legislation should consider:

- Proportionality of all sentences to crimes committed
- Judicial discretion
- Budget constraints on the Iowa Department of Corrections
- Effectiveness of treatment and other programs for offenders

## **Selection of Judges**

Historically, Iowa had selected judges through political elections with the most popular candidates winning. In the 1960s a number of groups, including the League of Women Voters of Iowa, began to look for a better way of selecting judges. In 1962 the people of Iowa were asked to ratify a constitutional amendment to change the judicial selection process. The present system, based on merit selection with periodic retention votes by the voters, was supported by the League and ratified by the voters in 1962. LWVIA continues to support this system.

## **Social Policy Positions**

### **Mental Health Delivery System in Iowa (2009)**

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a coordinated and comprehensive state-funded mental health system that ensures convenient and equitable access to an established menu of mental health services for Iowans of all ages who need mental health services, and elimination of legal settlement.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports adequate funding of a comprehensive menu of services, including those that promote early detection and treatment of mental illnesses and co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Appropriate levels of care should be available that meet people's needs in or near their home communities.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a mental health system that individualizes care to meet a person's specific mental health needs and focuses on the person's specific strengths and ability to recover.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports a mental health system that is adequately funded and accountable to its consumers and communities by providing efficient, effective, and evidence-based programs and services.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports sustained funding to expand effective programs that divert mentally ill individuals from the criminal justice system. Examples include mental health crisis intervention teams, jail diversion programs, and mental health courts.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa supports eradicating the stigma of mental illness and treating persons with mental health needs with the same respect and treating their illnesses with the same urgency as persons with other health needs.

## **Natural Resource Positions**

Promote the wise management of resources in the public interest and an environment beneficial to life.

### **Land Use (1973, 1982, 1987, 2002)**

The League of Women Voters supports an integrated local, county, regional, and state land use policy which enhances our quality of life and provides for:

- Preservation of prime agricultural land and sensitive natural areas, e.g. prairies, woodlands, wetlands, as priorities;
- Soil and water conservation;

- Managed urban growth which protects agricultural land, fosters higher density urban development, encourages infill development and redevelopment in cities, and preserves natural areas;
- A statewide land capability inventory;
- A diversified transportation system; and
- Statewide distribution of natural areas, open spaces, and public recreation areas.

A state land use agency or other state entity should provide policy and guidelines for local and regional planning bodies, including guidelines for zoning decisions. Land use planning and enforcement should be adequately funded by a combination of state funds, fees, local taxation, and federal funds. State personnel should assist jurisdictions that cannot afford their own planners. The state agency should have power to initiate action and levy fines against violators if local jurisdictions fail to do so, and to hear appeals from local decisions.

Land use impact statements should be required for cases involving state funds, large developments above a designated size, land acquisitions by other government agencies, transportation and utility sites, and extractive industries. Citizens should have the right to sue to prevent the granting of variances. Public input at all levels of decision making is essential to sound land use planning.

The League supports the concept of publicly owned recreation trails on abandoned railroad rights-of-way. If present routes cannot be maintained, the League encourages governmental bodies to purchase abandoned rights-of-way for use as recreational trails, wildlife habitat, or for open spaces, thereby maintaining the capability for future transportation uses.