

THE VOTER

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.

A MESSAGE FROM CO-PRESIDENTS

As we write this report, we know that the Governor signed the AEA bill that is going to have very significant changes to how the AEAs will provide services to the schools in Iowa. It is such a great disappointment to so many of us who advocated for the AEAs by contacting our Legislators through emails and phone calls. The LWV of Iowa held a virtual Forum with Margaret Buckton, Executive Director for the Urban Education Network and John Speer, Chief Executive of the Grant Wood Area, so they could explain the important work of the AEAs in Iowa. Local League questioned their Legislators at Forums about their support for the AEAs. The people of Iowa sent thousands of emails to Senators and Representatives, but they did not listen. It is a huge disappointment for all of us who value our schools, teachers, and students here in Iowa. But we will continue to advocate for issues that support our Legislative Priorities.

There are certainly a lot of good things happening with the League in Iowa. We are all looking forward to the Defending Democracy Award Dinner on April 11 where we will honor Connie Ryan, Executive Director of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa and be able to hear the guest speaker, Deidre DeJear. Also, one of our local Leagues, the Black Hawk-Bremer League, was recently recognized for their outstanding work in their local community by the Waterloo Human Rights Commission.

We are fortunate to have been contacted by Reanna Heim of Western Iowa Community College in Council Bluffs IA. She has heard good things about LWVIA and she was asking about starting a League on their college campus. Linda Duckworth of the Omaha NE League kindly offered to set up a kiosk and answer questions. There was a definite interest, and we will be following up with them. Thank you, Linda!

Looking ahead, we know that LWVUS is preparing to implement a new membership system. We are working with members of the LWVUS staff to offer a presentation on the LWVUS Transformation with an event in April. We will have more details about this virtual event in the coming weeks.

We want to offer our thanks to all our Local Leagues and members across the state for the work that they are doing. As always, the League of Women Voters continue to "Empower Voters and Defend Democracy."

Co-Presidents of the LWV of Iowa, Terese Grant and Holly Oppelt

Board of Directors

Co-Presidents

Terese Grant
tag.lwvia@gmail.com

Holly Oppelt
hoppelt@me.com

Officers

Vice President: Nancy Halvorson

Secretary: Jessica Tierney

Treasurer: Shannon Patrick

Directors

Teresa Bomhoff
Linda Serra Hagedorn
Polly Horton
Peg Lazio
Jean McMenimen
Jennifer Ramaeker
Maureen White
Sue Wilson
Martha Wolf

Newsletter Highlights

A Message from Co-Presidents

Announcing 2024 LWVIA Council Meeting

Share Your Local Justice Projects with the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Committee

LWV of Iowa Advocates Update

LWV of Blackhawk-Bremer Counties Recognized for Work to Register Voters

Ames League Announces Keynote

LWVIA State Board Approves State Study on Bringing Economic Justice to the Justice System

Summary of Proposed Positions - Bringing Economic Justice to the Justice System

International Voter Center Celebration

ANNOUNCING 2024 LWVIA COUNCIL MEETING

On June 8, 2024, the LWVIA Council will hold its meeting from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Joe Rosenfield Center, 1115 8th Avenue, Grinnell, IA 50112

LWVIA Council is held in the interim year between State Conventions. The Council shall be composed of two delegates from each local League, Members-At-Large (MAL) unit, and the State Board Members. The cost is \$50 per delegate and is assessed for two delegate attendees per local, whether that number can attend in person or not. The two delegates are voting delegates, but other members of Local Leagues are encouraged to attend and will also pay the \$50 fee. The registration fee includes morning coffee with pastries and a deli box lunch.

This important meeting includes election of Vice President, Treasurer, and two Board of Directors members; gives guidance to the Board of Directors on program and methods of work; adopts a budget for the ensuing year; transacts other business presented to the Board; and offers training to attendees. The Council agenda will be sent to all locals and Members-at-Large units at least four weeks in advance of the Council meeting.

Our keynote speaker will be Charity Nebbe, host of Iowa Public Radio's weekday show, Talk of Iowa and Iowa Public Television's show *Iowa Ingredient*. Charity interviewed Dr. Deb Turner shortly before her passing and was planning a follow-up interview. With this special connection to our beloved Deb Turner, this will be a very special guest speaker.

Delegates and local leaders are invited to attend in person and have an opportunity to mix and mingle with League members across the state. There will be college dorm rooms available to those who wish to travel on Friday. More details will be sent with the Agenda for Council.

SHARE LOCAL JUSTICE PROJECTS WITH THE CRIMINAL AND JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMITTEE

The Criminal and Juvenile Justice Committee has been looking at actions that can be taken on the local level. We often focus on state level legislation, but few LWVIA positions have prevailed in the Iowa legislature lately.

So, what can we do at the local level? The Ames league has developed a project to deal with profiling and re-entry challenges. They are creating a helpful packet of information that will be presented at Council this June and available there, on paper and digitally.

The packet includes ideas for interviews of local officials and inclusion of the business community on a "Ban the Box" effort. We invite you to bring your local criminal or juvenile justice projects to tell us about and share at Council.

LWVIA ADVOCATES UPDATE

Thank you to all the LWVIA members who rallied to our Action Alerts and contacted their legislators. The proposal to remove gender identity from the Iowa Civil Rights Act failed. Requiring the national anthem to be sung in public schools failed. Making local elections partisan failed. Define sex in strictly binary ways failed.

Hundreds, if not thousands of emails were sent to legislators by LWVIA members and Advocates. Additionally, four community letters were published in the Cedar Rapids Gazette and Des Moines Register, testimony was given at public hearings, our co-president Terese Grant spoke at the January 8 rally at the Capitol, and LWVIA had a table in the rotunda in support of reproductive rights on Planned Parenthood's Lobby Day.

It came as quite a blow when following the second funnel deadline, the House and Senate reached a compromise on restructuring AEAs, and the Governor immediately signed the bill. Although the bill was passed, we know our advocacy along with thousands of other Iowans, made a difference.

The bill that passed did not have all the proposed changes in it that would have weakened the AEA's to the point of not being viable in rural communities. Legislators appreciated hearing from AEA supporters as it gave them evidence to share in debates and discussion. We also fought hard to maintain the requirement for gender equity on state boards and commissions but could not sway the majority party and Governor.

At the time of this writing, three proposed bills are still waiting debate and passage. In the Senate HF 2586 allows school employees to be issued a permit to carry firearms and allows qualified immunity from criminal or civil liability.

Another proposed bill in the Senate, SF 2380 will ban ranked choice voting and eliminate ballot drop boxes and require an absentee ballot to arrive at the auditor's office a day before election day. In the House, a positive proposal to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months after pregnancy ends is being analyzed for fiscal impact (HF 329).

The LWVIA strategized and mobilized to advocate for our priorities this legislative session. Now it is time for each local League to strategize and mobilize to register and educate voters before the 2024 Election.

LWV OF BLACKHAWK-BREMER COUNTIES RECOGNIZED FOR WORK TO REGISTER VOTERS



LWVBHB President Cherie Dargan accepted a plaque that honors the LWVBHB for the group's work to register voters from Rev. Abraham Funchess, Executive Director of the Waterloo Human Rights Commission presented LWVBHB President Cherie Dargan with a plaque on Saturday, March 23 at the conclusion of the annual march for voting rights.

The march is an annual reenactment of the famous 1963 march for voting rights that brought awareness to the fact that African American citizens did not have the right to vote. Each year, a group of citizens march from Lincoln Park in downtown Waterloo to the amphitheater overlooking the river.

The plaque reads, "For your unwavering commitment to democracy, equity, and informed civic engagement. We commend you for your legacy of empowerment, education, and advocacy."

Cherie thanked the Commission on behalf of the League, adding that the League would come do a voter registration at book clubs, churches, classrooms, and anywhere else. "Our mission is to register voters, educate voters, and advocate for voters."

Other LWVBHB members and Vice President Kristi Anhalt were on hand to pose with Cherie holding the plaque.



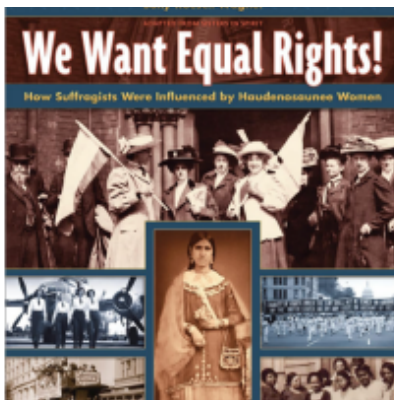
AMES LEAGUE ANNOUNCES APRIL 18 KEYNOTE SPEAKER

The Ames League of Women Voters is pleased and excited to welcome Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner as Keynote Speaker at their Annual Members' Meeting on April 18. The subject of Dr. Wagner's speech – "Democracy on the Land Before Columbus."

A major historian of the suffrage movement, Dr. Wagner is active on the national scene. She appeared on the CNN Special Report: Women Represented and CNN's Quest's World of Wonder. In March 2021, the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian featured the film, Without a Whisper which traces Dr. Wagner's research demonstrating the Haudenosaunee influence on the suffrage movement.



She appeared in and wrote the faculty guide for Ken Burns' documentary, Not for Ourselves Alone. Awarded one of the first doctorates in the country for work in women's studies (UC Santa Cruz) and a founder of one the first college-level women's studies programs in the United States (CSU Sacramento). Dr. Wagner has taught women's studies courses for 51 years. She teaches in Syracuse University's Honors Program and California State University, Sacramento's Women and Gender Studies department. A prolific author, Dr. Wagner's anthology The Women's Suffrage Movement unfolds a new look at the 19th century women's movement. Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists documents the surprisingly unrecognized authority of Native women, who inspired the suffrage movement.



Dr. Wagner Will Sign Her Book at the Event

Dr. Wagner's book *We Want Equal Rights!* is the story of remarkable women who laid the foundation for the modern women's movement and the American Indian nation that proved equality was possible. How did these brave women envision such a world? They looked to their neighbors the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and saw how women were held in high regard, with even greater rights than men.

Join US!
The League of Women Voters Annual
Members' Meeting. Thursday, April 18.
Dinner and Program 5:00-7:30, Prairie
Moon Winery, Ames
 Contact prez.lwvasc@gmail.com or 515-231-0857

LWVIA STATE BOARD APPROVES STATE STUDY ON BRINGING ECONOMIC JUSTICE TO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

On Saturday, March 16, 2024, the State Board heard the final presentation of the State Study that had Concurrence by all 12 Local Leagues in Iowa. They approved the State Study so that it can become part of the Positions for League of Women Voters of Iowa. The nine members of the study spent over two years researching the study.

Our introduction to the economic disparities in the Iowa criminal justice system evolved from a presentation to the LWVIA Criminal & Juvenile Justice Committee by Alex Kornya, Litigation Director & General Counsel, Iowa Legal Aid, in 2021. Legal Aid has a chart showing the costs borne by poor defendants and compares them to the costs for a citizen similarly charged but able to pay the cost of defense and bail; the disparity was eye-opening! Our democracy cannot flourish when our poorest citizens are plunged further into poverty by decisions within the Justice system. Fortunately, when League members observe and identify disparities, we can move to correct them.

Our study committee consisted of Bonnie Pitz, Jean Dell, Mary Richards, Allen Hays, E.J. Gallagher, John Klaus, Lettie Prell, Martha Hurst and Karen Person. The committee members were invaluable in shaping our positions through too many zoom meetings to count. The committee believes LWVIA can, through this study, educate our members and our local communities about the inequities in the justice system that have long term negative impacts on the indigent citizens of our state. The committee researched articles, reports, and books, and conducted interviews with individuals who are part of the justice system.

We have been privileged to work with Karen Person, Co-Chair of the 2005 State Study on Sentencing and Corrections; Lettie Prell, a retired researcher with the Department of Corrections; and Mary Richards, retired Story County Attorney, all of which had special assets to assist with the study. Additionally, we want to thank Alex Kornya for providing much of the Iowa data gathered for this study. We would like to thank Katherine N. Flickinger, an Ames lawyer, who gave us valuable insights into the realities of the justice system for poor Iowans. Additionally, an interview with Rita Bettis Austen, Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Iowa, was constructive to the language used in writing positions.

After presentation at the LWVIA Convention in June 2023 in Dubuque, the study material was made available to all 12 Local League who then had speakers come in to present or did their own work to share with League members and sometimes the local community. Those who made presentations and continue to do so are Lettie Prell, Karen Person, John Klaus, Al Hays, Martha Hurst, Jean Dell and E.J. Gallagher. Each Local League then voted to accept the study by Concurrence. All 12 voted for Concurrence. This result was then shared with the State Board on March 16, 2024. Now with the LWVIA Board approval, this Economic Justice Position will be added to the LWVIA Program of Positions.

The complete Position is listed below.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED POSITIONS TO BE ADDED TO THE LWVIA PROGRAM OF POSITIONS

Part I: Bail and Pretrial Alternatives – The Proposed League Position

The LWVIA believes justice delayed is justice denied. The LWVIA believes that bail is seldom necessary as most defendants do show up for trial and are not a danger to the public. The LWVIA believes that holding nonviolent defendants in jail pretrial is counterproductive, often compounding poverty for defendants, causing loss of job, car, schooling, and possessions.

The LWVIA supports:

- Funding the courts to provide indigent persons awaiting trial an adequate number of high-quality defense attorneys or contract attorneys to ensure a speedy trial.
- Providing prosecutors, defense attorneys, contract attorneys, and judges with regular training about the alternatives to jail for those awaiting trial, including pretrial diversion, pretrial supervision, and restorative justice programs. Funding for pretrial alternatives should not be assessed to indigent defendants.
- Amending Iowa Code 811.2 (which provides that judges consider the likelihood of a defendant's appearance in court and safety of others when ordering pretrial release) to add consideration of the risk of harm to the defendant and the defendant's family if the defendant were detained.

Part 2: Criminal Justice Debt – The Proposed League Position

The LWVIA believes that just as the state has the responsibility to prove a defendant guilty, so does the state have the responsibility of proving that the defendant has the ability to pay fines and fees. The determination should be based on all relevant evidence and sources of information. The burden of proof should be with the state which has greater resources than an indigent defendant. The LWVIA believes that Iowa should institute a sliding scale for assessing fines based on an individual's ability to pay. Ability-to-pay policies must include a presumption that some individuals will not have the ability to pay any fine, fee or other monetary sanction. The LWVIA believes that resources devoted to collecting fines and fees could be better spent on efforts that actually improve public safety.

The LWVIA further believes that after the court determines a person's ability to pay and assesses any fines, fees, or other monetary sanctions, it must allow payment plans as an acceptable payment method. The court should also consider converting the reduced amount to an alternative method of fulfillment such as community service. An individual should not face incarceration, have probation extended, be denied services, or have a driver's license suspended for missed payments or nonpayment of fines and fees.

Continued on next page

The LWVIA supports:

- Providing free legal services of high quality for indigent defendants, and repealing Iowa Code Section 815.9(3) to make this possible.
- Eliminating fees assessed to indigent defendants whose charges are dismissed.
- Mandating use of a guideline for all judges and court clerks to apply in determining reasonable ability to pay.
- Requiring monthly payment amounts that do not exceed 2% of an individual's monthly net income (including wages and excluding any child support or Supplemental Security Income) or \$10-whichever is greater.
- Waiving or reducing fines, fees, or any other monetary sanctions after a court determines an individual's ability-to-pay. Courts should permit individuals to enroll in a payment plan and should offer community service as an alternative form of payment. Courts should be flexible and allow a wide range of activities to qualify as community service.
- Mandating that collected public defense fees be remitted to an indigent defense fund rather than the general fund (should indigent defendants continue to be charged these fees).
- Streamlining and simplifying forms, petitions and processes designed to determine indigency and ability to pay. The "Financial Affidavit and Request for Reasonable Ability to Pay Determination for Category B Restitution" form should be rescinded.

The LWVIA opposes:

- Incarceration, extension of probation, denial of services, or driver's license suspension as punishment for missed payments by an individual on a payment plan.
- Issuance or execution of warrants for any failure to pay.
- The use by some County Attorneys in making Category B restitution a factor in plea negotiations, such as requiring agreement to forgo a Reasonable-Ability-to-Pay determination.

INTERNATIONAL VOTER CENTER CELEBRATION

LWVIA meets with Iowa International Center Visitors from the Middle East



Karen Person and Bonnie Pitz represented the League of Women Voters of Iowa in meeting with visitors from Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, and Libya. This group from the Middle East is in the US for three weeks to learn about the role of young Americans in the current political landscape.

Karen and Bonnie reviewed the history of the League and outlined the current activities to keep citizens informed and registered to vote.

The visitors were especially interested in the current issues we are working on, including the role of women in American politics and leadership roles. In Egypt, 35% of the parliament and four cabinet positions are held by women. In discussion, it appeared the countries were working hard to make sure women had leadership roles.

One unusual fact in contrast with the USA, most countries had multiple parties running for elections. Israel had 12 parties, and Jordan and Egypt also had multiple parties.

The overall view was that if America had multiple parties, it would be useful for Democracy. The translators were kept quite busy sharing all the ideas discussed. In 2023 League also met with the Iowa International Center. The League looks forward to meeting with visitors in the future.