

# LEGISLATIVE ACTION

## Working Together to Influence Public Policy

Effective congressional lobbying on national legislative issues depends on a partnership at all League levels—lobbying in Washington and constituent lobbying at home. The Advocacy Department leads the organization’s federal lobbying work and provides information to state and local Leagues about advocacy priorities.

This department, working at the direction of the LWVUS Board, is responsible for developing and implementing strategies for lobbying on national issues and advancing LWVUS program priorities. In Washington, the LWVUS president testifies on Capitol Hill and, with members of the Board, lobbies members of Congress (MCs) through phone calls and office visits. Day-to-day lobbying of MCs, staff members and committees is carried out by the LWV’s professional staff lobbyists.

The LWVUS volunteer Lobby Corps (LC) of some 20 Washington-area League members lobbies each month when Congress is in session. Each Lobby Corps member is assigned specific state congressional delegations. Contact the LC chair through the national office for the name of the LC member assigned to your delegation.

While it is the job of the LWVUS Board to take the lead in national action and to keep League action synchronized with the U.S. Congress, national legislation is every League’s and every member’s business. Each state and local League president is expected to take whatever official action is requested in response to a national Action Alert.

Encourage your members and Board members to contact their legislators on key League national issues because their action greatly enhances the League’s clout. It is important to remember, though, that **only a League spokesperson, usually the president, speaks in the name of the League.** Leagues and League members should only lobby their own legislators. Individual members can take action on their own behalf.

Lobbying in Washington is vitally important, but direct lobbying of MCs by constituents often is the key to persuading them to vote the League position. The arguments that League leaders and members make to their representatives or senators can make the difference in how they vote. MCs return to their states or districts regularly during congressional recesses. This is a good time to schedule meetings with them or to talk with them at public events. Please inform your state League and the LWVUS Advocacy Department of your lobbying efforts, along with any important information uncovered during your lobby visit or call (reports may be sent to [advocacy@lww.org](mailto:advocacy@lww.org)).

The LWVUS Grassroots Lobby Corps provides another good way for Leagues to keep in contact with their members of Congress. This online network of activists gets the League message to Congress in a highly effective way. Members of the network receive email action alerts from the LWVUS and then respond by sending quick, targeted, and sometimes last-minute, messages to members of Congress on priority issues before key votes. League members are automatically enrolled in the Grassroots Lobby Corps.

The LWVUS grassroots lobbyists act as liaison between LWV lobbyists on Capitol Hill and local and state Leagues. The grassroots lobbyists work with LWV leaders and activists in targeted states and congressional districts to help develop and implement grassroots lobbying strategies. Call the LWVUS if you want to talk about lobbying strategies or have questions about LWVUS issues, and call if you would like written materials or want to schedule training on grassroots strategies or on getting press coverage.

The LWVUS may call League presidents before critical votes in Congress or when in-depth and ongoing grassroots lobbying is needed from your area. LWV presidents also will receive sample op-ed pieces and letters to the editor on issues on which we are actively lobbying.

League communications on priority legislative issues include:

**Action Alerts** - Members of the Grassroots Lobby Corps and local and state League presidents receive alerts by email at critical times in the legislative process. An alert not only asks Leagues and League members to take action on a key issue, but also provides substantive and political background information. A quick and easy system for sending an email directly to MCs also is provided.

Each state and local League is expected to take whatever official action is requested in response to a national Action Alert. A League Board may choose not to respond to a particular call to action, but may not take action in opposition to a position articulated by the LWVUS on federal or national issues, or by the state League on state issues. Individual League members of course are always free to take action on whatever they choose as long as they do so in their own name and leave no impression that they speak for the League.

**Legislative Action Center on the Web** - Current Action Alerts, Legislative Updates and other advocacy tools are posted on the LWVUS website at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).

The LWVUS Board annually adopts a set of advocacy priorities to guide its advocacy work in Congress. The goals are:

- Enhance the League's effectiveness by concentrating resources on priority issues
- Build the League's credibility and visibility by projecting a focused and consistent image
- Ensure that the League has sufficient issue and political expertise to act knowledgeably
- Enable the League to manage resources effectively.

In setting legislative priorities, the Board considers the following:

- Opportunities for the League to make an impact
- Program decisions made at Convention or Council
- Member interest
- Resources available to manage effectively.

The LWVUS Board regularly reviews the legislative priorities and is prepared to make adjustments should new opportunities for effective action emerge. In even numbered years, the LWVUS reviews its current program and positions through the program planning process. Convention delegates then vote on program content for the next biennium.

The LWVUS Bylaws provide that Leagues may act on national program only in conformity with positions taken by the LWVUS. State Leagues are responsible for determining action policies and strategies on state issues and ensuring that the League's message is consistent throughout the state. The LWVUS is responsible for a consistent national message. This helps ensure that the League speaks with one voice and is essential for our effectiveness as an advocacy organization.

**Requests from State/Local Leagues for Permission to Act at the Federal Level** - All action at the federal level must be authorized by the LWVUS board. This includes any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a federal issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter-to-the-editor. A state or local League wishing to work in this way on a federal issue or at the national level must consult with the LWVUS about the intended action.

As part of this consultation process, the state/local League is asked to provide the following information in writing:

- The proposed action and the message to be conveyed
- The LWVUS position on which the action is based
- Evidence that the issue is a priority for that state or local League.

Leagues are asked to provide this information on the Federal Action Request Form, which can be found on the LWVUS League Management Site [forum.lwv.org](http://forum.lwv.org).

If a local League is requesting permission to contact its U.S. Senator(s) on an issue that has not been the subject of an LWVUS Action Alert, it should also provide evidence that

the action has been authorized by its state League. Appropriate LWVUS Board and staff will review the action request to determine that it is consistent with League positions and that it will not interfere with LWVUS action on a priority issue.