

# Social Policy

**Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all Americans.**

From its inception, the League has worked for equal rights and social reforms. In the early years, the League was one of the first organizations to address such issues as child welfare, maternal and child health programs, child labor protection and laws that discriminated against women.

In the 1960s, with the nation's unrest over civil rights, the League began building a foundation of support for equal access to education, employment and housing. The fight against discrimination broadened in the 1970s and 1980s, and the League supported the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1972, fighting hard for ratification by the states. As that effort fell short, support for the ERA undergirded action on issues from pay equity to Title IX, which required equal educational opportunity for women.

Based on 1970s work to combat poverty and discrimination, a two-year study evaluating public and private responsibilities for providing food, shelter and a basic income level ended in 1988 and culminated in a position on Meeting Basic Human Needs. Programs to increase the availability and quality of child care and protect children at risk remained a concern.

In the 1980s, fiscal issues, from tax reform to entitlement programs and deficit reduction, were at the forefront of the League program. The League was a major force in the tax-reform effort to cut loopholes and promote fairness. It sought deficit reduction while protecting federal old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the League worked to increase the availability of quality child care and adopted a position in favor of community and government programs to help children reach their full potential, including early childhood education.

Leagues nationwide also work hard on transportation issues, focusing on environmental protection and ensuring the availability of public transportation for access to employment and housing.

In the 1990s, concern for violence prevention spurred a new League position and brought strong support for commonsense measures to control gun violence. The League supported the Brady bill and sought to close loopholes that undermine consumer safety.

The 2006 Convention voted to undertake a study on immigration. After study and consensus, the new position was finalized in 2008 and sent to Capitol Hill.

Given the growing crisis in health care delivery and financing in the 1990s, the League developed a comprehensive position supporting a health care system that provides access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans and protects patients' rights. In 2010, the League's efforts saw success – the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law. Throughout the 112th Congress, the League continued to defend the ACA from challenges in Congress and the Courts.

At Convention 2010, delegates voted to study the role of the Federal Government in Public Education and in March 2012, the board announced a new position. Delegates to Convention 2012 adopted by concurrence a new position on Sentencing Equality.

## Equality of Opportunity

### The League's History

By 1966, the League had reached its first position on combatting poverty and discrimination: support of policies and programs to provide equal opportunity for all in education and employment. The position described general criteria and specific kinds of programs to further these goals.

“An evaluation of equality of opportunity for housing” was in the proposed program slated for 1968 Convention consideration. Two events that spring caused delegates to alter the normal sequence of study/consensus/position: the shock waves in cities following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the passage of a new civil rights bill that included fair housing.

Convinced that League members knew where they stood on fair housing, delegates amended the existing position at Convention, adding support for equality of opportunity for housing, and they redirected the study from an evaluation of the concept to an evaluation of the means to achieve the goal. By December 1969, members had endorsed criteria for ensuring fair housing and adequate

housing supply.

The League has consistently supported federal programs aimed at combating poverty and discrimination and has worked at the community level for successful implementation. The list is long – starting with programs initiated under the long-defunct Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), legal services, community action agencies, Job Corps, urban renewal, Model Cities and others designed to provide equal access to housing, employment and education.

When the federal government combined many categorical grant programs into block grants, the League found new ways to work for the goals and policies it supports. In 1973, the League began monitoring the impact of the General Revenue Sharing (GRS) program on poverty and discrimination. This resulted in reforms incorporated into the 1976 GRS amendments that tightened weak antidiscrimination provisions and expanded citizen participation and accountability requirements, but efforts to direct more funds to jurisdictions in greatest need failed.

Since the late 1970s, threats to League goals and policies have taken the form of frequent legislative and executive attempts to drastically reduce federal funding of League-supported programs, as well as persistent moves to dilute existing civil rights laws and policies. The League has actively opposed tuition tax credits, budget cuts in social welfare programs and large, untargeted block grants, while supporting strengthened fair-housing legislation and civil rights legislation to reaffirm congressional intent in passing Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that the law be broadly interpreted and applied.

The League's Social Policy positions were revised in 1989. The Equal Access to Education, Employment, and Housing position was combined with Equal Rights into one Equality of Opportunity position.

The 1992 Convention added language to the Equality of Opportunity position, stating that it referred to “all persons, regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability.” In July 1992, the LWVUS joined the National Endorsement Campaign in calling for the extension of existing civil rights laws by local, state and federal legislation to prohibit discrimination against lesbians and gay men in jobs, housing and public accommodations. In the 106th Congress, the LWVUS supported federal legislation targeting hate crimes. Convention 2010 added language

to the Equality of Opportunity position to equalize the rights of same-gender couples to those of heterosexual couples.

## Education

### Integration

The League is committed to racial integration of schools as a necessary condition for equal access to education.

When busing became one means of achieving school desegregation, Leagues worked to ensure that laws were obeyed peacefully – building coalitions, running rumor-control centers, sometimes going to court to get compliance. At the national level, the League worked to oppose antibusing/anti-desegregation initiatives in Congress.

The League served as an *amicus* in Supreme Court challenges to the desegregation process. The LWVEF maintained a desegregation clearinghouse and assembled League leaders and national policy experts for a workshop on metropolitan school desegregation in 1982-84.

### Quality Education

The 1974-76 LWVUS Program included the phrase “equal access to...quality education,” reflecting League recognition that “equality” and “quality” are inseparable. However, the LWVUS has never undertaken a process for determining a common League definition of quality education that could serve as a basis for action nationwide. Therefore, when the definition of quality is a key factor in a state or local community, a local or state League must conduct its own study rather than relying on the LWVUS position to take action. Many Leagues that have member agreement on quality education in specific terms use their positions to support an array of local and state educational reforms. A number of Leagues have used this position to oppose private school vouchers. The LWVUS is a member of the National Coalition for Public Education, which opposes vouchers.

### Tuition Tax Credits

The 1978 Convention directed the national board to oppose tax credits for families of children attending private elementary and secondary schools. Convention action was based on League support for equal access to education and support for desegregation as a means of promoting equal access. The League is concerned about the negative impact that tuition tax credits would have on the public schools by encouraging flight, particularly from

desegregated schools. The League also supports federal efforts through Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulation to deny tax-exempt status to racially discriminatory “segregation academies.”

## Federal Programs

The League supports many federal education programs, some designed to meet the special educational needs of the poor and minorities and others to give women and minorities equal education opportunities.

The League worked for passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal aid. Subsequently, the League has focused on thwarting congressional attempts to dilute Title IX, as well as on advancing federal enforcement efforts. At the national level, the League was active in major court challenges to Title IX, defending key provisions and urging a broad interpretation of Title IX’s scope. In 1983, the League filed an *amicus* brief in *Grove City College v. Bell*, a major Supreme Court case that narrowed considerably the prohibitions of Title IX. In 1984, after the Court’s decision, the League supported efforts in Congress for new legislation clarifying congressional intent on the scope of coverage of Title IX and similar civil rights statutes.

In 2003, the League responded to a Department of Education effort to scale back Title IX. The LWVUS opposed attempts to weaken the law and lobbied in support of congressional resolutions affirming that Title IX had made great progress in establishing equal opportunity for girls and women in education and in school athletics. In July 2003, the Department of Education affirmed its support for Title IX without change. In September 2004, the LWVUS signed on to an *amicus* brief in *Jackson v. Birmingham Board of Education*, supporting Title IX’s original intent of broad and effective protection against gender discrimination by ensuring that individuals who bring discriminatory practices to light are protected from retaliation and reprisal.

Under an LWVEF project to monitor sex equity in vocational education programs in 1981-82, several state Leagues evaluated progress toward meeting federal sex-equity mandates. Vocational education programs have significant impact on employment, particularly for women who have difficulty gaining access to training programs for higher paying jobs. Linkages between the League’s Education and Employment positions promoted

increasing the enrollment of girls and young women in math and science courses, to prepare them for the jobs of the future.

## Education Financing

Many state and local Leagues have identified inequities in education financing during the course of their own program studies and have worked for reforms. Action on school financing equity takes place predominantly at the state level, where school financing laws are made. With financial and technical support from an LWVEF grant, a number of state Leagues have stepped up efforts to educate citizens about inequities and inadequacies of state funding systems.

## Employment

The League has supported federal job training programs and is on record in favor of a full employment policy, i.e., the concept of assuring a job for all those able and seeking to work. In 1978, the League supported passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill to promote full employment.

The League supported the public service employment (PSE) component of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Program (CETA) during the 1970s and worked for the passage of emergency jobs legislation in 1983, spearheading a “Call to Action for Jobs for Women” that resulted in more funding for the types of public-service jobs that women traditionally perform. In 1994, the League unsuccessfully supported passage of the Infrastructure Jobs Act and the Full Employment Opportunity Act, both targeted especially to urban areas.

## Nondiscrimination & Affirmative Action

Through legislative and regulatory approaches, as well as litigation, the League advocates affirmative action programs for minorities and women. Action has included a lawsuit to compel the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to issue goals and timetables governing the employment of women in nontraditional jobs and apprenticeship programs and prodding to ensure enforcement. The League has worked to combat administrative initiatives to restrict the enforcement authority of DOL’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Since 1977, the League has supported measures to combat employment discrimination in Congress itself.

The League has been outspoken in supporting affirmative

action programs and policies. That support has included filing *amicus* briefs in key affirmative action lawsuits, including *Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp. v. Weber* in 1979, *Boston Firefighters Union, Local 718 v. Boston Chapter NAACP* in 1983, *Firefighters Local Union No. 1784 v. Stotts* in 1984 and *Williams v. City of New Orleans* in 1983. The League has actively opposed attempts by OFCCP to weaken regulations that govern the federal contract compliance program. During the 1985-86 Supreme Court term, the League filed *amicus* briefs in three key affirmative action cases: *Local 28 Sheet Metal Workers v. EEOC*, *Local 93 International Association of Firefighters v. City of Cleveland*, and *Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education*. The Court reaffirmed the validity of voluntary race-based affirmative action in these cases.

In 1986, the LWVUS signed onto another *amicus* brief filed in the U.S. Supreme Court, *Johnson v. Transportation Agency*. In 1987, the Court held that public employers may adopt voluntary affirmative action plans to attain work force balances in traditionally segregated job categories—the first instance in which the Supreme Court upheld a gender-based affirmative action plan.

In 1988, the League participated in a Supreme Court *amicus* brief in *Patterson v. McLean Credit Union*. In its 1989 decision, the Court reaffirmed that Section 1981 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination in contracts, applies to private acts of discrimination. However, the Court also held that Section 1981 does not apply to racial harassment or other discriminatory working conditions that arise after an employment contract has been entered into.

Between 1984 and 1988, the League was an active player in successfully urging Congress to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which restored four anti-discrimination laws that were narrowed by the Supreme Court's 1984 *Grove City v. Bell* decision. Subsequently, the League endorsed the Civil Rights Act, which reversed a series of 1989 Supreme Court decisions that seriously weakened federal employment discrimination laws, and strengthened protections under federal civil rights laws. In 1990, the bill passed both Houses of Congress but was vetoed by the President. In 1991 a compromise bill was passed by Congress and signed by the President. The League did not actively support this bill, in part because it placed a monetary limit on damages for sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. In 1992, the League joined other groups in supporting the Equal Remedies Act, which would remove the monetary limit on damages in

civil rights laws.

In response to continued congressional attacks, the League joined other concerned organizations in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) to reaffirm strong support for affirmative action programs.

In 2004 and 2006, the League opposed the “Federal Marriage Amendment,” which would permanently write discrimination into the United States Constitution by limiting fundamental protections such as health care benefits for same-sex partners.

In 2008, the League joined other organizations in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), designed to restore the ADA to its original intent and ensure coverage for disabled Americans in all aspects of society. The bill was passed and signed into law. In 2012, the League joined an *amicus* brief in an affirmative action case before the Supreme Court, urging the Court to recognize that diversity in higher education is crucial for the success of our multi-racial democracy.

## Pay Equity

League work on pay equity (equal pay for jobs of comparable worth) stemmed from member concern over the feminization of poverty. The League played a key role at the national level through its work with the broad-based National Committee on Pay Equity in the 1980s. In 1986, the LWVEF participated in an *amicus* brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in the pay equity case, *Bazemore v. Friday*. The Court ruled a state agency may be held liable for disparities in salaries between blacks and whites, even if the disparities were caused by racial discrimination that occurred before the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

State and local Leagues also have endorsed legislative efforts to undertake job evaluation studies or to implement pay equity for public employees.

## Fair Housing

The League made passage of the Fair Housing Amendments a priority in 1980. The legislation passed the House but was filibustered in the Senate. Another attempt in 1983-84 was put on hold in light of more pressing civil rights issues. The League also supported reauthorization of the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) in 1982.

LWVEF participation in a Department of Housing and

Urban Development (HUD)-funded project in 1979-81 enabled local Leagues to promote the entry of women into the mortgage credit market and sparked interest in the problems of single-headed households, displaced homemakers and discrimination against families with children.

In 1989-90, the League endorsed recommendations to Congress by the Women and Housing Task Force of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, which included enforcing the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. The act, for the first time, prohibited housing discrimination against families with children.

In 2005, the League urged support in Congress for creation of the Affordable Housing Fund, a long overdue step toward addressing the housing crisis that confronts very low- and extremely low-income families. It also urged House members to protect activities of the nonprofit groups providing the bulk of housing services for our poorest communities.

## Equal Rights

In 1972, shortly after congressional passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the national Convention overwhelmingly approved support of “equal rights for all regardless of sex” as a necessary extension of the League’s long-term support for equal opportunity for all. Delegates also voted to support the ERA. With this decisive action, the League came full circle in giving priority support once again to equal rights for women and men.

The foremothers of the women’s movement, in their 1848 Conventions at Seneca Falls and Rochester, New York, rooted the movement in a demand for women’s equality before the law. The right to vote came to be seen as the key that would unlock the door to the others. This vision sustained the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the forerunner of the League.

When the 19th Amendment was passed in 1920, suffrage leaders divided on strategy. Some founded the National Woman’s Party, which sponsored the first ERA, introduced in Congress in 1923. Others—the founders of the League among them—decided not to push for an ERA. It’s hard for League members now to imagine the time in which the League actually opposed the ERA. It wasn’t for lack of concern for women’s rights. The League’s record on that point speaks for itself. Rather, it was a problem in priorities. At the League’s 1921 Convention delegates decided that an ERA might

adversely affect new and hard-won state labor legislation, which offered some protection to tens of thousands of women working in nonunionized, unskilled jobs.

Moreover, though it was an organization of women, the early LWV wanted to affirm strongly that its interests and lobbying activities were not confined to women’s issues. The League in the 1920s and 1930s set the stage for future program development by focusing on a broad range of social issues. Many were, of course, of obvious concern for women: the Sheppard-Towner Act, which provided for federally funded infant and maternity care; the removal of discrimination against women in immigration and naturalization laws; equality for women in the Civil Service Classification Act; equal pay for equal work. During the same period, local and state Leagues worked to eliminate sex discrimination affecting jury duty, property rights, the treatment of women offenders and a number of other issues.

Through the 1940s, the national League program included “removal of legal and administrative discriminations against women,” but retained the statement in opposition to an ERA until 1954 when the national program was restructured and it disappeared.

As the League became active in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, members grew acutely aware of the parallels between the status of women and minorities. Many state and local Leagues pursued women’s issues with new vigor, and a strong push for women’s issues developed at the national level, culminating in the 1972 Convention action.

Subsequent Conventions have reaffirmed the League’s commitment to the ERA. The 1980 Convention took the League’s commitment a step further, voting to use the existing ERA position as a basis not only for ratification efforts, but also to work on gender-based discrimination through action to bring laws into compliance with the goals of the ERA.

In 1972, lobbying for ratification—and against rescission—on a state-by-state basis became a top League priority at the national and state levels.

In 1979, the LWVUS organized the National Business Council (NBC) for ERA, the first formal structure to bring major business leaders into the fight for ratification. In 1981 under an LWVUS/NBC partnership, a volunteer task force of advertising executives developed and produced radio ads designed to “sell” the ERA in seven

unratified states. Throughout the media campaign, the LWVUS provided extensive technical and financial assistance to state Leagues and ERA coalitions, and worked to organize business efforts in the states.

The ratification process was not completed by the June 30, 1982, deadline, but the League's support of a constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law remains strong. The League supported reintroduction of the ERA in Congress in 1982 and helped lead a lobbying effort that culminated in a narrow November 1983 defeat in the House.

In July 1993, the League signed on to an *amicus* brief in the Supreme Court case, *J.E.B. v. T.B.*, which argued that sex discrimination in jury selection is prohibited by the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. League participation was based on support for actions to bring laws into compliance with the ERA. In 1994, the Supreme Court agreed, ruling that state laws allowing jury challenges based solely on sex are unconstitutional.

The League will continue to work to achieve the goals of the expanded ERA position. Issues cover action for pay equity and support for the Economic Equity Act, which includes provisions to eliminate sex discrimination in pensions and insurance. In 1996, the League endorsed the Women's Pension Equity Act, legislation designed to make pension law simpler and more even-handed. Meanwhile, the League continues to lay the groundwork for passage and ratification of the ERA.

On the international front, the League of Women Voters supports the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and is on the Steering Committee of the NGO UNICEF Working Group on Girls at the UN, which formed an International Network for Girls, a global advocacy network.

## **The League's Position**

*Statement of Position on Equality of Opportunity, as Revised by the National Board in January 1989, based on Positions Announced by the National Board in January 1969, Adopted by the 1972 Convention, Expanded by the 1980 Convention and the 2010 Convention.*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and**

**housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability. Employment opportunities in modern, technological societies are closely related to education; therefore, the League supports federal programs to increase the education and training of disadvantaged people. The League supports federal efforts to prevent and/or remove discrimination in education, employment and housing and to help communities bring about racial integration of their school systems.**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States supports equal rights for all regardless of sex. The League supports action to bring laws into compliance with the ERA: a) to eliminate or amend those laws that have the effect of discriminating on the basis of sex; b) to promote laws that support the goals of the ERA; c) to strengthen the enforcement of such existing laws.**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States supports equal rights for all under state and federal law. LWVUS supports legislation to equalize the legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to same-gender couples with those available to heterosexual couples. LWVUS supports legislation to permit same-gender couples to marry under civil law. The League believes that the civil status of marriage is already clearly distinguished from the religious institution of marriage and that religious rights will be preserved.**

## **Further Guidelines and Criteria**

**In more specific terms, the kinds of programs the League supports include:**

- **Programs in basic education, occupational education and retraining when needed at any point of an individual's working career.**
- **Expanded opportunities in apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs.**
- **Child-care centers for preschool children to give parents the opportunity for employment.**
- **Greatly increased educational opportunity through compensatory programs for disadvantaged groups beginning at the preschool level and extending through secondary education.**
- **Federal financial aid to help needy students remain in high school and to take advantage of post-high school training and education.**
- **A regional approach to problems of economically depressed areas that cuts across state lines. This approach can be handled administratively by such means as interstate cooperation or more formal**

interstate compacts or commissions made up of representatives of state and federal governments. Development programs should reflect the needs of the particular area and can include such measures as provision of education and training for available jobs, encouragement of new industry in the area, development and conservation of natural resources and the building of public facilities.

- Programs that would inform individuals of their civil rights in education, employment and housing, and of the opportunities open to them.
- Full use of mediation and conciliation in efforts to bring about integration of minority groups into full participation in community life.
- A federal clearinghouse for the exchange of information on solutions communities have found to problems of integration in employment, education and housing.
- Programs to bring about effective integration of schools through federal technical assistance such as training programs and institutes for teachers and school administrators.
- Withholding federal funds from school districts that fail to meet realistic and effective guidelines and standards for school integration.
- Withholding government contracts from businesses and industries that discriminate in employment.
- An effective federal fair employment practices agency.

## **Education and Employment Criteria**

In evaluating federal programs that have been, or will be, established to provide equality of opportunity for education and employment, the League will support those programs that largely fulfill the following criteria:

- The nationwide effort to achieve equality of opportunity in education and employment should include participation of government at all levels and encourage the participation of private institutions.
- Programs should be carefully tailored to the educational or employment needs of the people they are intended to reach.
- People for whom community action programs are designed should be involved in the planning and implementation of those programs.

- The programs should be carried out by personnel competent to meet the specific requirements of their jobs.
- Programs should assist people to become self-supporting, contributing members of society.
- The programs should be nondiscriminatory with provisions for enforcement.
- Research, pilot projects and continuing evaluation should be encouraged and, where feasible, built into programs.
- Programs may be closely related but should avoid unnecessary duplication.
- State and local governments should contribute to the extent their resources permit; at the same time, adequate federal funds for the establishment and continuation of programs should be available if necessary.

## **Fair Housing Criteria**

The following criteria should be applied to programs and policies to provide equal opportunity for access to housing without discrimination:

- Opportunities for purchase or renting of homes and for borrowing money for housing should not be restricted because of discriminatory reasons such as race, color, sex, religion or national origin.
- Responsibility in the nationwide effort to achieve equality of opportunity for access to housing resides with government at all levels and with the private sector—builders, lending institutions, realtors, labor unions, business and industry, news media, civic organizations, educational institutions, churches and private citizens.
- The continued existence of patterns of discrimination depends on the covert support of community leaders, institutions and residents. Award or withdrawal of federal contracts and placement of federal installations should be used as levers to change this covert support.
- After positive steps such as mediation and conciliation have been exhausted, the federal government should have the option for selective withholding of federal funds where patterns of discrimination in access to housing occur. In applying the option to withhold funds, the federal government should weigh the effects of its actions on the welfare of lower-income and minority groups.

- Federal programs should include provisions to guarantee equal opportunity for access to housing. Federal funds should not be used to perpetuate discrimination.
- In the enforcement of fair-housing laws, speedy resolution should be ensured. Administrative procedures and responsibilities should be clearly defined and widely publicized.
- Mediation and legal redress should be readily available. The process should ensure every possible protection for both complainant and persons or institutions against whom complaints are lodged. Avenues for mediation and legal redress should be widely publicized and should be easily accessible.
- Funding should be adequate to provide trained and competent staff for public education to inform citizens of the provisions of fair-housing legislation, of their fair-housing rights and of procedures to be followed in securing them. Adequate funding should also be available for mediation and for all aspects of speedy enforcement.
- There should be continued evaluation to provide a basis for revision and strengthening of all procedures so that equality of opportunity for access to housing can be accomplished.

## Federal Role in Public Education

### The League's History

Convention 2010 delegates voted to embark on a two-year study of the Federal Role in Public Education. Local and state Leagues across the country participated in the study and a position was announced in March 2012.

### The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Federal Role in Public Education as announced by the National Board in March 2012.*

The League of Women Voters believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12. A quality public education is essential for a strong, viable, and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right.

The League believes that the role of the federal

government should include the following:

- Provide leadership and vision to promote a quality education for all children;
- Provide broad common standards developed by educational experts upon which states and local education agencies can build;
- Provide a suggested curricular structure or framework as a guide to state and local education agencies to develop their own curricula;
- Provide a national assessment that clearly informs teachers, parents and students about how well individual students have mastered criteria established at the national level;
- Provide a national assessment that informs districts how well their populations compare to other populations similar to theirs; and
- Provide a combination of competitive grants and non-competitive funding to states and local school districts to achieve equity among states and populations.

The League of Women Voters believes that an equitable, quality public education is critical for students. While the League recognizes that there are instances where the federal government's involvement is the only way to achieve universal change (desegregation, special needs population, gender equity), we also recognize that primary responsibility for public education resides with the states. In accordance with the League of Women Voters' position on Equal Rights, the League continues to support equity in public education for all through:

- Broad guidelines for accountability, leaving implementation to the state and local education agencies;
- Adequate funding sources that support the broad goals of national standards; and
- Mechanisms for local and state funding with adequate federal support for mandates that require less burdensome, compliance-based reporting and regulations.

The League of Women Voters believes a basic role of the federal government in funding education should be to achieve equity among states and populations on the basis of identified needs. This should be done with full understanding that equity does not mean equal, given that some populations are more expensive to educate than others and some localities have specific needs.

The League believes that the federal government should be primarily responsible for funding any programs



**mandated by the federal government on local education agencies. Although the League recognizes equity in education depends on meeting basic human needs of children and of their families, the costs associated with providing equitable access to safe neighborhoods and secure housing do not belong in the education budget. Major programs of federal funding for public education (i.e., Elementary and Secondary Education Act) should be targeted toward children living in poverty and/or children with special needs.**

**The federal government has the responsibility to monitor and support access to the following:**

- **High quality teaching and learning, supported by quality current learning materials and well maintained educational facilities; and**
- **Access to health care needs (i.e., hearing, vision, dental, immunization, school-based health clinics at the secondary level, etc.) and nutritionally adequate food (i.e., school-based meals under “free and reduced meal programs”).**

**The League of Women Voters believes that the first five years of a child’s life are crucial in building the foundation for educational attainment and greatly impact success or failure in later life. Additionally, the League believes quality, developmentally appropriate and voluntary early learning experiences should be available to all children, with federally funded opportunities going first to children of poverty and/or with special needs. The League believes that the federal government should support the following:**

- **Early childhood education programs that include funding for parent education and involve child development, health, nutrition and access to other supportive services such as mental health care for all children and their families;**
- **Research that documents quality early childhood education programs; and**
- **Research that demonstrates the importance of linking state and local community partnerships with effective early childhood education programs and services.**

## **Fiscal Policy**

### **The League’s History**

The 1984 Convention adopted criteria for evaluating federal tax policies as a League position and a two-year study of U.S. fiscal policy. The three-part study focused on tax policy, deficit issues and entitlement funding.

League members completed the tax policy portion of the study in time to position the League as a major force in the tax reform movement of 1985-86. As Congress debated major legislation to broaden the income tax base, the League became a recognized leader in pushing for passage of reform legislation. The League achieved a major victory after mobilizing League members and activists to urge members of Congress to pass broad-based, fair and progressive legislation. As part of its strong legislative campaign, the League opposed a value-added tax as regressive. The League supported taxing capital gains as ordinary income and urged the removal of loopholes in the tax law.

The final two stages of the study, concluded in 1986, gave the League new tools for responding to federal deficit and budget issues. Under the deficit position, the League has supported selective cuts in defense spending that target military investment rather than readiness, in accord with the LWVUS Military Policy and Defense Spending position.

In determining what national security crises might call for deficit spending, the League is guided by its International Relations positions, including U.S. Relations with Developing Countries. The League also can, if necessary, support selective cuts in nondefense discretionary spending. In determining its stance, the LWVUS will be guided by its Social Policy, Natural Resources, Representative Government and International Relations positions and priorities.

As Congress continued in 1986 to grapple with extraordinary federal deficits and budget dilemmas, the League took a comprehensive approach to the budget battle that combined support for increased funding for human needs, for selective cuts in defense spending and for necessary revenue increases. The deficit position enabled the League to oppose a balanced budget constitutional amendment in March 1986.

The deficit position, like the tax policy position, applies only at the federal level. Thus, LWVUS opposition to the line-item veto and to a constitutionally mandated balanced budget applies only to the federal government. Under the LWVUS deficit position, state Leagues will be expected to oppose state legislative resolutions and other actions calling for a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget.

Since the state budgeting process occurs under different constitutional arrangements and laws, the conclusions of

the federal deficit study do not overrule any current state League positions on state budgeting processes, nor can they be used at the state level without separate state League study and member agreement on the subjects.

The Funding of Entitlements position enables the LWVUS to support efforts to expand participation in the Social Security system (including participation by state and local government employees and other excluded groups). The League is opposed to measures that allow individuals to opt out of the system or measures to substitute private programs. The League opposes reducing Social Security benefits to achieve deficit reduction.

In 1990, the LWVUS urged the President and Congress to produce actual deficit reductions rather than masking the problem, and prodded them to rely primarily on reductions in defense spending and increased revenues through progressive taxes. In 1992, the LWVUS urged the President and Congress to address the recession and promote economic development. The League called for tax and budget reform and for rebuilding the nation's infrastructure.

As the federal deficit grew, the "balanced-budget" amendment to the Constitution was introduced in Congress as a political expedient to control the federal budget. The League successfully fought against passage in the House in 1992 and both houses in 1994. The League argued it would dangerously upset the federal balance of powers and hurt the economy.

In 1995, the federal deficit began to shrink, but the push for a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget grew. The League lobbied and brought grassroots pressure to oppose this dangerous and misleading proposal, arguing that it would hamstring the government's ability to stimulate the economy in time of recession and to respond to natural disasters. Amendment opponents prevailed then and in 1996-97. League grassroots pressure was key in defeating balanced budget Constitutional amendment efforts.

In December 1998, the League and others signed a letter urging President Clinton to use the budget surplus to invest in programs that benefit the American people, including education, health care, human needs and the environment.

In 1999, when debate over Social Security's future heated up with various proposals to "privatize" the Social Security system, the LWVUS endorsed the principles of the New

Century Alliance for Social Security, emphasizing Social Security's central role in family income protection. The League's stance is based on support for a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance.

In the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the League joined with several hundred other organizations, lobbying against tax cut legislation because it was fundamentally unfair and jeopardized the nation's ability to meet its domestic and foreign responsibilities.

Responding to Congressional efforts to cut funding to the poorest of Americas during the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, the League lobbied in support of programs that benefit low income Americans while opposing tax breaks for the wealthiest in the country.

## **The League's Position**

***Statement of Position on Fiscal Policy, as Adopted by 1984 Convention and as Announced by National Board, March 1985, January 1986 and June 1986:***

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that federal fiscal policy should provide for: adequate and flexible funding of federal government programs through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and that relies primarily on a broad-based income tax; responsible deficit policies; and a federal role in providing mandatory, universal, old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance.**

## **Tax Policy**

**The LWVUS believes that the federal tax system should: be fair and equitable; provide adequate resources for government programs while allowing flexibility for financing future program changes; be understandable to the taxpayer and encourage compliance; accomplish its objectives without creating undue administrative problems.**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal tax system, taken as a whole, should be progressive, not proportional.**

**The League: supports income as the major tax base for federal revenues; believes that the federal income tax should be broad-based with minimal tax preferences and a progressive rate structure; opposes a value-added tax or a national sales tax in the federal revenue system.**

## **Further Guidelines**

**Under this position, the League of Women Voters would support tax measures that broaden the base and**

**improve the equity of the income tax while working to incorporate progressivity into the tax system, taken as a whole. In evaluating specific tax preferences, the League will use the following criteria: whether the tax preference promotes equity and progressivity; whether the tax preference effectively furthers League of Women Voters program goals; whether the tax preference is the most efficient means of achieving its purpose; whether the revenue loss from the tax preference is justifiable.**

## **Federal Deficit**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the current federal deficit should be reduced. In order to reduce the deficit, the government should rely primarily on reductions in defense spending through selective cuts and on increased revenue through a tax system that is broad-based with progressive rates. The government also should achieve whatever savings possible through improved efficiency and management. The League opposes across-the-board federal spending cuts.**

**The League recognizes that deficit spending is sometimes appropriate and therefore opposes a constitutionally mandated balanced budget for the federal government. The League could support deficit spending, if necessary, for stimulating the economy during recession and depression, meeting social needs in times of high unemployment and meeting defense needs in times of national security crises. The League opposes a federal budget line-item veto.**

## **Funding of Entitlements**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the federal government has a role in funding and providing for old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance. For such insurance programs, participation should be mandatory and coverage should be universal. Federal deficit reduction should not be achieved by reducing Social Security benefits.**

# **Health Care**

## **The League's History**

In 1990, the LWVUS undertook a two-year study of the funding and delivery of health care in the United States. Phase 1 studied the delivery and policy goals of the U.S. health care system; Phase 2 focused on health care financing and administration. The LWVUS announced its initial health care position in April 1992 and the final position in April 1993.

The health care position outlines the goals the LWVUS believes are fundamental for U.S. health care policy. These include policies that promote access to a basic level of quality care at an affordable cost for all U.S. residents and strong cost-control mechanisms to ensure the efficient and economical delivery of care. The Meeting Basic Human Needs position also addresses access to health care.

The health care position enumerates services League members believe are of highest priority for a basic level of quality care: the prevention of disease, health promotion and education, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health care), acute care, long-term care and mental health care. Dental, vision and hearing care are recognized as important services but of lower priority when measured against the added cost involved. Comments from numerous state and local Leagues, however, emphasized that these services are essential for children.

To achieve more equitable distribution of services, the League endorses increasing the availability of resources in medically underserved areas, training providers in needed fields of care, standardizing the services provided under publicly funded health care programs and insurance reforms.

The LWVUS health care position includes support for strong mechanisms to contain rising health care costs. Particular methods to promote the efficient and economical delivery of care in the United States include regional planning for the allocation of resources, reducing administrative costs, reforming the malpractice system, copayments and deductibles, and managed care. In accordance with the position's call for health care at an affordable cost, copayments and deductibles are acceptable cost containment mechanisms only if they are based on an individual's ability to pay. In addition, cost containment mechanisms should not interfere with the delivery of quality health care.

The position calls for a national health insurance plan financed through general taxes, commonly known as the "single-payer" approach. The position also supports an employer-based system that provides universal access to health care as an important step toward a national health insurance plan. The League opposes a strictly private market-based model of financing the health care system. With regard to administration of the U.S. health care system, the League supports a combination of private and public sectors or a combination of federal, state and/or

regional agencies. The League supports a general income tax increase to finance national health care reform.

The League strongly believes that should the allocation of resources become necessary to reform the U.S. health care system, the ability of a patient to pay for services should not be a consideration. In determining how health care resources should be allocated, the League emphasizes the consideration of the following factors, taken together: the urgency of the medical condition, the life expectancy of the patient, the expected outcome of the treatment, the cost of the procedure, the duration of care, the quality of life of the patient after the treatment, and the wishes of the patient and the family.

As the LWVUS was completing Phase 2 of the study, the issue of health care reform was rising to the top of the country's legislative agenda. In April 1993, as soon as the study results were announced, the LWVUS met with White House Health Care officials to present the results of the League's position. Since then, the League has actively participated in the health care debate.

The LWVUS testified in fall 1993 before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Education and Labor Committee, calling for comprehensive health care reform based on the League position. The League joined two coalitions—one comprised of consumer, business, labor, provider and senior groups working for comprehensive health care reform, and the other comprised of groups supporting the single-payer approach to health care reform.

Throughout 1994, the League actively lobbied in support of comprehensive reform, including universal coverage, cost containment, single-payer or employer mandate and a strong benefits package. The League emphasized LWVUS support for the inclusion of reproductive health care, including abortion, in any health benefits package.

When congressional sponsors could not reach accord and comprehensive reform was declared dead for the 104th Congress, focus shifted to the states, where Leagues worked in support of health care reform and fought attempts to cut existing health care.

The LWVEF initiated community education efforts on health care issues with the "Understanding Health Care Policy Project" in the early 1990s. The project provided training and resources for Leagues to conduct broad-based community outreach and education on health care policy

issues with the goal of expanding community participation in the debate.

In spring 1994, the LWVEF and the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) undertook a major citizen education effort, "Citizen's Voice for Citizen's Choice: A Campaign for a Public Voice on Health Care Reform." The project delivered objective information on health care reform to millions of Americans across the country through local and state Leagues sponsored town meetings in major media markets nationwide, involving members of Congress and other leading policy makers and analysts in health care discussions with citizens. In September 1994, the LWVEF and KFF held a National Satellite Town Meeting on Health Care Reform, with 200+ downlink sites across the country. They also undertook a major television advertising promotion of public participation in the health care debate.

In 1997, the LWVUS joined 100 national, state and local organizations in successfully urging Congress to pass strong bipartisan child health care legislation. In 1998, the LWVUS began working for a Patients' Bill of Rights, aimed at giving Americans participating in managed care health plans greater access to specialists without going through a gatekeeper, the right to emergency room care using the "reasonably prudent person" standard, a speedy appeals process when there is a dispute with insurers and other rights.

In 1998, the LWVEF again partnered with KFF and state and local Leagues on a citizen education project, this time focused on Medicare reform, patients' bill of rights and other health care issues. In the first phase, more than 6,500 citizens participated in focus groups, community dialogues and public meetings. Their views were reflected in "How Americans Talk About Medicare Reform: The Public Voice," presented to the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare in March 1999. The report emphasized that people value Medicare but recognize its flaws. Fairness, responsibility, efficiency and access were identified as important values for any reforms of the Medicare system.

In spring 2000, the LWVEF and KFF developed and distributed two guides, "Join the Debate: Your Guide to Health Issues in the 2000 Election" and "A Leader's Handbook for Holding Community Dialogues." The project focused on five issues under debate in the election: the uninsured, managed care and patients' rights, Medicare reform, prescription drug coverage and long-

term care.

In the late 90s, the LWVUS lobbied in support of a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. Despite close votes in 2000, Senate opponents continued to block passage. At Convention 2000, League delegates lobbied their members of Congress to pass a strong, comprehensive Patients' Bill of Rights, but it was shelved as Election 2000 drew near.

The LWVUS lobbied federal lawmakers in support of the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act of 2001, legislation that would provide patients with administrative and legal recourse in dealing with insurers and Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), which died in conference.

In the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the League lobbied in support of the Health Care Access Resolution. In 2003, the League opposed the Medicare Prescription Drug bill the President signed into law because of provisions that undermined universal coverage in Medicare.

In May 2006, the League urged Senators to oppose the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act (HIMMA), which purported to expand healthcare coverage, while actually limiting critical consumer protections provided in many states.

From 2007-2009, the League urged reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which provided health care coverage in 2007 to six million low-income children; the efforts were rewarded with reauthorization in early 2009.

In 2010, two decades of League work to ensure access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans and protect patients' rights celebrated success when the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law. The League remains vigilant in light of current efforts to repeal or diminish the law in Congress and the Courts.

In the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, the League continued to fight attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to limit provisions that provide health and reproductive services for women. State Leagues began to work with their legislatures to implement the ACA and the LWVUS signed on to an amicus brief in the challenge to the Affordable Care Act, which was upheld by the Supreme Court.

## **The League's Position**

*Statement of Position on Health Care, as Announced by National Board, April 1993:*

**GOALS:** The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all U.S. residents. Other U.S. health care policy goals should include the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care.

**BASIC LEVEL OF QUALITY CARE:** Every U.S. resident should have access to a basic level of care that includes the prevention of disease, health promotion and education, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, long-term care and mental health care. Dental, vision and hearing care also are important but lower in priority. The League believes that under any system of health care reform, consumers/patients should be permitted to purchase services or insurance coverage beyond the basic level.

**FINANCING AND ADMINISTRATION:** The League favors a national health insurance plan financed through general taxes in place of individual insurance premiums. As the United States moves toward a national health insurance plan, an employer-based system of health care reform that provides universal access is acceptable to the League. The League supports administration of the U.S. health care system either by a combination of the private and public sectors or by a combination of federal, state and/or regional government agencies.

The League is opposed to a strictly private market-based model of financing the health care system. The League also is opposed to the administration of the health care system solely by the private sector or the states.

**TAXES:** The League supports increased taxes to finance a basic level of health care for all U.S. residents, provided health care reforms contain effective cost control strategies.

**COST CONTROL:** The League believes that efficient and economical delivery of care can be enhanced by such cost control methods as:

- the reduction of administrative costs,
- regional planning for the allocation of personnel, facilities and equipment,
- the establishment of maximum levels of public reimbursement to providers,
- malpractice reform,
- the use of managed care,
- utilization review of treatment,
- mandatory second opinions before surgery or extensive treatment,

- consumer accountability through deductibles and copayments.

**EQUITY ISSUES:** The League believes that health care services could be more equitably distributed by:

- allocating medical resources to underserved areas,
- providing for training health care professionals in needed fields of care,
- standardizing basic levels of service for publicly funded health care programs,
- requiring insurance plans to use community rating instead of experience rating,
- establishing insurance pools for small businesses and organizations.

**ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO INDIVIDUALS:** The League believes that the ability of a patient to pay for services should not be a consideration in the allocation of health care resources. Limited resources should be allocated based on the following criteria considered together: the urgency of the medical condition, the life expectancy of the patient, the expected outcome of the treatment, the cost of the procedure, the duration of care, the quality of life of the patient after treatment, and the wishes of the patient and the family.

## Immigration

### The League's History

In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the League lobbied in support of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act that would provide a path to citizenship for young immigrants who complete a college degree or serve in the military, thereby enabling them to be a fully productive part of American society. The legislation passed the House, but lacked enough votes to overcome a filibuster in the Senate.

### The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Immigration, as Announced by National Board, April 2008:*

The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law.

The League supports federal immigration law that provides an efficient, expeditious system (with minimal or no backlogs) for legal entry of immigrants into the United States.

To complement these goals the League supports federal policies to improve economies, education, job opportunities and living conditions in nations with large emigrating populations.

In transition to a reformed system, the League supports provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status

The League supports federal payments to impacted communities to address the financial costs borne by states and local governments with large immigrant populations.

### Criteria for Legal Admission to the United States

The League supports the following criteria for legal admission of persons into the United States:

- Family reunification of spouses or minor children with authorized immigrants or citizens;
- Flight from persecution or response to humanitarian crises in home countries;
- Economic, business and employment needs in the United States;
- Education and training needs of the United States;
- Educational program opportunities; and
- Lack of a history of serious criminal activity.

### Administration and Enforcement

The League supports due process for all persons, including the right to a fair hearing, right to counsel, right of appeal and right to humane treatment.

The League supports:

- Improved technology to facilitate employer verification of employee status;
- Verification documents, such as status cards and work permits, with secure identifiers;
- Significant fines and penalties for employers who hire unauthorized workers;
- Improved technology for sharing information among federal agencies;
- More effective tracking of individuals who enter the United States; and
- Increased personnel at borders.

**The League also supports programs allowing foreign workers to enter and leave the United States to meet seasonal or sporadic labor needs.**

## **Unauthorized Immigrants Already in the United States**

**In achieving overall policy goals, the League supports a system for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status, including citizenship, by paying taxes, learning English, studying civics and meeting other relevant criteria. While policy reforms, including a path to legal status, remain unachieved, the League does not support deporting unauthorized immigrants who have no history of criminal activity.**

# **Meeting Basic Human Needs**

## **The League's History**

After adopting the Meeting Basic Human Needs position in 1988, the League reorganized the Social Policy program in 1990. This reorganization combined several existing positions to address the basic needs of all people for food, shelter, and access to health care and transportation. The Meeting Basic Human Needs position encompasses previous positions on income assistance and transportation. The issue of housing supply was separated from the fair housing position, still under Equality of Opportunity, and put under the Meeting Basic Human Needs position.

## **Income Assistance**

The 1970 Convention adopted a study of alternatives to welfare. As a result of the study, members agreed to support a system of federalized income assistance. The position, adopted in 1971, suggests criteria for such a system and for minimum uniform standards of eligibility for both cash benefits and supportive services (in-kind benefits). The position is closely linked with the Employment position in encouraging work and in emphasizing the responsibility of the federal government to help those who can't find work, those whose earnings are insufficient to meet basic needs or those who are unable to work.

Adoption of the position coincided with a congressional effort to make major changes in the welfare system in 1971-72. The League mounted an all-out lobbying effort, despite recognized shortcomings in the legislation. In the

late 1970s, the League attempted unsuccessfully to strengthen a number of federal welfare reform proposals. The League has supported a variety of specific programs for income assistance and in-kind benefits—food stamps, low-income energy assistance, child-care legislation, reform of unemployment compensation and Aid to Families with Dependent Children programs, and housing subsidies. Comprehensive child care remains an elusive but critically needed support service for women seeking employment. In each case the League has pressed for: uniform minimum federal standards of eligibility; uniform standards for benefits based on need; standards for quality of services.

The League has opposed cutoffs of Medicaid funding for abortion, on the basis of the supportive services provisions of the Income Assistance position and because such actions clearly discriminate against economically disadvantaged women.

In the 1980s, national League action on income assistance focused primarily on opposition to funding cutbacks, dilution of the federal role, and changes in eligibility requirements for income maintenance programs and support services.

In 1986-88, the League worked in support of welfare reform legislation in Congress, culminating in passage of the Family Support Act of 1988. The League had supported the House version, the Family Welfare Reform Act, which included provisions for education, training and employment of welfare recipients. The final bill followed the Senate version, the Family Security Act, which the League opposed. The League joined the national Coalition on Human Needs in opposing the final bill, citing inadequate funding and mandatory participation quotas. Since passage of the Act, states continue to face implementation decisions.

The League lobbied successfully in support of the Family and Medical Leave Act, designed to guarantee workers unpaid leave for illness or the birth or adoption of a child. Through the years, the League has supported the Earned Income Tax Credit as a necessary form of income assistance.

Other recent League efforts include lobbying Congress in 1991 and 1992 to pass the Mickey Leland Hunger Relief Act and the Freedom From Want Act, bills designed to alleviate hunger in the United States. In 1988-90, the LWVEF coordinated an 18-month Hunger Advocacy Project designed to help state and local Leagues develop

and carry out model, targeted activities to document or alleviate hunger. A guide, *Fighting Hunger in Your Community*, provided information on replicating such activities.

In 1989-90, the LWVEF promoted discussion of a Ford Foundation report on social welfare, *The Common Good*. Three regional workshops were held on issues raised in the report, and local Leagues conducted related community education activities.

The League actively opposed welfare reform legislation proposed in the 104th Congress. During summer 1996, the White House and Congress agreed on legislation to essentially hand over welfare to the states. Despite the League's strong lobbying effort with a particular focus on the President, the bill was passed and signed into law in August 1996. State Leagues across the country monitored the implementation and effects of "reform" efforts at the state level to ensure that the benefits were provided where needed and that recipients' civil rights were protected.

In 1997, the League opposed congressional budget and appropriations provisions attempting to transfer responsibility for public assistance programs such as Medicaid and Food Stamps from state governments to private for-profit corporations.

In fall 2005, the League responded to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, urging Congress to protect basic human needs of those affected by securing the basics —jobs, income when work is not available, health care, food, education, child care, and housing—while also protecting and expanding the capacity of the federal government to respond by preserving and increasing funding for vital services and not sapping revenues through misdirected tax cuts.

## Housing Supply

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the League worked for a number of federal housing programs. In 1974, League support was channeled into aspects of the Housing and Community Development Act, which consolidated federal assistance under a block grant approach. The League fought against congressional action to weaken the Community Development Block Grant program through drastic cuts in the full range of authorized low- and moderate-income subsidies for both rehabilitation and new housing.

Throughout the 1980s, the League continued to support increased funding to add to and maintain the existing

stock of federally assisted housing for very low-income persons. LWVUS efforts included working as a member of the National Low Income Housing Coalition to urge passage of 1987 legislation authorizing HUD's low-income housing and community development programs, as well as endorsing the 1989 "Housing Now" march on Washington.

As a member of the Low Income Housing Coalition's Women and Housing Task Force, the LWVUS endorsed a 1988 memorandum to the incoming Administration highlighting the housing problems facing women and making specific recommendations. In March 1990, the League endorsed a similar set of recommendations to Congress by the Women and Housing Task Force, predicated on the conviction that every person and family should have decent, safe and affordable housing. State and local Leagues have worked to increase the supply of low- and moderate-income housing through efforts to change zoning laws and to set up shared housing services.

In 2002, the LWVUS formally endorsed legislation to establish the National Housing Trust Fund, using surplus funds from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to create new housing for low-income families.

## Transportation

LWVUS concern about public transportation grew out of efforts on behalf of equal opportunity for employment and housing. The 1971 Air Quality position added another dimension to this concern by urging "measures to reduce vehicular pollution...and development of alternate transportation systems." In 1972, the LWVUS Board responded to questions of interpretation by synthesizing the two positions into a unified Transportation position. In 1976, following League concurrence on the Energy Conservation position, the LWVUS Board reaffirmed the national League's Transportation position. In 1979, the Urban Policy position reinforced the theme that federal aid for highway construction should be reduced; the Transportation position language was revised to make that point clear.

The League first put the position to work by backing a national coalition's efforts to amend the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1972 to permit financing part of the costs of urban mass transit from highway trust funds. The League also supported the National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974. Later the focus shifted to prevent stalling or cutting of federal assistance to mass transit systems.



In response to the urgency to improve and promote public transportation systems, the 1980 Convention voted to give greater emphasis to the Transportation position. In 1988, it was incorporated into the Meeting Basic Human Needs position. Leagues continue to use the Transportation position with their own local or ILO positions to back local and regional moves to improve mass transit and support other alternatives, such as express lanes for buses and carpools.

## **The League's Position**

*Statement of Position on Meeting Basic Human Needs, as Revised by the National Board, January 1989, based on positions reached from 1971 through 1988.*

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that one of the goals of social policy in the United States should be to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty.

Persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate or for whom jobs are not available have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and access to health care.

The federal government should set minimum, uniform standards and guidelines for social welfare programs and should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families. State and local governments, as well as the private sector, should have a secondary role in financing food, housing and health care programs. Income assistance programs should be financed primarily by the federal government with state governments assuming secondary responsibility.

## **Preventing and Reducing Poverty**

In order to prevent or reduce poverty, the LWVUS supports policies and programs designed to: increase job opportunities; increase access to health insurance; provide support services such as child care and transportation; provide opportunities and/or incentives for basic or remedial education and job training; decrease teen pregnancy; ensure that noncustodial parents contribute to the support of their children.

## **Access to Health Care**

The LWVUS believes that access to health care includes the following: preventive care, primary care, maternal and child health care, emergency care, catastrophic care, nursing home care and mental health care as well as

access to substance abuse programs, health and sex education programs, and nutrition programs.

## **Access to Transportation**

The LWVUS believes that energy-efficient and environmentally sound transportation systems should afford better access to housing and jobs and will continue to examine transportation policies in light of these goals.

## **Further Guidelines and Criteria**

### **Criteria for Income Assistance**

- Eligibility of all low-income individuals for assistance should be based on need. Eligibility should be established through simplified procedures such as a declaration of need, spot-checked in a manner similar to that used in checking the validity of income tax returns.
- Benefit levels should be sufficient to provide decent, adequate standards for food, clothing and shelter. Minimum income standards should be adjusted for regional differences in the cost of living and should be revised periodically to take into account changes in the purchasing value of the dollar. Until a federal welfare program achieves an adequate level of benefits, some states will need to supplement federal payments.
- There should be increasing emphasis on cash assistance, but in-kind assistance (e.g., food stamps, housing subsidies, medical aid) should be continued to help assure that these needs are met.
- Under a revised program participants should not have their benefits reduced.
- Privacy of participants should be protected. All administrative procedures should be conducted with respect for the rights and dignity of the individuals.
- Work should be encouraged: participants' total income should increase as earnings increase. Counseling, realistic training for actual jobs and financial incentives should be the links between job programs and income assistance.

### **Criteria for Supportive Services**

- Supportive services should be available—but not compulsory—for participants in income assistance programs. Most important among these are child

care, counseling, transportation, and family planning, health care and legal services.

- Fees for supportive services should be based on ability to pay and be free where necessary.
- Facilities and services for participants should be the same as for the general public.
- The federal government should exert leadership in setting standards for eligibility, for the quality of services and for adequate funding.
- Participants in the programs should be included in program development and implementation, and the administration of social services programs should be responsive to the needs of the people being served.
- Wherever possible, these services should be conveniently located in the neighborhood.
- Transportation systems should afford better access to housing and jobs and should also provide energy-efficient and environmentally sound transportation.
- Government programs that require recipients of assistance to engage in work-related programs would be acceptable only if the following protections are guaranteed to the participants:
  - a. job training;
  - b. basic education;
  - c. exemptions for primary care givers;
  - d. supplemental support services such as child care and transportation;
  - e. equitable compensation to ensure that program participants earn the same wages and benefits as other employees performing similar work;
  - f. a disregard of some earned income for purposes of calculating benefit levels.

### **Criteria for Housing Supply**

The following considerations can be applied to programs and policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family:

- The responsibility for achieving national housing goals rests primarily with the federal government, which should:
  - a. assure that our economic system is functioning to produce and maintain sufficient decent housing for citizens at all income levels;

- b. compensate for any failure or inadequacy of the system by building, financing, renting and selling homes to those citizens whose housing needs are not being met;
  - c. give a variety of incentives to local jurisdictions to encourage them to provide within their boundaries an adequate supply of decent housing for low- and moderate-income groups;
  - d. withhold federal funds from communities that fail to encourage such housing.
- State and local governments should assist by establishing effective agencies to aid, promote, coordinate and supplement the housing programs of the federal government and the private sector.
  - Government at all levels must make available sufficient funds for housing-assistance programs.
  - When families or individuals cannot afford decent housing, government should provide assistance in the form of income and/or subsidized housing.
  - Government programs providing subsidies to the building, financing and insuring industries for housing for lower-income families should be evaluated in terms of units produced rather than in terms of benefits accruing to these industries.
  - Government at all levels should develop policies that will assure sufficient land at reasonable cost on which to develop housing and that will assure fulfillment of other goals such as access to employment, preservation of open space, environmental cleanliness and beauty, and other aspects of a suitable living environment.
  - Regional and metropolitan planning should be promoted to prevent haphazard urban growth, and housing for low- and moderate-income families should be provided as a part of all planned neighborhoods or communities.
  - Lower-income families should not be segregated in large developments or neighborhoods. As their economic status improves, lower-income families should be enabled to continue to live in the same units as private tenants or as homeowners, if they are so inclined.
  - Housing should be designed to meet human needs and should be built with amenities that will encourage economic integration within apartment buildings as well as within neighborhoods.

- **Publicly assisted housing should be included in viable, balanced communities, with provision for quality public services and facilities, including schools, transportation, recreation, etc., that will encourage integration and stability.**
- **Zoning practices and procedures that will counteract racial and economic isolation should be promoted.**
- **State and local governments should adopt and enforce:**
  - a. **uniform building codes with standards based on performance;**
  - b. **housing codes to protect the health and safety of all citizens.**
- **State and local tax structures should be examined and revised to:**
  - a. **benefit communities that build housing for lower-income families;**
  - b. **encourage private owners to improve their homes;**
  - c. **reduce speculative land costs.**
- **Government, industry and labor should encourage innovative building techniques to reduce the cost of housing production.**
- **Rights of tenants to negotiate for proper maintenance, management of facilities and services should be protected.**
- **Housing programs should be administered by individuals trained for the jobs and sympathetic with the needs of their clientele.**
- **Citizen groups should participate in the development of publicly assisted housing programs by:**
  - a. **evaluating performance;**
  - b. **activating nonprofit sponsorships;**
  - c. **supporting legislation;**
  - d. **developing public awareness of housing discrimination and need.**

## Child Care

### The League's History

The League has long recognized that child-care programs are a key supportive service for poor families.

The 1988 LWVUS Convention adopted child care as a priority and separated the child-care position within the Social Policy position. The League supported a

compromise child-care bill, signed by the President in 1990. The legislation included three basic provisions endorsed by the League. It provided financial assistance to low-income families for child care; increased the availability of child care through resource and referral programs and training for child-care workers; and required states to establish health and safety standards for day care. Following passage of the bill, Leagues across the country monitored and commented on the regulatory process as the Department of Health and Human Services wrote regulations to implement the legislation.

LWVEF activities included a 1990-91 School-Age Child Care Project. The goal was to help local Leagues serve as catalysts in targeted communities to increase the availability of affordable, quality school-age child care for low- and moderate-income families. In 1992, the LWVEF published a community action guide using the model League projects, to help other communities implement similar programs.

In summer 1998, the LWVUS and other groups urged congressional action on child care and the passage of a substantial increase in guaranteed funds for the Child Care Development Block Grant.

In early 2002, the League joined other groups in support of legislation to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF) and provide for comprehensive reforms to help those on welfare become self-sufficient. It was not adopted.

### The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Child Care, as Adopted by the 1988 Convention, based on positions reached from 1969 through 1988:*

**Support programs, services and policies at all levels of government to expand the supply of affordable, quality child care for all who need it, in order to increase access to employment and to prevent and reduce poverty.**

## Early Intervention for Children at Risk

### The League's History

The position on Early Intervention for Children at Risk was adopted by concurrence at Convention 1994; it was based on state and local League work.

In 1995, the LWVEF published a comprehensive kit,

designed to help Leagues and other groups advocate and work for children in their communities. In June 1996, the League endorsed the Stand for Children, a national day of commitment to improving the lives of children throughout the country.

## The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Early Intervention for Children at Risk, as Adopted by the 1994 Convention:*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that early intervention and prevention measures are effective in helping children reach their full potential. The League supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being, encourage the full development and ensure the safety of all children. These include:**

- **child abuse/neglect prevention;**
- **teen pregnancy prevention;**
- **quality health care, including nutrition and prenatal care;**
- **early childhood education;**
- **developmental services, emphasizing children ages 0-3;**
- **family support services;**
- **violence prevention.**

## Violence Prevention

### The League's History

The 1994 Convention adopted by concurrence a position on Violence Prevention, based on state and local League work. The League subsequently endorsed the Violence Against Women Act, which Congress passed and the President signed in 1994 as part of a comprehensive crime bill.

### The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Violence Prevention, as Adopted by the 1994 Convention:*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States supports violence prevention programs in all communities and action to support:**

- **public and private development and coordination of programs that emphasize the primary prevention of violence.**
- **the active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior.**

- **the allocation of public monies in government programs to prevent violence.**

## Gun Control

### The League's History

The 1990 Convention took the then rare step of adopting the gun control position by concurrence. Proponents had sent two informational mailings to all Leagues before Convention. Spirited debate on the Convention floor persuaded the Convention to concur with the statement proposed by the LWV of Illinois.

Following the Convention action, the LWVUS wrote to all members of Congress, announcing the League's new position on gun control and urging passage of federal legislation to control the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States. In 1991, the League joined with other organizations to support legislation banning semi-automatic assault weapons. In 1992 and 1993, the League supported congressional passage of the Brady bill, to institute a five-day waiting period and background check for the purchase of handguns. Following enactment of the Brady bill in November 1993, the League stepped up its efforts in a successful 1994 House campaign to force inclusion of the assault weapons ban in the final conference report on omnibus crime legislation.

Addressing constitutional arguments affecting gun control, the 1994 Convention voted to amend the position on gun control based on federal court decisions limiting the meaning of the Second Amendment's "right to keep and bear arms." This section of the position was nullified by the Supreme Court decisions in *District of Columbia v. Heller, 2008* and *McDonald v. Chicago, 2010*.

Throughout 1995-1996, opponents of the assault weapons ban and Brady bill pushed for repeal, but the League and others convinced Congress otherwise.

The 1998 Convention again amended the position with: "The League supports regulating firearms for consumer safety."

In the 106th Congress, the LWVUS worked for gun control measures to close major loopholes in current law. Although the Senate passed legislation mandating background checks for all gun show purchases, the House derailed this and other attempts to control gun violence, including child safety locks on guns.

The LWVUS endorsed and League members joined the Mother's Day 2000 Million Mom March that demonstrated citizens' call for common-sense gun control measures.

In 2004, the League voiced strong concern over the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which would grant special protection for the gun industry by barring city, county or individual lawsuits against gun manufacturers and dismiss pending cases

The League supported legislation to extend the Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in September 2004. The LWVUS also supported language to close the Gun Show Loophole to require all dealers to run criminal background checks at gun shows.

In the 2000s, the League opposed congressional attempts to repeal District of Columbia gun safety laws because such action interfered with the right of self-government for DC citizens.

## The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Gun Control, as Adopted by 1990 Convention and amended by the 1994 and 1998 Conventions:*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and safety threat to its citizens. The League supports strong federal measures to limit the accessibility and regulate the ownership of these weapons by private citizens. The League supports regulating firearms for consumer safety.**

**The League supports licensing procedures for gun ownership by private citizens to include a waiting period for background checks, personal identity verification, gun safety education and annual license renewal. The license fee should be adequate to bear the cost of education and verification.**

**The League supports a ban on "Saturday night specials," enforcement of strict penalties for the improper possession of and crimes committed with handguns and assault weapons, and allocation of resources to better regulate and monitor gun dealers.**

## Urban Policy

### The League's History

Recognizing that the League's program already had many urban implications, the 1976 Convention added

Cities/Urban Crisis to the national program as a "specific focus for information and action on urban problems." Members examined urban connections among existing League positions in order to open up new action opportunities to address the desperate plight of many urban areas.

The 1978 Convention reaffirmed the League's interest in the urban problem by adopting an "evaluation of urban policy options, with emphasis on fiscal policy." Leagues drew on their preliminary explorations of urban problems for a more structured study of the appropriate federal role in the intergovernmental responsibility for cities. In June 1979, the national board announced a new position, enabling the League to take a strong stand on targeting federal assistance to distressed cities, especially through urban economic development assistance programs to encourage private reinvestment in cities. It also supports general and targeted direct financial assistance to cities.

During the consensus process, it was made clear that restoring economic health to the nation's cities requires the combined state, local and federal government efforts. State Leagues have used the position to work for targeted state aid to distressed areas, and local Leagues have pushed for improved city management to make better use of diminishing resources.

The League's first national action campaign under the position involved the 1980 reauthorization of General Revenue Sharing. Building upon the previous monitoring and action to strengthen GRS (see Equal Access position), the Urban Policy position reaffirmed support for strong civil rights and citizen participation requirements and auditing standards, and for a more equitable distribution of funds. The League worked with a coalition toward these ends, and was successful on all but the last issue.

Under the Urban Policy position, the League has supported expansion of Economic Development programs and the reauthorization of Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG). In efforts to bring more jobs to urban areas, the League also has supported the location of federal facilities in distressed cities.

Local and state Leagues implemented the position on the home front, fighting to save downtown businesses from extinction, commenting on local UDAG applications, working for public/private cooperation in the revitalization of city neighborhoods, undertaking citizen education activities to spur interest in improving the quality of urban life.

In 1979, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the LWVEF and a number of local Leagues worked to increase public awareness of urban problems and solutions. Another grant enabled the LWVEF to sponsor an exchange between Leagues in the industrial heartland and the Sunbelt.

The 1980 Convention changed Urban Crisis to Urban Policy. A new focus on urban transportation united the League's long-time concerns about access to jobs, air quality, land use and energy with newer concerns about urban economic development and municipal finances. In Washington, the LWVUS opposed crippling cuts in mass transit operating assistance and unsuccessfully pushed for legislation to increase federal aid for capital and operating expenses.

## **The League's Position**

*Statement of Position on Urban Policy, as Announced by National Board, June 1979 and revised by the National Board in 1989:*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that it is in the national interest to promote the well-being of America's cities.**

**Sharply targeted federal assistance to distressed cities should be central to this policy. The federal government should give highest priority in urban policy to measures that enhance the economic base of cities. The League also favors supplementary federal aid for cities in distressed fiscal condition and grants for particular program areas as strategies to counter the problems of hardship cities.**

**The fiscal health of cities depends on the active cooperation of all levels of government. The federal government should provide incentives to encourage states to take an active role in promoting the fiscal viability of their cities.**

**The League is committed to an urban environment beneficial to life and to resource management in the public interest.**

### **Further Guidelines**

#### **Economic Development Assistance**

**The cornerstone of a national urban policy is a commitment to helping cities achieve economic strength. Federal programs to encourage private reinvestment in central cities should counter an eroding tax base and provide jobs for the inner-city unemployed. Therefore, the League supports the following federal**

**strategies:**

- **Target community development programs to cities most in need.**
- **Encourage businesses to locate or expand in distressed cities through such financial incentives as investment tax credits, loan guarantees, subsidies for hiring the long-term unemployed and interest subsidies.**
- **Expand middle-income housing while not diminishing attention to low-income housing needs.**
- **Target federal purchasing and location of federal facilities in distressed cities.**

## **General Financial Assistance**

**The League supports a variety of federal strategies, including direct general assistance, targeted to distressed cities. Such a program should include aid to counter recession. In providing federal aid for particular program areas, grants offer city governments the best opportunities to meet local needs.**

- **In order to increase the availability of funds to city governments for capital expenditures, the federal government should use mechanisms to lower the cost of borrowing.**
- **Aid to cities should include technical assistance to improve management capacity.**

## **Death Penalty**

### **The League's History**

At Convention 2006, delegates voted to adopt a position supporting abolition of the death penalty. This decision was made in concurrence with a position adopted by the LWV of Illinois. Since that time, state Leagues have used the position to support initiatives to abolish the death penalty in their states.

### **The League's Position**

*Statement of Position on Abolition of the Death Penalty, as Adopted by the 2006 Convention:*

**The League of Women Voters of the United States supports the abolition of the death penalty.**

# Sentencing Policy

## The League's History

At convention 2012, delegates voted to adopt a Sentencing Policy position by concurrence. The position is based on the Sentencing Policy of the LWV of the District of Columbia.

## The League's Position

*Statement of Position on Sentencing Policy, as Adopted by the 2012 Convention.*

**The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.**