



THE NASHVILLE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Nashville

PO Box 158369, Nashville TN 37215 | 629-777-5650

<http://www.LWVnashville.org>

March 2021
Volume 74, No. 10

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 15, 2021. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. League of Women Voters State Advocacy Committee. Look for Zoom invitation or join [here](#).

March 17, 2021. at 1:00 p.m. A Conversation with Mandy Pellegrin from the Sycamore Institute. Sponsored by the League of Women Voters Williamson County. On ZOOM. Click [here](#) to register.

March 19-22, 2021. Tennessee Tree Day 2021. Sponsored by the TN Environmental Council. Learn more at @ tectn.org/tennesseetreeday2021

March 22, 2021. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. League of Women Voters State Advocacy Committee. Look for Zoom invitation or join [here](#).

March 29, 2021. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. League of Women Voters State Advocacy Committee. Look for Zoom invitation or join [here](#).

April 2, 2021. 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Hot Topics: Downtown Nashville. Presenter: Councilman Freddie O'Connell. On ZOOM. Look for an email link to register.

April 5, 2021. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. League of Women Voters State Advocacy Committee. Look for Zoom invitation or join [here](#).

April 12, 2021. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. League of Women Voters State Advocacy Committee. Look for Zoom invitation or join [here](#).

April 21, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. A Conversation with Robert Blair, Board Chairman of FSSD. Sponsored by the [League of Women Voters Williamson County](#). On ZOOM. Click [here](#) to register.

April 23 to April 24. League of Women Voters Tennessee Virtual State Convention. On Zoom. Look for an email to register and mark your calendars to attend.

President's Message



We are midway through March and Spring is blooming all over. I hope that each of you feels the hope that we may be emerging from the dark tunnel of the past year.

“What”, you may ask, “has the League been up to lately?” Oh, so many things! Our **Conversations on Moving Forward** produced an array of thoughts, concerns, and ideas. Our next steps are to form a committee to decide upon our direction, identify the “how” to enact and accomplish our goal/s, and entice others to join us in our efforts.

In addition, the **State Advocacy Committee** is currently having Zoom meetings **every** Monday to address bills in the General Assembly that are scheduled for committee votes each week. To date, there have been Action Alerts as well as letters of either support or opposition sent to legislators. These are based on research as well as the positions of the **LWVTN** and **LWVUS**. Please read **Debby Gould's** article below.

Constance Caldwell and **Clare Sullivan** continue to keep their eyes on issues surrounding Health Care Access and Public Health. Where are we on the **American Rescue Act** as it pertains to Covid-19 treatment and vaccine availability and healthcare access? To learn more, please read their article in this edition of the Voter.

Also, our Communication team of **Ophelia Doe** and **Lara Webb** is working with the Community Connections co-chairs **Sabina Mohyuddin** and **Tamanna Qureshi** to produce 5-minute videos on our YOUTUBE channel. These videos will give you even more information about the work of the **League** here in Nashville. The Communication team is working with the Membership co-chairs **Reba Holmes** and **Karen Hernan** to reach out in a video to the membership as well.

Finally, the **LWVTN** is having their Convention on Zoom **Friday evening, April 23**, and all-day **Saturday, April 24**. This will be a meeting full of information, elections, approvals of budget, bylaws, positions. You will have gotten some email information recently and will receive registration information soon. Please sign up to “come” and be part of the conversation.

As you can see, there is a lot going on. Our board meetings are on the **second Thursday each month**. Members are welcome to attend to observe at any meeting. If you are interested email me at mgarr2@gmail.com and I will send you a link. Thank you for being a member of this incredible organization.

Madeline Garr



State Advocacy Committee Is Hard at Work By State Advocacy Chair **Debby Gould**

The **State Advocacy Committee** has a full load of bills that we are monitoring and responding to during this intense legislative session. In addition to the education bills that **Jami** has reported

on this month, there are an incredible number of election bills that have been filed. We have yet to see much traction on many of **the pro-voter bills**, such as ones calling for **no-excuse** absentee voting, **same day** registration, and the use of **university-issued** IDs for voting.

On the positive side, we were especially pleased that our advocacy activities paid off with the passage out of committee of a **pro-voter bill** to expand access to **on-site voting** for assisted living residents who are on the same campus as a nursing home facility. In addition, a bill that would have given **LLC's voting rights** in municipal elections was defeated. We were also one of the **many** voices that called for the defeat of a resolution that would have led to the ouster of **Chancellor Ellen Hobbs Lyle**. This was especially good news for the preservation of an independent judiciary in the state.

As you have probably read, there are efforts in state legislatures across the country to make voting **more difficult**. Tennessee is no different. We are now looking out for election bills that will chip away **access** for voters. Your quick response to Action Alerts in which we ask you, as an **LWVTN** member, to contact legislators can make a difference. Please make sure that your friends and relatives —especially those living in **rural** Tennessee —have the same information so they can respond **promptly**.

Our next virtual meeting to discuss action strategies with our lobbyist **Stewart Clifton** is **Monday, March 22nd** at 11:30 CST. Please contact lwvtenn@gmail.com if you have not done so and wish to receive an agenda.



What is Happening in Williamson County? By Linda Sherman

The **Williamson County League of Women Voters** will welcome speaker **Robert Blair** on **April 21st at their 1 p.m. Zoom meeting**. A Franklin native and graduate of the Franklin Special School District (FSSD), Mr. Blair was elected Board Chairman of FSSD in 2020 where he has served since 2003. He has earned numerous honors from the Tennessee School Boards Association and the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

Mr. Blair has advocated for children through his work with many non-profit organizations including **Youth Leadership Franklin, My Friend's House**, and the **Boys and Girls Club of Franklin/Williamson County**. Mr. Blair continually takes opportunities to increase his knowledge of school-related issues. All are welcome to attend. Please sign up on the Brentwood Library website in Adult Programs. Click [here](#) to register. **Everyone** is welcome!



Summary of March Hot Topic –The Secret Life of Judges By Co-Vice President Ethel Detch

For March’s “Hot Topic” retired **Chancellor Claudia Bonnyman** and **LWVNashville** member shared her candid observations of the judiciary. Chancellor Bonnyman served three decades in **Davidson County’s Chancery Court** system, including 16 years as a judge.

Citing the **purpose** of court as the **non-violent resolution of disputes**, Chancellor Bonnyman noted that Chancery Courts do **not** try criminals but may get involved in issues that affect prisoners. She discussed a couple of such cases, one addressing whether the poisons used to execute prisoners inflict cruel and unusual punishment, and one addressing whether the records of a private prison company are private or not.

Although judges are **frequently** compared to **umpires**, in describing their role, Chancellor Bonnyman, finds this comparison to be simplistic and somewhat inaccurate. Rather than umpires, judges are **servants** of the law. Unlike umpires, judges often disagree about the rules, and the law’s **complexity** causes judges to have varied interpretations. The umpire analogy implies that judges can ignore bias, but she believes it’s important to **recognize** bias instead, including one’s own, in applying the law. In many cases, the **law** itself and Supreme Court decisions that guide later decisions, may leave **gaps** in interpretation which judges must fill.

She also discussed the role of “**common law**,” the **legal wisdom** that has been distilled over the years. She noted that, although court proceedings are evidence-based, love, faith, loyalty, and empathy are **all** qualities that cannot be ignored, and are, in fact, **vital** to judicial proceedings. She emphasized the importance of judges applying the law even when they personally disagree with it. Those who don’t do a disservice to the judicial system.

Chancellor Bonnyman discovered the hard way that some of her methods of **weighing facts** in the courtroom don’t work so well when applied to family dynamics. Having a husband and son who are passionate advocates for certain causes made her realize that her detached reactions to their ideas wasn’t helpful at home.

Although the public thinks that the courtroom is the most important place that legal work occurs, in actuality some of the most **vital** work happens in other places. The role of mediation and discovery are as important as what occurs in the more visible courtroom setting.

Chancellor Bonnyman described **petitions for name changes** as a type of case that gave her the most joy. In most such cases, the petitioner had an important reason for wanting a different name. She cited examples of people who chose to change names that were **demeaning**, or to **evade** a stalker, or for gender **reassignment**. One of her favorite stories was of an elderly African American woman who had **no** birth certificate and couldn’t find accurate records of her parents’ names. Helping that woman establish a **legal identity** enabled her to get a Social Security card and also **vote** for the first time.

This **Hot Topics** meeting, as well as others, was recorded and can be watched on the League of Women Voters of Nashville’s website at <https://lwvnashville.org/blog/>



April Hot Topic: Downtown Nashville

By Co-Vice Carole Kenner

Been downtown lately? Our **April 2 Hot Topic Presentation**” at noon on Zoom will focus on **Downtown Nashville**. Our speaker, **Freddie O’Connell**, is a native Nashvillian and has represented **District 19** on the Metro Council for the past 6 years. His district covers much of the downtown area, including sections destroyed by the tornado, damaged during some of the protests, and bombed on Christmas day. He will talk about the **future** of our downtown **beyond** being a tourist destination.

Chairing the advisory board for the District Energy System, he has been **instrumental** in moving Nashville forward towards a “Green New Deal” utilizing 100% **renewable** energy for Metro, including a zero-emission fleet for Metro vehicles. He also has been instrumental in moving Metro to utilize stronger **green** building standards.

He is an ex officio board member of the Nashville Downtown Partnership, the Central Business Improvement District, the Gulch Business Improvement District, and the South-Central Nashville Development Corporation. In the Council, he was elected to chair the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation committee. Freddie is an integration architect at HealthStream. He lives with his family—**Whitney Boon**, a pediatric neurologist at Vanderbilt, and two daughters.

April 2, 2021

**HOT TOPICS
Continues on ZOOM!**

Downtown Nashville

Presenter: Councilman Freddie O’Connell

**Be on the lookout for Zoom registration information
in your email, Facebook, or the League website.
Register and tune in on Friday, April 2, 2021 at Noon**



The American Rescue Plan and Its Impact on Covid-19 Issues and Health Care Access

By Health Care/Public Health Co-Chairs Clare Sullivan

The American Rescue Plan (ARP), signed this past week by President Biden, is expected to have a large and enduring impact on health care access. While the relief focus has been on providing an additional **\$1400** in income supplementation for those individuals and families eligible for the previous \$600 relief payment given at the end of 2020 and extending

supplemental unemployment insurance benefits for the **18 million** Americans who remain out of work, the ARP makes major changes in coverage for those who are uninsured and those insured through Medicaid or the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

For starters, the ARP guarantees full coverage not only for the costs of **COVID related testing** for insured **and** uninsured Americans (which was put in place by the first COVID rescue package passed by Congress called the CARES Act), but also for **vaccinations and treatment** for COVID infections and complications. Treatment costs will be covered for a twelve-month period following the end of the **official** COVID public health emergency. This will enable "**COVID-long-haulers**" to continue treatment for vascular, neurological, and other lasting effects of COVID infections.

ARP also provides additional funding for **safety net** programs, including community health centers, rural health providers, Native American health centers, mental health services, and the public health workforce at state and local levels. For persons who have **chosen** COBRA, the ARP will cover **6 months of COBRA** payments at 100%. The ARP also expands Medicaid/TennCare limited post-partum health coverage from **2 months to a full year** following the birth and expands that coverage to include cover **all** health needs, not just coverage related to pregnancy and birth.

In addition, the ARP provides for **increased health insurance premium assistance for Americans who have enrolled in ACA Marketplace coverage** in the following ways:

- Enrollees with incomes between **100-400%** of the federal poverty level will receive additional financial assistance.
- Enrollees with incomes **over 400%** of the federal poverty level will be eligible for assistance paying for premiums that **exceed 8.5%** of their income.
- Anyone **already** enrolled in an ACA plan will have an opportunity after April 1 to reapply for the enhanced assistance.
- Anyone who is **currently** uninsured has a special open enrollment period through **May 15** to apply for new coverage.
- Anyone receiving unemployment assistance during 2021 will be deemed to have an income equivalent to **133% of the federal poverty level** which will make them eligible to enroll in an ACA plan with premium assistance.

ARP's **greatest** potential impact on TennCare, however, is a special **incentive** for states, like Tennessee, that have refused to take advantage of the opportunity under the **Affordable Care Act** to extend their Medicaid programs to adults who earn **below** 138% of the federal poverty level and who don't otherwise qualify for our current TennCare program because they do not have minor children or a serious disabling condition. It is estimated that approximately **300,000 Tennesseans** would be able to gain coverage through such an extension of TennCare. Originally, the ACA provided that the federal government would pick up 90% of the costs of care for the expansion population to the state's 10%. This is in contrast to the traditional federal/state cost sharing arrangement for Medicaid, which for Tennessee was 65% federal and 35% state.

The **incentive** is that the federal government would cover an additional **5%** making the **federal/state match 70/30** for its **current** 1.5 million TennCare recipients for **two years!** This is

estimated by the Kaiser Family Foundation to generate a **net gain of \$900 million over the next two years for the TennCare program**. [<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/new-incentive-for-states-to-adopt-the-aca-medicaid-expansion-implications-for-state-spending/>]

While this offer will be on the table for the next 8 years, it is clearly in the interest of those families and communities struggling to recover from pandemic losses for the governor and legislature to move quickly to accept this incentive for expansion. **Watch for upcoming action alerts on this issue as advocates coordinate a new statewide push for closing the coverage gap in Tennessee.**

As importantly, the ARP includes provisions for additional earned income and child tax credits that many believe will be able to significantly reduce adult and childhood poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit for childless adults is nearly tripled and the Child Tax Credit will increase from \$2000 to \$3000 for children over 6 and to \$3600 for children under 6.



Education Legislation and Issues

By Education Chair Jami Oakley

The General Assembly has continued to make decisions on several education bills since starting the session with the special session on education. The details of those **three** main bills passed during special session are continuing to draw attention and debate by school districts across the state. Memphis is [pushing back](#) particularly hard on the “third grade retention” bill.

SB0415/HB0882 (Yarbro/McKenzie). Known as the “Teacher Discipline Act” this bill gives teachers **ultimate** authority to remove a student from the classroom due to behavioral challenges. The **LWVTN** has concerns that this could lead to disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of students who are already facing hardships or discriminations. However, it appears the bill is continuing to move forward toward passage.

SB1101/HB1460 (Robinson/Hakeem) attempts to formalize standards around Black history. The **League** has sent a letter to the Senate Education committee regarding SB1101.

SB1457/HB808 (Akbari/Powell) Prohibits corporal punishment in public schools or public charter schools. The **League supports** this position, and a letter of support has been prepared and will be sent when the bill has a date on the calendar.

There are several proposed bills surrounding the state’s **Basic Education Plan**. The BEP is severely underfunded in Tennessee. We are consistently ranked **in the bottom five states** in the nation for public education funding. This year, with a budget surplus and the microscopic attention put on public education by the governor, legislators and parents across the nation during the pandemic, the **League** believes that the momentum exists to change this.

The **LWVTN** has drafted a **press release** regarding the **failures** of the BEP, encouraging the legislature to adopt recommendations from last year’s **BEP Review Committee** for the coming year, and, moreover, start to recalculate the entire formula so that funding is sufficient for generations to come.

In addition, plans are in the works for letters to committees surrounding the BEP bills and Action Alerts to be sent to members.

Finally, March 23 is the **50th anniversary** of the 26th amendment, which gave 18-year-olds the right to vote. Check out our social media links that week for a fun slideshow of some history surrounding the bill and interesting facts on youth voting and engagement today.



Environmental News

By Environment Co-Chair Barbara Gay

Resolution RS2020-290 recognizing **International Dark Skies Week** and declaring **April 19-26, 2020** as Dark Skies Week in Nashville and Davidson county was sponsored by Council members Burkley Allen and Freddie McConnell last year.

*“International Dark Sky Week is a worldwide event hosted by the **International Dark Sky Association** to celebrate the night and bring attention to the problems caused by light pollution. Light pollution in the U.S. is estimated to **waste** up to 35% of the energy used for outdoor lighting, resulting in five million tons of greenhouse gas being emitted into the air unnecessarily, costing three billion dollars in wasted energy, and squandering limited energy resources.*

*Light pollution has significant **environmental** effects, including the alteration of the circadian rhythms of many animals and insects who depend on the natural light / dark cycle of day and night, and the disruption of seasonal cycles used by migrating birds, sea turtles, and many other animals. Research suggests that excessive artificial light at night can **negatively** affect human health, increasing risks for obesity, depression, sleep disorders, diabetes, breast cancer and more.*

Light pollution reduces the ability to see the constellations of the night sky, an invaluable source of wonder and curiosity, diminishing the opportunity to draw our children into fascination with Science Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education.”

Each year, **International Dark Sky Week (IDSW)** is held in April during the week of the New Moon, when the sky is darkest and the stars most visible. In this year **2021**, April’s International Dark Sky Week will be the **week of April 12th**. Go to idsw.darksky.org to learn more about this event and the solutions promoted by the **Dark Sky Association** that allow people to appreciate dark, star-filled skies while enjoying the benefits of responsible outdoor lighting.



March Membership Update

By Membership Co-Chair Reba Holmes

With great delight, we announce and welcome our new and returning members that joined the **League of Women Voters Nashville**. It is our privilege to welcome these individuals to the organization: **Lisa Headley, Lindsey Hornbuckle, Mary Murphy, Emily Spatz, and Martha Weller**, and **Anne Dallas Dudley Member: Karen Edwards**.

We are grateful to these members and **all** our members that support the League's activities, programs, and underwriting.

We Continue to Grow

Monthly, our League Administrator, **Tracy Depp** reconciles our membership roster. The official league count for March 2021 is **260**. With your help we will **continue** increasing membership. While our membership grows each month, we need more advocates to defend and protect our system of democracy and its cornerstones.

Membership allows you to share a year's worth of experiences promoting democracy, educating others in the community, participating in political discourse, registering new voters, to name a few. Plus, the annual membership **includes** membership to the national, state, and local LWV organizations. Details regarding the various support levels may be found on our website <http://lwvnashville.org/join/>.

Need more Advocates for April 29, 2021

Redistricting is the way we change the districts that determine who represent us. Redistricting impacts **all** issues, funding for public resources, such as emergency services, education, healthcare services. This process occurs **every 10 years**. To **ensure** transparency and elevate awareness, the **LWVUS** is sponsoring **"People Powered Day of Action"** on April 29, 2021.

Political and racial gerrymandering undermines representative democracy by allowing officials to select their voters rather than voters to elect their officials. As a nonpartisan group, the **League** will work to **counter** these gerrymandering efforts. April 29th is just the beginning to keep commissioners and elected officials accountable.

Invite your friends and family members to join in furthering the mission to **reform** redistricting, **combat** disinformation campaigns, **foster** transparency, and **promote** needed voter reforms throughout the country.

Comments from members as to what most excite you about the League of Women Voters.

I belong to the League because It helps me keep up with current events in Nashville and Tennessee. And I've become friends with so many fabulous, courageous women who I would have never met otherwise. -Ethel Detch



*Please let us know if there is a death in your family so that the membership may be aware of your loss.
Thank you!*



LWVN 2020-2021

Board of Directors

President: **Madeline Garr**

1st Vice Presidents: **Ethel Detch and Carole Kenner**

2nd Vice President: **Open**

Secretary: **Elise Lamar**
Treasurer **Susan Mattson**

Portfolio Chairs

Communications: **Lara Webb** and **Ophelia Doe**
Community Connections: **Sabina Mohyuddin** and **Tamanna Qureshi**
Education: **Jami Oakley**
Environment: **Barbara Gay** and **Russanne Buchi-Fotre**
Fundraising: **Debby Gould** and **Anne Marie Farmer**
Health Care/Public Health: **Constance Caldwell** and **Clare Sullivan**
Membership: **Reba Holmes** and **Karen Hernan**
Metro Government: **Winnie Forrester**
State Advocacy: **Debby Gould**
Voter Services: **Perry Macdonald**
Voter Newsletter Editor: **Madeline Garr** and **Elise Lamar**
Williamson County Representative: **June Bond**
Nominating Committee Chair (2020): **Senator Brenda Gilmore**

Nominating Committee Members: **Betsy Walkup, Constance Caldwell, Hasina Mohyuddin, June Bond, and Brenda Wynn**