

# LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF NORTH PINELLAS COUNTY

## REDUCING POVERTY IN FLORIDA: LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

### CONFERENCE-IN-BRIEF

#### OVERVIEW

The League of Women Voters (LWV) Education Fund and the LWV Florida Poverty Task Force convened a day-long summit on January 25, 2019 to reduce poverty in Florida, facilitated by St. Petersburg College Collaborative Labs. Seventy-five community, nonprofit, academic and religious leaders participated in this non-partisan gathering.

The shared vision was to improve the lives of our low-income residents and to promote a path to greater self-sufficiency.

The goals of the event were to prioritize state legislative focus areas, determine the best advocacy strategies, and summarize action plans to inform ourselves and our state legislators. Expert presenters helped inform participants on poverty issues—national and statewide.

The issues surrounding poverty are complex, but concrete steps described here can be part of a legislative agenda.

#### COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The participants were randomly assigned to ten groups for the first round of discussion, using their expertise to summarize, then rank legislative priorities. The groups were asked to “provide the top three state statutes/issues impacting the lives of our low-income residents.”

Continued...



**DR. TIM SMEEDING**, Keynote  
Lee Rainwater Distinguished  
Professor of Public Affairs and  
Economics, University of  
Wisconsin

#### PANELISTS WHO FRAMED OUR DISCUSSION



**DR. LADONNA  
BUTLER**, CEO, The  
Well for Life – a  
Healing Space

**DR. SUSAN  
GREENBAUM**,  
Professor Emerita of  
Anthropology, USF



**MS. SUSAN MEYERS**,  
Chief Executive Officer  
of Pinellas Homeless  
Leadership Board



**REVEREND DR. RUSSELL  
MEYER**, Executive  
Director of the Florida  
Council of Churches

**MS. KAREN WOODALL**,  
Executive Director of  
the Florida Center for  
Fiscal and Economic  
Policy



#### LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FROM COLLABORATIVE PROCESS\*

1. Increase affordable housing with full Sadowski Act funding and end housing discrimination
2. Expand social welfare benefits such as TANF, SNAP, WIC, & Medicaid to serve more low-income Floridians
3. Increase subsidized childcare and access to quality early learning for all children
4. Reform biased and unfair sentencing codes and practices that produce felony convictions with lifelong collateral consequences, see: <http://tinyurl.com/FLpublicdefender>
5. Address barriers and increase access to public transportation
6. Reform Ch. 192-220, Florida's tax code to close corporate tax loopholes, achieve greater tax fairness, and reinvest in Florida's families; reform state campaign finance laws in Ch. 106

\*Top three legislative priorities in red boxes

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy. Join the League of Women Voters of Florida <https://lwvfl.org> or League of Women Voters North Pinellas County <http://lwvnorthpinellas.org/join.html>

Contact Beth Hovind, 727.940.4930, [lwvpoverty@gmail.com](mailto:lwvpoverty@gmail.com), with questions about the conference or follow-up.

## OVERVIEW

### COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

Each group selected a scribe to record results entered into an automated real-time system visible to all participants. The entire group of 75 people subsequently ranked the items to prioritize the six most pressing issues.

### ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

Groups were again randomly arranged to discuss and rank advocacy strategies – *the best way to work with lawmakers, get their attention, and focus on these critical issues to improve the lives and self-sufficiency of our low-income residents.* The top four advocacy strategies:

- Faces and personal stories – show the problems encountered by real people
- Specific analysis for each legislator’s District (see United Way ALICE report-- <http://www.uwof.org/alice> for similar example)
- Many organizations coalesce around legislative priorities; speak to the Legislature "with one voice"
- Persistent advocacy

### ACTION PLANS

Participants were invited to develop action plans in groups to refine any of the four advocacy strategies that resonated with them and their representative organizations.

Developing the action plans was most challenging because individual and organizational names were assigned to the selected strategies. This is where the rubber meets the road. The LWV Florida Poverty Task Force expects to use these ideas to create alliances with summit participants and other interested organizations to push forward on state legislative solutions benefitting low-income Floridians. For all action plans and supplemental materials, please see <http://tinyurl.com/FLpovertyconference>.

- Sponsors and Participating Organizations
- Dr. Smeeding’s keynote presentation
- List of Top Legislative Focus Areas
- List of Top Advocacy Strategies
- Bibliography / Reading List
- Kids Count FL Poverty Statistics

## NEXT STEPS

**Our LWV chapter will distribute this report to conference participants in February 2019. We will reach out to them to learn more about their plans for the 2019 state legislative session. We wish to know their advocacy objectives and activities, especially their efforts to communicate with lawmakers and allied groups on their issues during the next three months, and how we might coordinate efforts on shared goals. A key outcome of the summit is to make our voices heard so that our state legislators agree with us that reducing poverty in Florida reaps enormous and measurable financial and personal benefits to all involved.**

**We took a *big* first step with the legislative solutions conference to define a shared purpose. Now we wish to move forward in concert with other advocates. As James Baldwin said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”**

## MAJOR SPONSORS



### League of Women Voters of North Pinellas County Education Fund

LWV of the St. Petersburg Area,  
Publix Supermarkets Charities,  
St. John’s Episcopal Church,  
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

CASA \* The Children’s Campaign \* Citizens Alliance for Progress, Inc.\* Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce \* Dunedin Cares, Inc. \* Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County\* Empath Health \* Empowering Pinellas Youth Collaborative \* Faith in Action for Strength Together \* Feeding Tampa Bay \* Florida Center for Fiscal & Economic Policy \* Florida Council of Churches \* Florida Department of Children and Families \* Florida Housing Coalition \* Florida NASW \* Fresh Company USA \* Healthy St. Pete Foundation \* Hispanic Services Council \* Junior League of Clearwater-Dunedin \* Juvenile Welfare Board \* Kids Count, Florida \* LWV Florida \* LWV Hillsborough County \* LWV Palm Beach \* LWV of St. Petersburg \* Mattie Williams Neighborhood Family Center \* NAACP Upper Pinellas \* Metropolitan Ministries \* Pinellas Emergency Mental Health Services \* Pinellas Community Foundation \* Pinellas County Urban League \* Pinellas Homeless Leadership Board \* Pinellas Public Defender \* Preserve Vision Florida \* Progress Florida \* Salvation Army \* SEIU Florida Public Services Union \* Southern Poverty Law Center \* Stetson University College of Law \* St. John’s Episcopal Church \* St. Petersburg College \* Tampa Bay Health Collaborative \* Tampa Bay Times \* United Way Suncoast \* University of South Florida \* Voices for Florida \* The Well of Life \* Whole Child Program \*