

✓ THE VOTER

The official newsletter of



<https://my.lwv.org/florida/north-pinellas-county> | lwvnpc.info@gmail.com
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November/December 2021

State League Legislative Priorities For 2022

Each year, our membership is polled by the state organization to see which issues are most important to them at the current point in time. During the month of September, our North Pinellas League was given the opportunity to submit priorities. After tabulating each local League's submissions, the top six areas become priorities for the annual state legislative session. Those issues chosen for legislative focus and lobbying efforts for the 2022 Legislative Session are:

- VOTING & ELECTION LAWS
- REDISTRICTING
- REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & JUSTICE
- EDUCATION
- ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES
- HEALTH CARE

For more information on each issue, please refer to the state website at <https://lwvfl.org/legislative-session>.



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Cecile Scoon, State League President Visits North Pinellas County

On September 24-26th, the LWVNPC had the pleasure of hosting Cecile Scoon, our State League President at a Community Partners dinner. In her professional life, Ms. Scoon is a civil rights attorney who works to protect the rights of those wronged at work due to their race, religion, age disability, place of birth, or unwanted sexual advances. As a League member and president, she has extensive experience testifying before the state Legislature and has led efforts to restore voting rights to returning citizens. Ms. Scoon has made a strong effort to visit all leagues in the state, and during our events it was clear she brings tremendous expertise and passion to her position.



Figure 1 Cecile Scoon & President Bill Jonson

On September 29, 2021, the LWVNPC hosted a Community Partners dinner at the Martin Luther King Center in Clearwater, with Ms. Scoon as the keynote speaker. The goal of the evening was to meet leaders of affiliate organizations and lay the groundwork to work together toward common goals. In attendance were local representatives from the ACLU, LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) Clearwater, NAACP, Urban League, Clearwater Neighborhood Coalition, Lake Belleview Community Group, Clearwater Neighborhood Housing Agenda, Youth 'n Greenwood, Clearwater MLK Center, Advantage Training, St. Matthew Missionary Baptist Church, and SEPIA. After a delicious dinner, Ms. Scoon spoke of the repercussions of Voting Restrictions in SB 90 and the need to ensure fair redistricting.

On September 26, the LWVNPC hosted “An Afternoon in the Park with Cecile Scoon.” We gathered at Phillippe Park for a brown bag luncheon with snacks. Each League member contributed why they had chosen to join LWVNPC. Ms. Scoon again spoke of the need to protect voting rights and ensure fair redistricting. For more discussion on Redistricting, see below.

What is Redistricting and Why it Matters

By: Jacqueline Farrell, Gayla Larsen, Karen Owen and Barbara Letvin

Redistricting...“While the topic may not be the sexiest or most thrilling being debated by state leaders, what happens over the next few months in Tallahassee will have a profound impact on the lives of every Floridian, from Key West to Fort Myers to Pensacola and every community in between.” These words were written by Robyn Cook, Guest Columnist to the News-Press on November 3, 2021.

Every ten years, following the US Census, the boundaries of electoral districts in each state are redrawn to reflect population changes in the state over the last ten years. For example, in the last ten years Florida’s population has grown by 2.9 million, meaning that we are now entitled to one more representative in the US House of Representatives, increasing our number from 27 to 28. In Florida, the Florida State Legislature redraws boundaries for Congressional districts, as well as districts for Representatives and Senators to the State Legislature. When these districts are drawn

fairly, they create districts that are relatively equal in population and do not promote the interests of one political party over another. If redistricting is done improperly, “gerrymandering” happens. Gerrymandering means districts are drawn to favor one political party, and groups of voters may be “packed” in one district to weaken their voting power in other districts, or “cracked” where lines are drawn to break up groups of voters and realign them to other districts where they do not have a majority. In 2010 two amendments called *The Fair Districts Amendments* were passed by the people of Florida which prohibited legislators from drawing lines which favored one political party or the incumbent party. Compliance did not come easily. In 2012 the Florida League of Women Voters successfully sued the State who were not complying with fair district procedures. At this time, the LWVFL has selected redistricting as one of its legislative priorities and is monitoring the State Legislature closely as they conduct the redistricting process. LWVFL redistricting position can be found at <https://www.lwv.org/redistricting/lwvus-position-redistricting>.

Recently two of our North Pinellas League members participated in redistricting efforts. Karen Owen, who has a PhD in Geographic Information Systems was appointed to the Pinellas County Redistricting Board. The purpose of the Board was to review the census data and present proposals to the County Commission to change Pinellas County Commissioner/School Board district boundaries or keep them the same based on the latest population data. Her observations on the experience:

1. The process is quite complex and difficult for the average citizen to understand.
2. Counties don't ensure transparency, so the public usually doesn't know exactly which boundaries (read: streets/homes/neighborhoods) are impacted by newly proposed districts.
3. At-large districts tend to reinforce the strength of those already in office. Pinellas has four single-member districts and three at-large districts - a mix.
4. Districts are often re-drawn or proposed to be re-drawn to include or exclude a seated commissioner or school board member.
5. They also commonly get redrawn to include when a seated commissioner moves their home.

A complete article describing Karen's experience can be found at: My Experience with Redistricting https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rFCd1kIVITj8Zg_POgY20kLeLrOawoju/view

League member Barbara Letvin recently attended the Pasco LWV meeting which featured a discussion on redistricting in Pasco County. The speaker was Joanna Cheshire of Pasco County government. In Pasco County there is no advisory board or consultants; staff prepare options and present them to County Commissioners. One option was presented for submission, which changed boundaries so that a present County Commissioner's new home was in the newly drawn district, and one school board member was eliminated.

Redistricting is important. Fair redistricting ensures that state and local representatives must listen to the needs of the voters in their district regardless of party affiliation. It's the difference between voters choosing their representatives or representatives choosing their voters!

News Release:

From Dustin Chase, Deputy Supervisor of Elections, Pinellas County 2 New Early Voting Sites to Open for 2022 Gubernatorial General Election

Pinellas County Supervisor of Elections Julie Marcus is announcing the locations for two new early voting sites beginning with the 2022 Gubernatorial General Election. Going into 2022, 91% of all in Pinellas County will be within 5 miles of an early voting site, and all voters will be within 3 miles of a mail ballot drop-off location.

“Expanding access to the ballot box in a deliberate and thoughtful way is a priority of my administration,” Supervisor Julie Marcus said. “While there’s a point of diminishing returns on the number of early voting sites, the data supports adding two more sites to meet the needs of those voters choosing to vote early.”

NEW Early Voting Sites	
Countryside Recreation Center 2640 Sabal Springs Dr. Clearwater, FL 33761	J.W. Cate Recreation Center 5801 22nd Ave. N. St. Petersburg, FL 33710
Early Voting Sites	
Election Service Center 13001 Starkey Rd. (Starkey Lakes Corp. Ctr.) Largo, FL 33773	Pinellas County Courthouse 315 Court St., Rm. 117 Clearwater, FL 33756
County Building 501 First Ave. N. St. Petersburg, FL 33701	The Centre of Palm Harbor 1500 16 th St. Palm Harbor, FL 34683
Gulfport Neighborhood Center 1617 49 th St. S. Gulfport, FL 33707	

Countryside Recreation Center and J.W. Cate Recreation Center are strategic choices. Each early voting site must meet the following criteria:

- Early voting requirements of Florida Law [F.S. 101.657]
- Must be equally accessible to all voters
- Near mass transit
- Must have proper entrances and exits
- Must have ample space to accommodate many voters

In Pinellas County, the total number of early voting sites will increase from five to seven. Each site will also have mail ballot drop boxes available for voters who vote by mail. As permitted by law, the early voting sites will be open from Monday, October 24 through Sunday, November 6, 2022, from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm – the maximum amount of time allowed under Florida Law.

Voters may choose to vote by mail, at an early voting location, or at their polling place on Election Day. The deadline to request that a mail ballot be mailed is Saturday, October 29, 2022 at 5:00 pm.

Voters who requested a mail ballot during the 2020 election cycle do not need to request another ballot in order to receive one for the 2022 General Election cycle.

For more information or to request a mail ballot, visit VotePinellas.gov or call 727-464-VOTE (8683).

Tampa Bay March for Voting Rights

This article appears now since the Voter was not published in September.

On Saturday August 28th, thousands of people marched across the country to commemorate the 58th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington where the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his 'I Have a Dream' speech to promote equality, dignity, employment opportunity, and voting rights as human and civil rights. Two years after the original march, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law. The Tampa Bay March was held 58 years later at 5:30 at St. Petersburg City Hall, to demonstrate for equity, inclusion, and protest voter suppression laws that are being passed in numerous states across the country, including Florida. 200 citizens were in attendance. Citizens are rising to the call to fight back as democracy is in jeopardy.



The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, named after the civil rights leader and fully supported by the League of Women Voters, passed the House, but there is concern regarding the filibuster blocking the legislation in the Senate. The John Lewis Voting Rights Act would restore protections to the Voting Act of 1965 which were weakened by subsequent Supreme Court rulings. March attendees also rallied to pass the 'For the People Act' which would attack voter suppression, outlaw gerrymandering, and overhaul campaign finance laws.

An amazing group of guest speakers including Caitlin Constantine, Voter Services Co-Chair, LWV St. Pete Area, presented. She discussed the attack on voting rights and how 400 bills have been introduced with 30 enacted in 18 states, including Florida, to suppress the vote even though the last election cycle was successful and very well run. The Florida Legislature passed these laws even though 67 supervisors of election don't support the legislation.

Yet there is good news. There were 900 bills filed to *expand* voting access in 49 states, and 25 states turned 54 of those bills into law. North Carolina restored voting rights for 55,000 returning citizens, and 95% of eligible citizens are registered to vote in Georgia. Dominique De Laet, a grassroots activist, discussed the need for people to canvas the streets and use their power to demand change and action against destructive laws. Eliseo Santana, past Vice President and current member of LWNPC, who is now President of LULAC Pinellas and Puerto Rico Connect, spoke about the military oath he took 'to protect and uphold liberty and justice for all,' and the need to vote out those who try to take away the people's right to vote. Because our democracy is at stake, the people need to be represented. He also stated it isn't enough to register people to vote; they also need to be educated. Ken Welch, St. Petersburg Mayoral Candidate, and former Pinellas Commissioner stated he was there to support "good trouble." He quoted 'For we hold these truths to be self-evident that all people are created equal' and that government requires the consent of

the governed to exert power. Without the right to vote we lose the foundation of our democracy. State Representative Michele Rayner, candidate for Florida's 13th Congressional District said we have a pivotal choice between unobstructed access to the ballot or full-scale voter suppression and that we fulfill the dream or let democracy die in the darkness. "The powers that be are betting on us getting tired, but we have the courage to do what needs to be done and must organize as the dream and our lives are on the line."

Note: As of this writing, the John Lewis Voter Advancement Act and the For the People Act have passed in the House but not in the Senate.

Welcome New Members!

By Kathy Smith, Membership Chair

LWVNPC enjoyed a brisk, sunny afternoon at Wall Springs Park on November 7, 2021. Twenty-eight of our members and prospective members met to recap our latest advocacy efforts for democracy and to plan future actions. We also presented our Director and Digital Communications Guru, Karen Owen with a plaque expressing our appreciation for all she's done for our LWVNPC in the past two years.



Redistricting, Education, Health, Poverty, Juvenile Justice, Voting Rights, and Transit were some of the topics covered, and everyone took opportunities to ask questions and learn from each other. This was the first time we've met in person in 18 months, so we had a lot to catch up on!

Thanks to everyone who braved the cool weather, and special thanks to my helpers: Vivian Posey for her Education Committee update, and bringing cookies for all; Tanya Landry and Laurie Meggesin for set up, and speaking on their experience as new LWVNPC directors and members; Mary Harper and Jacqui Farrell for assisting with coordination of this event; our President, Bill Jonson for presiding over our Orientation; Barbara Letvin for representing 3 Committees: Health, Poverty, and Juvenile Justice; and all of our directors and members who bring a wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm, and expertise to share with others.

I would love to hear ideas for our next New Member Orientation, and I hope to see everyone at our Holiday Party on December 5th. On behalf of the LWVNPC, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to new members for 2021;

Jill Armstrong
Lise & Howard Buck
Marilyn & James Collins
Beth Davis
Kelly Dufresne
Dorothy Feeney
Mary & Nick Fiorentino
Julie Funk

Janel Griffieth
Robyn Harker
Muriel Harney
Debra Marks
Elizabeth Mason
Linda Metzkwow
Donna Minasian-Friedman
Allison Miller

Jan Owen
Jeanne & Richard Richardson
Lynn Romano
Hailey Scheinman
Tamara Simpson
Christine Taylor
Lina Teixeira
Bonnie Whitehurst

Interview with LWNPC Life Member Fay Law

By Barbara Letvin



Recently LWNPC member Barbara Letvin sat down with Fay Law, A Life Member of our North Pinellas League.

“We were all housewives then,” said Fay Law, about her League of Women Voters experience in the early 1960’s. She was interested in governance, but “it was difficult to find others interested in discussing it,” she said; so, she joined the League of Rochester Metropolitan Area in New York where she lived with her husband, John. She became League president. As a member of the same League, Marti Folwell recalls that Fay was responsible for a very thorough published report on Government in Monroe County.

A graduate of Syracuse University, Fay taught high school English and later added Social Studies to her schedule in the Rochester City School District. Fay used the League’s brochures on issues in her social studies classes. “They were well researched and kept the politics out.”

Fay brought her League experience to the North Pinellas League once she and John retired to Palm Harbor. Our members elected her president from 1992-94 . The next year she was elected president of the state League (LWVFL) 1995-1999. She served again as president of our North Pinellas League 2007-2008.

“People didn’t pay much attention to reapportionment or redistricting. It didn’t get enough attention then or now,” she said.

Her advice to the League: “Create more publicity for what you are working on. Publish it yourselves. Don’t wait for somebody else to do it.” She added the *Times* (newspaper) was supportive of the League’s work.

Fay is one of eight Life Members of our North Pinellas League, all women who have been members more than 50 years. At age 91 Fay lives in assisted living in Accordia Woods, Palm Harbor. The other Life Members are Charlotte Abington, Lola Brett, Marti Folwell, Virginia Howie, Kathleen Woods-Masalski, Sally Parks, and Elayne Russell.

Transportation Guide is Complete

Check out our new Transit Guide for Pinellas County - free and low-cost transportation available throughout the county to the elderly, disabled, and low-income residents. You asked for it – your League compiled it!

Thanks to [#PSTA](#) and [#agingcarefl](#) for their help.

We're looking for nonprofits or agency partners willing to sponsor the printing of color copies to your clients. A Spanish version is also available. Please contact Kathy Smith at krmh1@yahoo.com for additional questions. Download the guide here:

English Version: https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/transportation_guide_digital_9-27-21.pdf

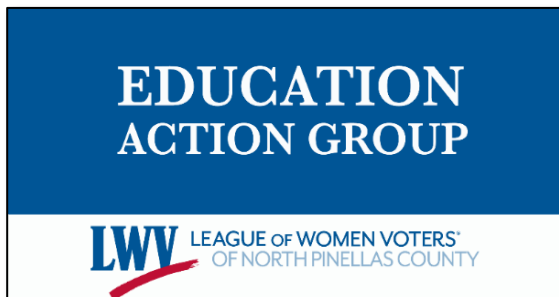
Spanish Version: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19-VJDtotZhUJ1yEalXysKvfDCxf6XcON/view>



Board & Committee Reports



So that everyone will be “in the loop” of what is happening with your board of directors, we are publishing the most recently approved minutes from the Board meeting. Future approved meeting minutes will be published in upcoming issues of *the Voter*. The LWVNPC Board meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month@ 4:30 pm. All members are welcome. Minutes for the October meeting: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1E1YmIFx-d5kaYvRPCq8XJ35ezfv0os0jPW7hHoiYPO8/>



Laurie Meggesin and Vivian Posey conducted a presentation on September 27th to 20 high school students on the importance of voting and registering to vote. The second presentation was Monday, October 18th.

A brochure, “Registering and Voting as a College Student,” was developed to inform students who will be out of state during the next election cycle and distributed to high school students at the

October 18th countywide College and Career Fair at Countryside HS.

A *Student Volunteer Protocols and Practices* document, composed by Laurie Meggesin, lists the steps planned by the newly created Volunteer Operations Committee which is charged with developing and implementing opportunities for students to volunteer with LWVNPC.

On Monday, October 25th, the guest speaker was Betsy Wells, who discussed the student-led voter registration events at St. Petersburg High School. The Education Committee meets the fourth Monday of each month at 4:30. Please contact Vivian Posey: vivposey@gmail.com for more information.

POVERTY, HEALTHCARE & JUVENILE JUSTICE



This year brought several changes in federal and state poverty programs, many helping low-income families. Most important is the Child Tax Credit which provides every family with a child under 18 a grant of \$250-300 per month, per child. This gives the credit that middle and upper-income taxpayers receive to include lower income families, but it is scheduled to end December 31st. Please contact your legislator to continue this

valuable program that provides a special social safety net for children.

Our committee is looking at health initiatives at the state level, particularly our state League's attempt to expand the Medicaid program, which has been an on-going effort. The federal government has offered to cover up to 90% of the costs for expansion to serve 800,000 Floridians, but to date, the State has refused to consider this. Another threat at the state level is the potential to deny established abortion rights. These are all priorities with LWVFL. Access to adequate, timely, and affordable mental health services is a crisis, more so after the pandemic.

The State LWV is reviewing Juvenile Justice legislation, in conjunction with other advocates, and supports recommendations that would make it easier for a juvenile who has been in contact with law enforcement and has completed a program to have their record expunged. Another bill will prohibit placing juveniles in solitary confinement. We will be following these.

For more information on these and other issues, please join our Poverty/Health/Juvenile Justice Committee zoom meeting on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm via Zoom. Contact Beth Hovind at bethse@gmail.com to register.

VOTER SERVICE



Voter Service activists started work last summer to achieve VS goal #5--increase voter turnout in 2022 elections in low voting precincts. We are: (1) gathering information on demographics and voting patterns in precincts with lower voting turnout; (2) attending community meetings in selected areas to learn from leaders and residents about their issues and build relationships; and (3) creating a community event calendar that will guide us in showing up to encourage voters' access to the polls.

The first voter registration deadline is February 14, 2022 for folks to vote in municipal elections. Our North County municipal focus includes the four Belleair communities, Clearwater, Oldsmar, and Tarpon Springs. Our League has already been invited to moderate candidate forums in Tarpon Springs, Belleair Beach, and Dunedin, among others.

Also underway is an effort to expand early voting sites in Pinellas County—VS goal #1 for 2021-2022. While Supervisor of Elections (SoE) Julie Marcus has agreed to add two new sites in 2022 (see Dustin Chase's press release in this newsletter), members from the SPA League and ours believe more Early Voting sites are warranted. We are gathering information to justify opening at least three more sites in high poverty, low-voting areas in Pinellas. These include Tarpon Springs,

High Point, South St. Pete, and Greenwood section of Clearwater. Our deadline to submit our recommendations with justification to the Supervisor of Elections is mid-December.

Voter Service needs more elbow grease, i.e., volunteers, including co-chairs for the Voting Service Committee to coordinate our efforts. Many hands make light work as they say. There is also the risk of burnout for a small group of members who keep doing the impossible – moving our League forward – on six VS goal areas. These include Miriam Benitez-Nixon, Jacqueline Farrell, Marti Folwell, Mary Harper, Beth Hovind, Bill Jonson, Tanya Landry, Gayla Larson, Barbara Letvin, Joe Nixon, Karen Owen, Doris Reeves-Lipscomb, Ruthann Richwine, Eliseo Santana, Kathy Smith, and Ellen Siegman. The most demanding work begins early in 2022.

Contact Doris Reeves-Lipscomb (doris.reeves.lipscomb@gmail.com), lead for voter registration, or Bill Jonson (bill.jonson@usa.net), or if you want our League to achieve local impact in *Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy*. At present, Voter Service task force meetings are held up to two times a month via Zoom to advance the work.

Strategic Planning

At the 2021 annual meeting, members suggested that we needed to build a strategic plan to focus the NPC League's future efforts. Board directors Jacqueline Farrell, Tanya Landry, Gayla Larson, Laurie Meggesin, and Doris Reeves-Lipscomb joined by Barbara Letvin, who coordinated strategic planning for the League in 2018, went to work. We formed a strategic planning survey that the Board approved to gather the views of members. The survey link will be emailed to members around December 6. Expect phone calls, too, to encourage 100%-member participation. Your views matter and will determine where leaders decide to take the League in 2022 and beyond.

Time for Holiday Gatherings and Parties – No matter what your holiday – Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa – may it be filled with light and laughter, and may you be surrounded by those you love, and those who love you!



You're Invited

LWVNPC Holiday Party

Sunday, December 5, 2021

3 - 5 PM



Club House @ Mediterranean Manors

Bring a Dessert and/or an Appetizer to Share

BYOB. Coffee, Tea, Water available

2700 Bayshore Blvd. Dunedin, FL

There'll be a DJ, Dancing, Holiday Music,
and Lots of Good Conversation.



Please bring your guests and have a good time.

Masks are always encouraged.

Directions

- Enter from Bayshore Blvd (also known as Alt 19)
- Turn either right or left and travel to rear of complex (halfway around circle road) to clubhouse
- Please park in any space labeled "Visitors"
- If none available, park and find Kathy Smith in the clubhouse
- Please call Kathy if you have any questions or concerns - (850) 830-3369



Look for this sign.



Additional Outside Parking beyond the Cove Club