



THE VOTER

LWV

The official newsletter of
the League of Women Voters
of North Pinellas County

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May-June 2023

League of Women Voters of Florida Sues State for Restricting & Penalizing Voter Engagement Efforts

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., May 24, 2023 – Today, the League of Women Voters of Florida, represented by Campaign Legal Center (CLC), sued Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody and Secretary of State Cord Byrd to block provisions of Florida’s recently enacted omnibus election law that would restrict and penalize basic nonpartisan civic engagement efforts. The law, Senate Bill 7050, directly targets and drastically restricts the ability of nonpartisan civic engagement organizations, like the League of Women Voters of Florida, to engage with voters, violating their right to freedom of speech and association.

“Folks helping their neighbors access and exercise the fundamental freedom to vote is one of the pillars of our democracy,” said Paul Smith, senior vice president of Campaign Legal Center. Instead of celebrating civic engagement groups for their work to encourage participation in our democracy, Florida legislators restricted and penalized basic voter outreach efforts. This action will directly harm members of historically marginalized communities – including voters of color, low-income voters, voters with disabilities, and young voters – who rely on these nonpartisan efforts to help make their voices heard.”

According to an independent analysis, Floridians of color are [five times more likely](#) to register to vote through nonpartisan third-party civic engagement organizations than white Floridians.

“Senate Bill 7050 is yet another assault on democracy and attempt to muzzle Floridians,” said Cecile M. Scoon, Esq., president of the League of Women Voters of Florida. “Florida seems intent on making the act of voting nerve-racking. We are forced to turn to the courts to ensure nonpartisan community-based voter registration organizations, like the League, can continue their important work of registering voters and ensure voters have equal and meaningful access to the ballot box.”

“Florida continues to be a leader in the attack on voters and voter-support organizations. Florida voters continue to be the punching bag for shameless anti-voter politicians,” said Celina Stewart, chief counsel and senior director of advocacy and litigation for the League of Women Voters of the US. “Communities across the nation rely on nonpartisan organizations like the League of Women Voters to navigate the voting process. That is why the League will continue the fight to expand voter access, to support the millions of voters we serve each election cycle.”

The lawsuit challenges provisions of Senate Bill 7050, signed into law by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis today, that would:

- Fine nonpartisan civic engagement groups \$50,000 for every volunteer with certain felony convictions or who is not a U.S. citizen who registers voters on behalf of the organization, preventing non-U.S. citizens and people with certain felony convictions from even engaging with voters in their community.
- Shorten the timeframe for civic engagement groups to verify information and deliver completed voter registration applications to election officials.
- Force non-partisan civic engagement organizations to re-register with the state before registering any voters in each and every general election cycle.
- Significantly raise the potential maximum fines for nonpartisan civic engagement groups engaged in First Amendment-protected voter registration activity.
- Require groups to provide a receipt to those who fill out voter registration forms but restricting those same groups from keeping records of those receipts.
- Prohibit civic organizations from retaining voters' personal information, even with the voter's consent, which limits their ability to continue associating with voters whom they help to register and providing them with assistance and information about how and when to participate in upcoming elections.



From Our President: Marti's Musings



Possibly the most important issue discussed at the 39th Biennial State Convention of the League of Women Voters of Florida June 1 - 4 in Orlando was the organization's support for electing the President and Vice-President by popular vote. We support the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPV) which would accomplish this and is well on its way to being approved by enough states to become reality.

We have had several recent instances of the persons winning national elections having only won the electoral college vote but losing the popular vote. The buttons distributed at Convention read "EVERY Vote Equal".

To understand the League, its history and the many public good issues it has studied and advocated for, I recommend referring to the publication which comes out after each state convention: "STUDY & ACTION." The

21-23 version is available both on-line and in print. The 23-25 edition should be available soon from the LWVFL. (www.lwvfl.org) The LWVUS publication is "IMPACT ON ISSUES."

Martha (Marti) Folwell, President, LWVNPC

To learn more about the National Popular Vote, go to: <https://lwvfl.org/issues/national-popular-vote/>

For LWVFL Study and Action 2021-2023, go to:

<https://lwvfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Study-and-Action-2021-2023.docx.pdf>

For LWVUS Impact on Issues, go to:

https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/LWV_ImpactOnIssues2022-2024.pdf

From the media, you may like . . .

- ✓ Roy Peter Clark of the Tampa Bay Times writes a thoughtful human-interest piece about a chance encounter with a young man that might had a different outcome if a gun had been involved. Read it at: <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/2023/05/25/how-random-act-kindness-got-me-thinking-about-americas-gun-violence-column/>
- ✓ On May 19th, Florida This Week featured a segment on Democrats and Republicans who meet monthly to seek common ground on the issues, all the while using respectful civil discourse and the services of a professional mediator. Watch it starting at 16:30: <https://www.pbs.org/video/may-19-2023-mse1gj/>

Clearwater Reducing Pollution and Energy Bills

Submitted by Bryan Beckman



The city of Clearwater continues to make important progress against key goals in their city environmental plan - Greenprint 2.0 - that will help reduce pollution and save money.

Some recent examples:

- One year ago, the city began a partnership with a company, Cenergistic, to focus on energy efficiencies in city buildings and operations. After one year, energy savings have totaled over \$450,000, with corresponding reduction in pollution / emissions equivalent to 5.4 million miles driven by an average car in one year.
- In the new Clearwater Coachman Park, which will open at the end of June, five EV (Electric Vehicle) chargers will be available to the public. The first solar arrays to be installed on city buildings will be generating electricity for park operations.
- The city recently approved solar and EV charging capabilities for 24 low/moderate-income townhomes to be built in Clearwater. This will reduce monthly energy costs for each new homeowner, and correspondingly, reduce harmful pollution and emissions.

Thank you, Clearwater, for taking these actions to improve our community!



Update: LWVNPC continues to collect petitions in support of getting the Right to Clean Water (RTCW) initiative on the 2024 ballot. Despite having a comprehensive body of state environmental laws and regulations, the condition of Florida waters continues to decline. If the measure to amend the state constitution passes, *“it creates a fundamental right to clean and healthy waters, clarifies prohibited actions and inactions that harm (or threaten to harm) waters, and defines important terms. It also allows Floridians to enforce this right through the ability to sue state executive agencies that violate this*

right.” This grassroots movement needs approximately 900,000 petition signatures by November 2023 to get on the 2024 ballot. At this point, there are between 58,000 and 60,000 signed petitions, so there is much work to be done. RTCW is now partnering with other organizations to obtain signatures in tandem with the Florida Protecting Freedom initiative. *To sign the petition or for more information go to <https://www.floridarighttocleanwater.org/>

Wanted: LWV Members To Change the Life of a Child

Requirements Include:

- ✓ 30 minutes of your time
- ✓ A desire to see students succeed
- ✓ A good listening “ear”
- ✓ An interest in providing a pathway to college for a deserving student



The Take Stock in Children (TSIC) Scholarship is a statewide program supported by the Florida Department of Education that awards college scholarships to qualified, often first in the family to attend college, Pinellas County students. The program is funded through the Pinellas Education Foundation. One of the requirements of TSIC students is to meet regularly with a volunteer adult “mentor.”

Even though school is out for the summer, it’s not too early to make a plan to become a volunteer “mentor” in the fall and to help a deserving middle or high school student achieve their goal of earning a college scholarship. Mentoring can be done virtually or in-person at the student’s school. Anyone can mentor, but League of Women Voters members make especially great mentors!

For questions about becoming a mentor, contact Stacie Allen or Patti Muscaro (727-488-4816) or go to www.pinellaseducation.org/tsic

More LWNPC Members in Action



Let Florida Read

Submitted by – Niki Amarantides

The League of Women Voters of North Pinellas County was proud to be one of the cosponsors for the recent Let Florida Read Teach-In event, held at Temple B’Nai Israel in Clearwater on May 31. We joined PEN America, the Florida Freedom to Read Project, FAME (FL Association for Media in Education), and Families for Strong Public Schools for an evening of conversation with K-12 media specialists, parents, and students who successfully stopped censorship in Pinellas County Public Schools, and representatives from PEN America and Florida Freedom to Read Project.

PEN America, founded in 1922, “works to ensure that people everywhere have the freedom to create literature, to convey information and ideas, to express their views, and to access the views, ideas, and literatures of others.” In chatting with Tasslyn Magnusen, a senior researcher for PEN, she quickly pointed to [Florida Freedom to Read Project](#) as the best organization in the country doing research and advocacy on book bans. In addition to talking with organizational representatives, attendees could browse banned books, sign petitions, and find ways to get involved.

Ryan Estrada, co-author of *The Banned Book Club*,” was the featured speaker who pointed out that book bans are about controlling knowledge. Dictators often control the flow of information under the guise of “protecting the children.” But history has shown us that dictators who target books, eventually target people. Estrada also invited the audience to name the books that changed their lives, to address the fear that leads to self-censoring, and to practice telling our own stories fearlessly.





ALERT: Florida Ranks 31st in Child Well-Being; Inaccessible, Unaffordable Child Care Pushes Parents to the Breaking Point **From the Florida Policy Institute**

Florida ranks 31st in child well-being, according to the 2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E.

Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring. However, the country's lack of affordable and accessible childcare short-changes children and causes parents in Florida to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs, while those who can find care are paying dearly for it. These childcare challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars.

Among the four domains that make up the index, the state ranks 37th in economic well-being, 33rd in health, 32nd in family and community, and 5th in education.

During a virtual press conference, representatives from Florida Policy Institute, MomsRising/MamásConPode, and the Florida Association for the Education of the Young, along with a mother who lives in Sarasota, drew awareness to the child care crisis in the Sunshine State.

Read the report at <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2023-kids-count-data-book>

Membership Coffee Hour, May 17, 2023

Twenty LWVNPC members and prospective members gathered at Starbucks in Safety Harbor for coffee, socializing, and learning about LWVNPC. Membership Co Chair Tanya Landry led the meeting. Lots of coffee paired with lots of energy! Look for more weekend coffee/ happy hours in the next few months!



Welcome New Members

Jarine Dotson
Karen Glass
Michael Hays
Vicki Love



COMMITTEE UPDATES

Board Meeting - members welcome!



The LWWNP Board meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 4:00pm. Minutes for the May 2023 meeting can be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_x8s8yJka67-bNFB1tVJNpDrkj7nJanl/view?usp=sharing

Please join us for any upcoming Board meeting to learn how you can participate more fully. Contact Gayla Larson (nbslarson@gmail.com) to obtain the link to join these informative and busy meetings.

Economic Equity Committee



Abortion Access Ballot Initiative

Submitted by Mina Harkins, Committee Chair

- The Florida League of Women Voters has joined with Floridians for Reproductive Freedom, the ACLU, Planned Parenthood, and many other organizations to support the campaign to put abortion access on the ballot in 2024. Our Board also voted to join other local Leagues to endorse this effort. For those of us who believe women

should have the right to access a legal, safe abortion based on decisions made between her, her family, and her physician, we can actively support the effort to end political interference in personal medical decisions. Women face these choices for a variety of reasons, but legislators in Florida just signed the most extreme abortion ban in the nation. The ban restricts access before most people realize they're pregnant. Floridians Protecting Freedom is the campaign to collect signed petitions to get an amendment on the Florida 2024 ballot to stop the type of legislation passed by the Florida legislature and signed by the Governor that does not appear to represent Florida voters.

While anyone can go to floridiansprotectingfreedom.org to download a petition, sign, and mail it, we encourage LWWNPC members to volunteer in the petition effort as League representatives at opportunities we identify in the coming months. League President Marti Folwell brought back 200 blank petition forms from the recent annual conference, and we have the training materials from the campaign to share. Contact Mina at mharkins@QIS.net or 443-536-3398 if you can volunteer to collect signatures, have an event where we can promote this initiative, or have signed petitions for delivery to the collection hub in Clearwater. Petitions should be turned in weekly during the campaign continuing through November 2023.

Education Committee



Education Committee Presents "Why Public School is the BEST Choice"

Submitted by Vivian Posey, Committee Chair

In response to the passage of HB1/SB 202 (School Choice) during the 2023 Florida Legislative session, the Education Committee presented a virtual Hot Topic, "Why Public School is the BEST Choice" on April 26th. The purpose of this Hot Topic was to inform the community about the history and

significant events in the movement to privatize public education in Florida and to highlight the variety of programs available to students in the Pinellas District public schools. Invited speakers for this event included advocate, educator, and LWVFL member Dr. Sally Butzin, lead author of the Preliminary Report on Step Up for Students, (2021); Pinellas School Board member, Caprice Edmond; Director of Student Assignment for Pinellas School District, Ellen Truskowski; and Superintendent of Schools, Kevin Hendrick.

In her remarks, Dr. Butzin reminded the community that the Florida Constitution requires the establishment of “a uniform, safe, secure and high-quality system of free public schools for ALL students,” (Article IX). She also stated that the implementation of tax-funded universal tuition vouchers to private school students, with no family income requirement or oversight of the school, seriously jeopardizes this constitutional requirement. She warned of the potential for resegregation of schools in Florida due to the passage of HB1/SB 202 (School Choice), and of the financial impact to the school district budget from this transfer of taxpayer funds to all Florida students who attend private schools or are home-schooled. Superintendent Hendrick, School Board member Caprice Edmond, and Student Assignment Director Ellen Truskowski, each spoke about the variety of educational offerings available to all K-12 students in Pinellas County that are not available in private schools. Some of the amazing programs that students can select from are robotics, engineering, health science, aeronautics, dual language, Advanced Placement, STEM, and gifted education. Parents were also reminded that the curriculum used in public schools meets all requirements of the Florida Department of Education, and that every student’s academic achievement is closely monitored and reported to parents throughout the school year, not just annually.

The LWVNPC Education Committee will continue its efforts to inform Pinellas community taxpayers about the progress of the implementation of the universal voucher program as it becomes law on July 1st. Look for more Hot Topics on this subject in the future! To listen

To view the recording of the Hot Topic, “Why Public School is the BEST Choice,” go to

https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/jRLrOaxqJ6Mn2hTNz-O7INmS6txqPUhG2WfV65Cy3TYNQGaeEPEcRGji8pTWknTb.YRet_twrFvgx5Kh6

Passcode: [1.@75mW#](#)

To learn more about the potential impact of the universal school voucher program on public schools, here is a great article: Understanding the Impact of School Choice Bills
by Rosemary Niles, LWV Citrus County.



Submitted by Linda Metzkwow, Voter Service Committee Chair.

I am delighted to be the new chair of the Voters Services Committee. With the recent passing of SB7050, which imposes new requirements and fines on third-party voter registration organizations, and more restrictions on mail-in voting, we have much to do before the 2024 election to inform voters and register new voters in Pinellas County. Our first committee meeting will be via Zoom on June 27th at 6:00 pm. We will be discussing new procedures for registering voters. If you are interested in attending, please email Gayla

Larson at nbslarson@gmail.com, and she will email you the Zoom link. My contact information is Linda Metzkwow at lindametzkwow@tampabay.rr.com. To learn more about new procedures for voter registration, go to <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VvrCjZ5Zql4b5DIHeYaKaRb6ukleqdqE/view?usp=sharing>

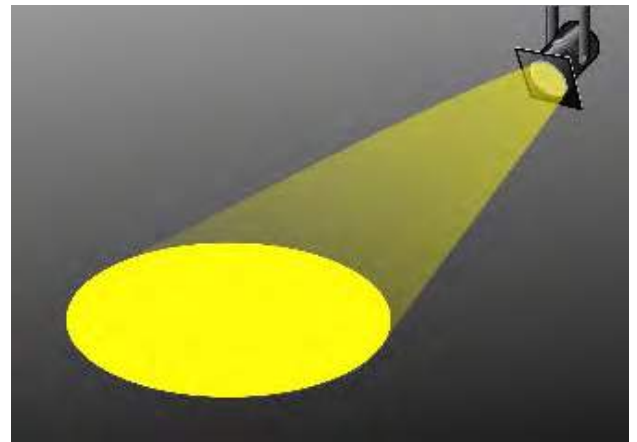
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GROUP



Bryan Beckman is the new chair of the Natural Resource/Environmental Action Committee. Bryan brings great qualifications and expertise! He is the current Chair of the Suncoast Sierra Group Executive Committee. Since Bryan joined Sierra Club, he has led various Sierra Ready for 100 campaigns across Pinellas County, working with cities and the county to set clean energy goals and implement solutions to reach those goals.

Bryan also serves on the Pinellas County Parks and Recreation and Conservation Advisory Board. He is also involved in advocacy in Clearwater for the workforce and affordable housing. If you are interested in serving on the Natural Resources/Environmental Action Committee, contact Bryan at bryanbeckman63@gmail.com

Spotlight: Introducing Amanda Ortscheid



Amanda Ortscheid is one of LWNPC's newer and younger members. She tells an interesting story about her childhood. When she was growing up in California, her parents received sample ballots for upcoming elections in the mail. Then they would sit at the kitchen table and discuss different candidates and issues. As a child, Amanda thought that looked like fun. She enjoyed it when her parents disagreed because she got to hear different opinions. As she became older, Amanda looked forward to becoming a registered voter so she could be at the table herself!

As a young adult, Amanda has a unique profession of working in the field of cyber security. As an analyst, she reviews network activity to see if it is suspicious. She started working in cybersecurity in 2019, where she met people who were involved in data privacy activism. A colleague recommended she read a book about Cambridge Analytica, which got her more interested in data privacy issues but also disinformation and political polarization. She was always politically active but felt like she didn't know how to get involved beyond trying to stay informed and voting. Her interest pushed her to try to do more. In 2022, she volunteered for Common Cause, to monitor online disinformation about the 2022 election. Interestingly, she discovered that most disinformation circulated following the election, occasionally by disgruntled voters, but mostly by bad actors invested in a particular candidate or those who benefited financially by generating outrage and falsehoods.

Amanda learned about the LWV by watching a special on Hulu called Mrs. America, which told the story of the Equal Rights Amendment. Previously, she knew little about the LWV and its position of nonpartisanship. One issue

that concerns her now is low voter participation in midterm and primary elections, something she would like to see change.

LWVNPC is so pleased to have Amanda as a member. When she is not protecting our safety online, she loves TV comedy, reading and cooking.

Reflections: My Civil Rights Tour



Reflecting Pool, The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Beth Hovind recently embarked on a five day “Civil Rights Tour” which began and ended in Atlanta but wove through Georgia and Alabama and explored historic settings of the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century. It is a diary that will educate and deepen our sensitivity to the racial struggles of Black Americans. It will be featured in installments in each issue.

Here is Day 2 of 5.

Wednesday, January 11: Day 2

Today is a big tour day in Atlanta. Doris has engaged a tour company with Roger as our guide. We arranged to meet him in the parking lot of the MLK National Park Center, a 22-acre park devoted to the memory of MLK. Dressed in a red jacket and red shoes, Roger shares a friendly welcome with us. After we arrange ourselves in his black van, he starts discussing the importance of the area we are in, the immediate efforts of Coretta Scott King after her husband’s death to preserve his birthplace, the house he was born in and his father’s church. With the assistance of the Park Service, the entire neighborhood is being revitalized centered on a long, cascading pool with Dr. King’s famous sermon excerpt: “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Large photos of King events surround the fountain, and a stone display quotes his non-violence precepts.

One of the most interesting stops is Sweet Auburn, a long stretch that had once been the height of successful Black businesses at a time when they were not allowed to operate in the white areas of town. This Black-owned business core served the Black community and was the location for early civil rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Women’s SCLC. Women, an important part of the Civil Rights movement, were often overshadowed (and ignored) by the men. (No surprise there.) Josephine Baker (a resident of France at the time, of American heritage) and Daisy Bates (organizer of the Little Rock Nine) were the only women to speak at the 1963 March on Washington. A mural in Sweet Auburn recognizes one of these unsung heroes. A huge mural of John Lewis sits alongside the closed YMCA, which was the only facility where Black people and whites frequented. We also see the office of Martin Luther King while he worked with the SCLC, a group of Black ministers working together on civil rights. The story goes that when he had a message to get out to the people, he would poke the ceiling with a broom and the Black radio station, WERD, would pass a mike down to the first-floor window so Martin could broadcast a message.

Sweet Auburn is now economically depressed, with many buildings shuttered and closed or in disrepair. Murals are beginning to fade. But there is an effort at restoration and a few businesses are still operational. We are fortunate to run into Sweet Auburn Bakery, run by a vivacious woman, Sonya, who created the sweet potato cheesecake and proudly served it to Bill Clinton. She charms us with wonderful aromas and delightful stories and sold us a few cookbooks as well.

We drive through many different parts of town, hearing wonderful stories of city fathers who have kept Atlanta prosperous. Under the control of Black mayors since the 1970's, the political and business communities are working together to improve the city. Roger is particularly proud of a 26-mile beltway being designed around the town on an old railroad bed, and destined to become a walking, bicycling trail. He shows us areas where they are rehabbing old warehouses into living and commercial spaces. Other areas are building apartments near the green beltway. He sees it as a real spur to new development in this urban area of 6.5 million people. The mayors are ensuring that the Black community is involved in this growth.

Roger reviews the history of slavery and the 5 primary tribes who used to populate the area. He highlights the civil war, the freedom for the enslaved, and the continued efforts by whites to ensure that they would maintain their "superior" position through social controls leading to the creation of Jim Crow laws that frequently placed Black people in the penal system where they could be forced to work. He reviews Black people service to the country in the military and other areas. Roger is proud of the tolerant city that Atlanta has now become. We end back at the King National Park, and Roger has suggestions about tour leaders in our future towns. He also clues us in on what Black people call Soul Food, whites choose to call Southern Cooking.

We continued on to the information center to learn more about MLK's family history, and a tour of King's birthplace. It is a 6 bedroom, 2 bath house where the main bedroom was called the "birthing room." Park Ranger Clyde leads the tour which was just up the street from the original Ebenezer Church. Martin Luther King, grandson of sharecroppers, married into an educated and prosperous preaching family. (His mother-in-law was shot playing a church organ a few years after Martin died.) Martin was one of three children, with one sister and one brother. His sister became a university professor. His brother drowned or was killed in his own swimming pool- a questionable death. Martin himself tried to commit suicide twice, once after a stair interaction with his grandmother and once when she died-- both by jumping from a second story window. Martin had 4 children, one daughter, still connected to the memorial foundation, and three sons with intermittent involvement. This entire area was developed through the work of his wife Coretta and the National Park Service.



New Member Orientation

Whether you've been a member for a few days or a few years, LWVNPC invites you to join us for our "new member orientation." We'll discuss how to best utilize your membership, who to contact, how to network, and much more.

Please join us on **Monday, July 3, 2023, at 5:30pm** for a Zoom orientation presentation on your League. We will present a PowerPoint "class" to give you a better picture of what the League of Women Voters of North Pinellas County does and how **YOU** fit in.

Please plan for a one-hour presentation to be followed by Q&A and suggestions you might have for how we can all work together in a more productive way.

We look forward to greeting you and spending a little time together. Don't miss this opportunity.

RSVP to nbslarson@gmail.com so we can send you the link and reminder for this meeting.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Tuesday, June 27, 6PM

Voter Service Meeting, Via Zoom

Wednesday, June 28, 5 pm

Economic Equity Committee Meeting Via Zoom

Monday, July 3, 5:30 PM

New Member Orientation Via Zoom

Tuesday, July 4th

Happy 4th of July!

Wednesday, July 4 PM

Monthly Board Meeting via Zoom

Reminder, if you are interested in attending any of these meetings, please contact Gayla Larson, Secretary at nblarson@gmail.com, or any of the committee heads mentioned in the committee reports.

