

***EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY***

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# **THE CAPITOL VOTER**

**AUGUST 2020**

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## **LWVLA CALENDAR**

- **August 26 - Equality Day. Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the adoption of the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution**
  - **September 8 at 10 am - Book Discussion meeting on Zoom. Details in the Program Committee report.**
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**A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**



Last month we lost the petite American giant, US Rep. John Lewis. I was lucky enough to twice see him in person. Each time, I felt like I was in the presence of greatness and love. He offered this advice to all Americans: “We should be creative, and we should accommodate the needs of every community to open up the democratic process. We should make it easy and accessible for every citizen to participate.” Terrific marching orders for these challenging days.

At all levels LWV is trying to be creative as we work to register voters and protect the right to vote. A common theme in these letters is that we are up to the task, but it sure feels like we are under fire. The pandemic is making it difficult, efforts to suppress the vote are at an all time high, and while many are eager to participate, some are being worn down by the daily news cycle.

I see two major foci right now: How do we meet the voting needs of the tri-county area as we approach November? And how do we keep the League vital after the election?

We have successfully managed to continue internal communication through virtual means. We’re trying to up our social media game and come up with innovative messages to motivate citizen involvement. If you have ideas, please let us know! You may believe that we have surely thought of it on our own, but I would rather you take the chance on being redundant than to keep your light under a bushel. What beyond virtual meetings with each other and the community could help communication? What message/story could be effective? What webinars could we offer that would engage a broader population than our usual crowd? What are you thinking? Remember that a small success is nevertheless a success. Change happens one person at a time.

And after the election? In my last Voter message, I mentioned that the board is developing a two-year strategic plan to enable us to smoothly transition after the election and continue to meet the needs of a very challenged democracy. Connect with your inner Marie Kondo and think about how this organization can develop to spark joy and pride in our members. What would the ideal League look like? Send your thoughts to [donnamullinslwvla@gmail.com](mailto:donnamullinslwvla@gmail.com). Everything will be considered as we continue to “accommodate the needs of every community to open up the democratic process.”

Few of us can meet the standard of John Lewis, but all of us are worthy of marching beside him. With your help, we can continue his dream.

Together,

*Donna*

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## REPORT ON THE LWVUS NATIONAL CONVENTION Donna Mullins

How exciting to participate in a Washington, DC League of Women Voters’ convention in the middle of a critical election year! Full of like-minded women, politicians showing up to milk the crowd, networking—imagine the sound of a needle scraping its way over an LP—that didn’t happen. Instead, a virtual meeting was held and it accomplished the work of the League. A [daily summary](#) of the convention can be found online. Below you’ll find a summary of the highlights but first, a few impressions:

- We are in good company. There are a lot of people who are passionate about democracy, justice, the environment, gun safety, education, and a host of other issues.
- We are patient. When 7 people out of 900 disagreed with a motion, 893 people listen attentively to their concerns. (Well, maybe my eyes rolled, but I wasn't on screen.)
- Our members tend to know the issues well.
- It wasn't exciting but it was something to be proud of. The League pulled off a national convention using technology in a manner suggesting they'd been doing it for decades.
- The leadership of the League makes an effort to walk the talk.
- Our new president, Deborah Turner, is smart, funny, dynamic and charismatic. We are in good hands.

### **Caucuses**

There were a variety of [caucuses](#) offered by state Leagues. Subjects included voting issues, diversity, healthcare, rebuilding trust, climate change, cyber security and management resources. I attended "How to Coordinate a Successful LWV Candidate Forum" and "Climate Migration, Immigration and Human Rights." The caucuses were interesting and worth a peek.

Several **Motions** were agreed upon:

- All current LWVUS positions in the areas of representative government, international relations, natural resources and social policy were retained.
- Continuing support for The Campaign for Making Democracy Work®: ensuring a free, fair and accessible electoral system for all eligible voters by focusing on Voting Rights, Improving Elections, and advocacy for the National Popular Vote Compact; Campaign Finance/Money in Politics; Redistricting; and continued work on urgent issues—Climate Change, the Equal Rights Amendment, Health Care, Gun Safety, and Immigration.
- The abolition of the electoral college by Constitutional amendment, which will be added to the LWVUS program

**READ MORE** about the 2020 Convention.

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## **NOTES FROM THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE**

### **Dorothy Engelman, Program VP**



August 26, 2020, is **Equality Day**, the 100th Anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and many virtual activities and programs are planned nationwide. Visit [PBS's Celebrating the Women's Vote Centennial](#) and [Womensvote100.org](#) to help you celebrate this important day!

The LWVLA and Capital Area Transit Authority (CATA) are celebrating Equality Day with an installation of the winning posters from the "Celebrate 100 years of Women's Suffrage ... VOTE!" contest at the downtown Transit Center. The Suffrage Centennial committee thanks Allegra Printing for producing the posters and CATA for providing the public space to highlight the project.



The LWVLA has its own [YouTube Channel!](#) The newest posting is for the [July 13, 2020 Luncheon Webinar Discussion](#) about criminal justice based on the movie, "**Just Mercy.**" The speakers are Jose Burgos, a former juvenile lifer who served 27 years incarcerated within the Michigan Department of Corrections and is now a Reentry Specialist; Mike Cheltenham, Ingham County's Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney; and Kathy Swedlow, Deputy Administrator of the Michigan Appellate Assigned Counsel System. It also includes questions from the luncheon attendees. You can subscribe to our YouTube channel to receive a notice when new programs and information are posted. This is a great way to share League programs with your friends!

The postponed Annual Meeting will be held this fall. You'll receive a "Save the Date" message when the date is finalized. Watch your email!

The Book Discussion Group meets September 8 from 10-11: 30 am on Zoom. ***How to Be an Antiracist*** by Ibram X. Kendi is this month's pick. You can see the author discuss his work at the [Aspen Festival](#). If you'd like to join, please contact Donna Mullins to be added to the Zoom information.

Please contact me at [lwvla100years@gmail.com](mailto:lwvla100years@gmail.com) with questions or comments.

Dorothy Engelman  
V. P. of Program Planning

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## VOTER SERVICE

### Joanne Winkelman, Voter Services Director



What a year so far! Usually, during the summer and fall, league members are registering voters at university orientations and gearing up to deliver talks on voting rights, as well as registering high school students. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has caused college orientations to be online and schools in the Tri-County area are beginning the school year virtually. It is going to be a struggle to get the word out about registering to vote and voting by mail, and ensuring ballots are received before election day.

Voter service is looking at ways for members to be involved in these activities while staying safe during the pandemic. Work is underway to reach high school social studies teachers to partner with the League on virtual lessons and voter registration activities. Hopefully, teachers will invite us to participate.

Candidates will again be solicited for responses to the Vote411.org questions. Due to early voting it will be imperative to receive those responses promptly. League members

stepped up in June to make reminder calls and will again be contacted to do the same this fall.

Voter Guides will be printed for the November election. Some of the previous sites that accepted the Voter Guides for distribution are closed and others are uncertain. Volunteers will be needed to call sites to see if they will take the guides and to distribute them to those sites. There are other activities in the works to engage the membership in voter service. Watch your inbox for opportunities to volunteer!

If you have any ideas/suggestions, please contact Joanne Winkelman at [jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com](mailto:jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com).

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## **AUGUST MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

### **Donna Mullins**

It's the little things that count and no one knows that better than Melinda Frame, who represents the Gun Violence Prevention Committee on the LWVLA board. Melinda is an expert in microscopy, now working for MSU's Center for Advanced Microscopy.



Melinda joined the League in 2017 as an extension of her involvement with Zonta International. Their focus on women's issues, including domestic violence and sex trafficking, made her a natural fit for the GVP committee. She emphasizes that gun safety doesn't mean taking away people's guns; rather, it seeks to promote strategies to ensure that guns are owned and used responsibly. Melinda told me that she was not an activist until becoming a Zonta member, when she learned about issues that touched her heart and made her want to become more involved with community issues. If learning new things could inspire her, then why not expand the knowledge of others?

When asked what the best thing about the League was, Melinda replied, "Its dedication to democracy." That we truly seem to make the effort that everyone has an equal voice. That's true about the GVP committee as well; it works toward a safer community by ensuring that citizens are knowledgeable and use their vote to promote safety.

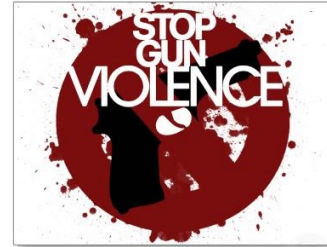
I have been asked by many why the League is involved in issues like climate change, education, and gun violence prevention. It's because members agree that the most powerful way to effect change is to have an educated citizenry vote their values. We may not agree on every detail, but when we put issues under the microscope we are more likely to come up with viable solutions.

The more she learns about an issue, the more Melinda wants to become a part of the solution. As such, she reflects the motivation of so many of our members. Melinda's intelligence, thoughtfulness and compassion are assets to the GVP committee and to our local League, and worth shining a light upon.

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**GHOST GUNS**  
**David Batten, Gun Violence Prevention Committee**

The Gun Control Act of 1968 requires gun manufacturers to stamp serial numbers on all produced firearms so that the firearms may be identified and traceable. However, firearm regulations in the United States allow anyone to build and possess weapons for personal use without registering the firearm or placing an identifying serial number on the firearm. Such weapons are not traceable. Similarly, guns produced by 3D printers do not have serial numbers or any connection to a licensed gun manufacturer and are therefore also untraceable. Untraceable firearms are often referred to as “ghost guns.”



Gun components that are sold online do not need to be manufactured by a licensed manufacturer, nor are any background checks of the purchaser required. People wishing to build and own a firearm for personal use often purchase gun kits that are sold online. To avoid the requirements for serial numbers and background checks, these kits lack a crucial component of the firearm called the “lower receiver.” However, it is possible to separately purchase a lower receiver online that is partially complete (80%). Since the partially completed lower receiver is non-functional, it also does not require either a serial number or owner registration. When purchased together, with a little machining, the gun kit and partially completed lower receiver can be made into a functional, untraceable firearm—a ghost gun.

The danger to public safety presented by ghost guns is readily apparent and increasing. Ghost guns are untraceable, making investigation of ownership, possession, and usage difficult, and they are easily accessible to persons unable to pass a background check. 3D printed firearms provide an additional danger as they are often undetectable to metal detectors at our airports, arenas, schools and courtrooms.

The advent of 3D printers and the undetectable nature of firearms produced by them prompted the enactment of the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988, which made it illegal to manufacture, possess or sell any firearm undetectable by common security metal detectors. This law has a ten-year sunset clause and was last reauthorized in 2013.

To address the dangers of ghost guns, the Untraceable Firearms Act (HR 3553) was introduced in the US House in June 2019. It would incorporate authorization of the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988 and extend it to address all untraceable firearms. In Michigan, HB 5190, introduced in October 2019, would expand the definition of firearms within the state that are not permitted to be manufactured, sold, or possessed to include 3D printed firearms. This bill has been referred to the Judiciary Committee for review.

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## REPORT FROM THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

### Ellen Link

First off, we’ve changed our name to the Environmental Advocacy Group (EAG), to better describe what we’re about. Second, while we are concerned about all things affecting our environment, we’ve decided to focus our attention this year on two main issues: Environmental Justice, and recycling/waste reduction/plastics. EJ is just beginning to be scrutinized, while the ongoing problems posed by our waste continue to both inspire and resist solutions. If you’d like



to work with us in our efforts to preserve this magical planet for our children and grandchildren, contact Ellen Link at [elink767@gmail.com](mailto:elink767@gmail.com).

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## **EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE**

### **Elaine Fischhoff, Environmental Advocacy Group**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the racist policies and health care practices of white society and governance that result in Blacks and other persons of color dying from the virus at a rate more than twice that of their proportion of the population. Lack of or implicitly racist health care leads to untreated hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, putting these men and women at a greater risk of infection. Being largely relegated to the lowest paying jobs that have proved to be “essential” to our economy, persons of color must put themselves at greater risk by being economically forced to continue working at jobs requiring close proximity to scores of persons, some of whom are not even wearing a protective mask that would shield others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also spotlighted the environmental injustice suffered by many persons of color who are also victims of poverty and redlining. The very places where they live are hazardous to their health and put them at greater risk of asthma, lead-poisoning, adverse chemical exposure, and pulmonary and cardio disease. These persons of color are also frequently neighbors to power and chemical plants and incinerators spewing odors and particulates, truck routes marked by trails of diesel smoke, and unremediated brownfields covered with hazardous metals and chemical-soaked soils that also rise into the air. Many live in old rental housing stock with lead paint, insufficient insulation and cooling, and lead water pipes.

Lansing is no exception. In a [2019 report](#) published by the University of Michigan that was requested by the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition, Lansing is one of the top 5 cities in Michigan in terms of the number of census tracts whose residents are victims of these environmentally unjust conditions. The LWVLA's Environmental Advocacy Group is presently examining the means by which it might help alleviate environmental injustice in Lansing. To that end, the EAG hopes to connect with neighborhood associations in order to provide them with information from the U of M report and facilitate discussions to identify what measures might be taken to improve adverse conditions and help implement any solutions, including getting access to useful resources. Please join us to help. Contact Ellen Link at [elink767@gmail.com](mailto:elink767@gmail.com).

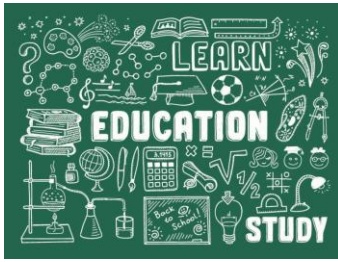
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## **ONE THING**

Make sure your [bank and credit card](#) are socially and environmentally responsible.

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**EENY, MEENY, MINY, MOE:  
WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH SCHOOLS THIS FALL?**  
**Bettie Landauer-Menchik, Co-chair Education Committee**



In my 70+ years of experience with education, there has never been greater uncertainty about children returning to classrooms in September. On every parent's mind this fall is what to do about sending their children back to school. If parents choose to send their children to schools that reopen, are they endangering them and their teachers and bus drivers? If children are kept home, are they pulling support from schools and depriving children of socializing, food support, mental health support? If parents keep

working outside of the home, are their children being neglected? If parents form pods and hire someone to help with remote school, are they widening the achievement gaps and inequality? No easy answers.

In May, Governor Whitmer, through Executive Order 2020-88, established the Return to School Advisory Council to develop recommendations for a safe return to in-person instruction. The report, [The Michigan Safe Schools Roadmap](#), was issued at the end of June, relying on the scientific data available on COVID-19. The Governor's executive order required Michigan school districts to adopt a COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan, including details of how they plan to protect students and staff across the various phases of the Michigan Safe Start Plan. The Roadmap offers guidelines about the types of safety protocols required or recommended at each phase of the Plan. District plans were due by August 17.

Few districts waited for the Legislature (and the State Board) to issue guidelines; most had their plans out by the end of July or early August. Statewide, school boards presented their plans to thousands of parents, who Zoomed into presentations, with meetings lasting well into the night. Based on the most recent information, all districts in the Lansing area will start online. For example,

- [Lansing](#) will be virtual (LSD Reimagined) starting August 31 for the first marking period with the option to continue remotely the entirety of
- [East Lansing](#) will be remote until at least September 30, with a vote of the school board on August 15.
- [Okemos](#)' Superintendent has recommended staying online through the end of October.

Elsewhere in the state, [Detroit Schools Community District](#) is giving parents the choice between in-person learning and online learning. Detroit teachers have announced a vote next week on whether to launch a safety strike over concerns they have about returning to classrooms amid COVID-19. The latest [health advisories](#) will continue to be posted.

On August 15, the State Senate and the Governor's office reached a compromise agreement providing clarity to districts for the start of what will surely be a chaotic year.

[READ MORE](#) about what's happening with schools this fall.

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## MEMBER UPDATES

We extend our deep sympathy to Carol Swinehart, whose daughter recently died, leaving two teenage daughters.



Congratulations to members Ralph Monsma and Ginger Ogilvie, who were both honored by East Lansing with Crystal Awards for their community service.

If you have news regarding our members, please send it to [donnamullinslwvla@gmail.com](mailto:donnamullinslwvla@gmail.com).

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Constance Knaggs - East Lansing**  
**Judith Labovitz - East Lansing**  
**Laura Rogers - Okemos**