

THE VOTER

A Quarterly Newsletter of the LWVAAC

December 2023, Issue 131

Winter Calendar of Events

LWVAAC Holiday Charity Drive

Benefiting Annapolis Light House
Ends Dec 31

LWVAAC Sunday Symposium (virtual)

Sun, Jan 7, 2-3 p.m.
Sun, Jan 21, 2-3 p.m.
Sun, Feb 4, 2-3 p.m.
Sun, Feb 18, 2-3 p.m.
Sun, Mar 3, 2-3 p.m.

LWVAAC Board Meeting (virtual)

Tue, Jan 9, 4:30-6 p.m.

MD General Assembly Convenes

Wed, Jan 10, 12 p.m.

LWVMD Winter Workshop (virtual)

Sat, Jan 27, 9:30 a.m.

Primary Election Filing Deadline

Fri, Feb 9, 9 p.m.

LWVAAC Board Meeting (virtual)

Tue, Feb 13, 4:30-6 p.m.

LWV 104th Anniversary

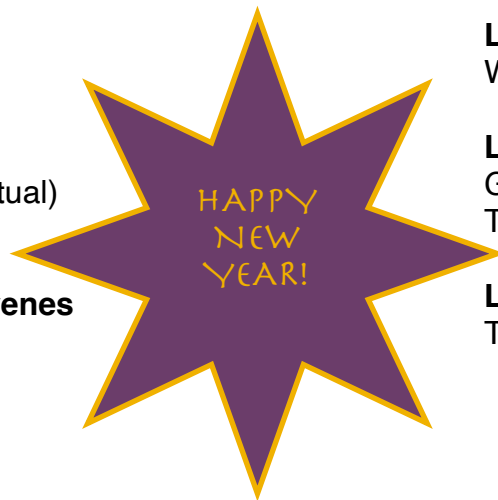
Wed, Feb 14

LWVAAC Member Meeting (TBD)

Guidance to LWVUS for 2024-2026
Thu, Mar 7, 7-8:30 p.m.

LWVAAC Board Meeting (virtual)

Tue, Mar 12, 4:30-6 p.m.



LWVAAC Online

Amanda SubbaRao, President, pres@lwvaacmd.org

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Membership, memb-aac@lwvmd.org

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LWVAAC Directors, board-aac@lwvmd.org

Website: www.lwvaacmd.org

Facebook: [@lwvaac](https://www.facebook.com/lwvaac) Phone: 443-672-8270

Join/Renew: www.lwvaacmd.org/join2

Donate: lwvaacmd.org/efdonation

Voter Toolkit: lwvaacmd.org/voter_toolkit

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President's Message

Dear Members,

Year's end is a good time to take stock and give thanks. As I reflect on our League's accomplishments this year, I am thankful to our dedicated Board members and volunteers for all the hard work they do. And I am grateful for the support each of you provide.

Our ambitious Voter Services team has had a busy fall, leading off with multiple National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) events in September and continuing through October and November with registration drives at the Anne Arundel Community College "Civility Matters" event and in our public high schools. It is always exciting to engage with and register youth voters, encouraging them to make their voices heard at the ballot box. Every vote matters.

Action Chair Abby Root has kept LWVAAC at the forefront of efforts to expand affordable housing in the county. In early November, she testified in favor of County Council Bill 78-23 Essential Worker Housing Access Act, basing our support on LWVAAC's Affordable Housing and Planning & Zoning positions. At a rally for the measure, speakers urged supporters to stay vigilant, vocal, and patient as the County Council considers amendments to the measure.

We continue the work to educate and support our members and voters. Many of you attended our September kick-off meeting that featured ranked choice voting, and our book discussion on fake news. Disinformation is a growing threat and we remain committed to ensuring people continue to

view the League as a trusted source of election-related and other information. You can help this effort by joining our 2024 voters' guide team, led by Niecy Chambers. See p. 9 to learn what tasks are involved.

The coming election year will offer many ways to engage with the League. Keep an eye out for volunteer opportunities, action alerts, and upcoming events, presented either in your email or through our [League in Action](#) app.

This winter, we'll host a Sunday Symposium series to consider [LWVAAC public policy positions](#). These virtual sessions will look at each of our positions in light of present-day conditions in the county and give members the opportunity to voice their concerns and suggestions. See p. 5 for details, and please plan to attend.

LWVAAC's 2023 Annual [Charity Drive](#) is underway, benefitting the Light House in Annapolis. It provides homelessness prevention and support programs that serve over 100 community members each day. Please consider a contribution to help our neighbors in need.

I hope you have a fabulous holiday season and a very happy New Year.

~ Amanda



Amanda SubbaRao

Member News

Faces of Our League

Delia and Rex Miller

Q: When and where did you first join the League; what prompted you to join?

Rex and I first joined the North Pinellas LWV in Largo, Florida, when we moved there after retirement in 2014. We had such positive experiences with the Voter Services and Education Committees of the Largo League that we decided to join the LWVAAC after moving to Odenton in October 2020. We have always found people we meet in the League to be informed, intelligent, and engaging.



Members Rex and Delia Miller

Q: What civic issues do you care most about?

We care most about encouraging people to register and vote, transparency and representation in government, and public education.

Q: What were your primary careers?

Rex was a registered nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital in Tampa, primarily working in critical care. I worked in commercial real estate as a paralegal.

Q: What might other members be interested in knowing about you?

Rex is an avid chess player, an internet influencer, and he runs a monthly Socrates Café*. He enjoys pickleball, swimming, cooking, and creating art. I enjoy reading, exercise classes, and volunteering (most recently with AARP Tax Preparation). I've recently taken up knitting and mahjong. We both love exploring locally and in the metro area, visiting museums and studying history. We enjoy food and entertaining friends and family. Most of all, we enjoy our grandchildren. #



**Socrates Café is an intentional conversation that invites people to come together to consider timely and timeless questions to seek a deeper meaning into a perplexing question, a contemporary issue or a thorny problem that is intriguing and demands consideration.*

In Memoriam

Mary Cleave, a 20-year League member and former LWVAAC Board member, died suddenly on November 27 at the age of 76. She was an astronaut and scientist with training in civil and environmental engineering, as well as biological sciences and microbial ecology. In her career as a NASA astronaut, she flew in space twice, orbiting the Earth 172 times and traveling 3.94 million miles. In 1985, during her first of two Space Shuttle (STS-61B) missions, she was the mission's flight engineer and operated the Shuttle's robot arm used to move payloads and position astronauts working outside the Space Shuttle. During her second Atlantis mission, STS-30 in 1989, Mary deployed the Magellan spacecraft on its journey to Venus, where it collected valuable information on surface, atmosphere, and magnetic field.

In 1991 Mary moved to Annapolis to work at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center where she turned around the troubled ocean-focused satellite instrument project, seeing it through development to launch in 1997. For 13 years, it collected an extraordinarily valuable dataset that increased the understanding of climate change, oceanography, and atmospheric science. In 1998, Mary transitioned to NASA Headquarters to become the first woman to lead NASA's Science Directorate. As Associate Administrator for Science, she was responsible for Earth environmental measurements to spacecraft orbiting the Sun and spacecraft probing the outer reaches of the Solar System.

In retirement, Mary became a significant advisor and advocate for space science, serving on

On a recent visit to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, LWVAAC members Niecy and Jim Chambers came across these plaques commemorating Mary's Space Shuttle missions. NASA Associate Administrator Bob Cabana called Mary "a trailblazer...(and) a force of nature."



numerous corporate boards and advisory committees and volunteering with the annual Maryland STEM Festival. She particularly enjoyed encouraging young girls interested in science. At the Maryland Women's Heritage Center events or the National Air and Space Museum, where Mary occasionally volunteered, she might tell a story about how she reengineered a flight toilet to accommodate women in space or how NASA had to rig a flight suit, originally designed for men, to fit her petite frame. RIP Mary. #

Annapolis

Janet Curtis
Susan Johnson

Gambrills

Kathryn Thompson

Severna Park

Susan Knisely



Sunday Symposium: A new approach to program planning

By Niecy Chambers, Treasurer

Every year, local Leagues across the country engage in an exercise called *program planning*. A little history may help to explain why.

The 70-year-long U.S. suffrage movement produced a female army of activists, many with a knowledge of government and a passion for reform. The League of Women Voters (LWV) was established to provide a structure for their advocacy and education. LWV leaders implemented the program planning process to manage the flood of public policy concerns raised by League members. Key to the process was the provision that members must study a topic and come to consensus on a position before the League could publicly advocate. Because consensus studies are a major commitment of time and resources, the program

planning process provided a way for the League to identify the issues of greatest concern to its members.

Over the past 100 years, LWV members have studied and reached consensus on countless topics. In addition to local studies, Leagues participate in state and national LWV studies, enabling them to advocate on positions adopted at those levels as well as their own. To date, LWVAAC has adopted seven [positions](#) pertaining to our county.

Program planning provides members the opportunity to review previously-adopted positions in light of current local conditions and to bring forward new topics of concern. The purpose is to identify focal issues for the League to address in the following program year (July-June). Program can include a wide range of activities, such as consensus studies, educational initiatives, community outreach, and lobbying.

This winter, LWVAAC will engage in local program planning in a novel way, looking at our positions individually as subjects of a Sunday Symposium series. The hour-long afternoon sessions will be held virtually and will feature an outside speaker with knowledge pertaining to the League position being considered.

Please reserve the following dates and make a plan to participate: **January 7, January 21, February 4, February 18 and March 3, 2024 at 2 p.m.** Be sure to watch your email or League in Action app for updates regarding registration, schedule, topics and speakers. #



*Planks detailed the early League's public policy priorities.
(Photo courtesy of LWVUS)*

Voter Services

Steps to vote readiness

By Vera Herath, Director and Voter Services Co-Chair

LWVAAC members are our boots on the ground as we work to achieve the League's mission. In an election year especially, we rely on members to represent the League in their communities, helping eligible U.S. citizens register to vote, informing registered voters when and where to vote, and educating new and seasoned voters on important issues, including sources for reliable information.

As the 2024 election year approaches, here is information you, as a League advocate, can share with your circle of acquaintances, including coming of age family members, neighbors, and friends in all social circles.

Registration: First and foremost, [apply for registration](#) or [check your registration status](#). If you have questions or need assistance, start with the AAC Board of Elections (BOE) [website](#). There, you'll find a wealth of election information and useful links. You can fill out an application to register; check your registration status; update or change your personal information; change party affiliation; find out your polling place; request a mail-in ballot and more. For personal help, call the BOE at 410-222-6600. Act early, don't delay.

Election Judges Needed!

The AAC BOE must recruit a total of 2,251 judges to staff 152 county polling places in the 2024 election cycle. There are close to 990 vacancies at this time. Click [here](#) to learn more or call 410-222-6600.

Primary Election: The Presidential Primary election takes place on **May 14, 2024**, with in-person early voting from May 2 through May 9. **Keep in mind that Maryland has closed primaries.** This means you must be affiliated with a specific political party in order to vote in that party's primary. You may affiliate with a party when you first register to vote or by updating your voter registration with the BOE prior to voting. The BOE runs the primaries for the Republican and Democratic Parties; others, like the Green Party, run their own. **All voters**, whether or not they're affiliated with a political party, **may vote for nonpartisan Board of Education candidates in the Primary Election.** Be sure to check which contests are on the sample ballot you receive from the BOE and come prepared to make an informed choice.

Early and Mail-In Voting: There will be 10 in-person early voting sites throughout AA County, open May 2 through May 9, 2024. You may cast your ballot at any early voting site in the county, but **on election day, you must vote at your assigned polling place**, as designated on your voter identification card. If you choose to vote by mail-in ballot, there will be at least 30 secure, monitored drop boxes around AA County to deposit your completed and sealed ballot. Early voting sites and drop boxes will be broadly publicized by the AAC BOE.

General Election: The Presidential General election takes place on November 5, 2024, with early in-person voting offered October 24 through October 31. #

Voter Services team in action

By Vera Herath, Director & Voter Services Co-chair

The Voter Services team was busy again this fall. We celebrated National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) by hosting events on 2 days at three locations. September 16, morning and afternoon, LWVAAC volunteers could be found at Discoveries: the Library at the Mall in Annapolis. On September 19, this year's official NVRD, our volunteers registered voters at the new Severn Senior Activity Center and at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC).

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National Voter Registration Day 2023



Member Maryann Gosnell sports patriotic colors and a smile to draw the attention of prospective new voters at Discoveries: the Library at the Mall.

Voter Services co-chair Vicki Jordan stands with Joyce, a new MD resident and a U.S. Army veteran of the Women's Army Corps. Joyce updated her registration at the Severn Senior Activity Center on NVRD.



Voter Services co-chair Vera Herath and member Barb Biehl help a student register to vote at AA Community College.

To become an LWVAAC Voter Services (VS) volunteer, email the VS team at votersvc@lwvaacmd.org or call Vera at 410-703-7463 or Vicki at 410-991-9908.

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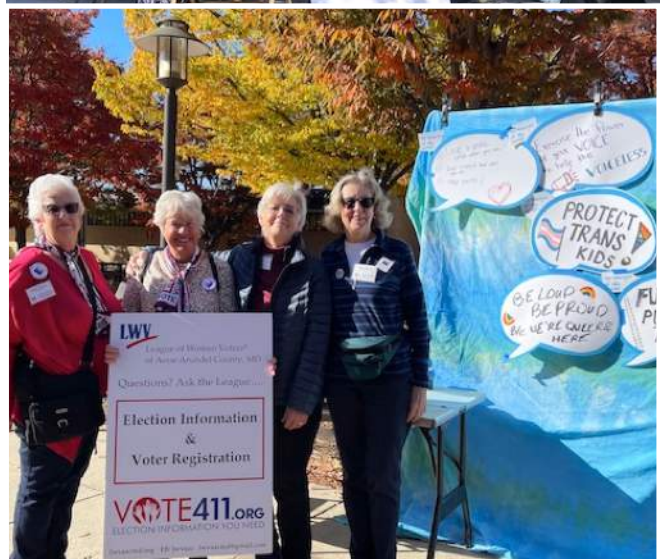
AACC's Communications Department invited LWVAAC to host a voter registration and information table at "Civility Matters" this October. This day-long event featured a variety of student presentations highlighting the importance of and need for civil discourse. Our presence was noted and well-received, and we accepted 28 voter registration applications!

In November, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) once again held voter registration drives at all 14 of the county's public high schools. We coordinated scheduling and signed up volunteer registrars from our League membership and from our NAACP-AAC and AAUW partners. At least one person from the county Board of Elections was present at each school. It is extremely rewarding and just plain fun to witness the students' energy and enthusiasm. They are interested, and they do care about democracy and about the future of this country.

In all, 243 students submitted voter registration applications, and 91 took applications with them to complete later.

October 24, 2023

Students filled every seat at the registration table during the AACC Civility Matters event, keeping Voter Services co-chair Vera Herath and League volunteers Cindy Barry, Yolande Dickerson, Alexis Dorsey, and Delia Miller happily busy on a lovely fall day.



Producing the voters' guide

By Niecy Chambers, Voter Services Team

Ask your neighbor what they associate with the League of Women Voters and, particularly if they're of a certain age, they're likely to say candidate forums, voter registration and voters' guides. These have been the hallmarks of our nonpartisan voter services since the League's founding in 1920 and they remain fundamental to our public image today.

Community organizations seek the League's guidance on best practices for forums and welcome our members' informed participation in registration drives. People in the know trust our voters' guides, thanks in part to the League's long-standing practice of including all ballot contests and printing candidate responses *verbatim*. Eager voters in our county clamor for the free print copies of the voters' guide that our League provides - just ask your public librarian!

If you'd like to help produce the League's voters' guide, these are the steps...

First, before we even know the candidates, we begin to formulate questions on topics of interest to voters. We take great care to write unbiased questions that will allow candidates to share their views on a variety of issues in a specified number of words.

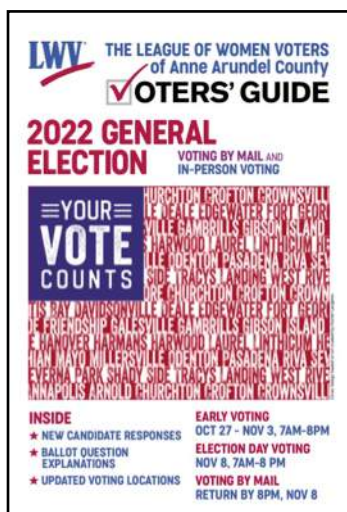
Next, we learn to use the League's voters' guide software, VOTE411.org. LWVMD licenses the

platform for statewide use and provides extensive training and support.

While we wait for the candidate filing deadline, we begin to assemble the supplemental election information that's included in the voters' guide, such as election dates, early voting sites, vote-by-mail instructions, registration requirements, etc. We research the job description and current salary of each office that appears on the ballot and enter the information, along with the

candidate questions, into VOTE411.org. We write explanations of any ballot questions and draft the emails that will be sent to candidates.

After the filing deadline, LWVMD loads the candidates into VOTE411.org. We verify the accuracy of the import before emailing the candidates an invitation to participate in the voters' guide. We check back regularly to see who hasn't responded and follow up by email or phone.



When it's time to produce the voters' guide, we download the candidate information from VOTE411.org and format it for publication, along with the election information gathered earlier.

Finally, we send press releases and emails publicizing VOTE411.org and our voters' guide. We distribute print copies of the guide to AA County public libraries and senior centers, the county BOE, educational institutions, and other public facilities. We pass out VOTE411.org cards and guides at voter registration drives, candidate forums and other community events.

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Producing the voters' guide is a team effort and a lifelong learning experience. There are tasks big and small, and nearly all can be done from home. As LWV voters' guides enter their 2nd century, we need fresh ideas and talents to meet the challenge of informing new generations of Anne Arundel County voters, including foreign-language speakers. Please click [here](#) to volunteer or email Niecy at votersvc@lwvaacmd.org. #

Anne Arundel County BOE receives national recognition for excellence in election administration

Submitted by Kathy Larrabee, Director and Editor

The Anne Arundel County Board of Elections (BOE) has been recognized for Outstanding Innovation in Election Cybersecurity and Technology by a unit of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), an independent, bipartisan federal agency focused solely on election administration. Clearies Awards, named for the EAC national Clearinghouse, were recently announced to celebrate the hard work of election offices across the country during the 2022 midterms.

The Anne Arundel County BOE's Mail-in Ballot Check-in Automation Program, one of 24 programs recognized with a Clearies Award, developed a process to automate the business practice of sorting, scanning, time stamping, and receiving mail-in ballots returned by voters.

According to a BOE press release, Anne Arundel County recognized how integrating mail sorting and scanning equipment with the voter registration system would improve ballot security and care, custody, and control by increasing the speed with which ballots are checked into MDVOTERS and ensuring each voter is notified their ballot has been received via email or text message.

"As mail-in voting grows more popular, we need to be innovative to manage the hundreds of thousands of ballots we receive each election," BOE leadership stated in writing. "This is the second consecutive election we have been recognized by the EAC for our dedication to improving the election process. We appreciate the opportunity to enhance the election experience for the voters in Anne Arundel County and increase their trust and confidence in our elections."

The EAC encourages election offices across the country to learn about award-winning programs they may consider in 2024 for their jurisdictions. #

NOTE: EAC's mission to serve as a clearinghouse for election administration information was established under the Help America Vote Act.



Action and Advocacy

Symposium brings together affordable housing experts

By Abby Root, Director and Action Chair

Public policy on housing was the focus of the inaugural Anne Arundel Affordable Housing Symposium, held November 1 at the Graduate Hotel in Annapolis and sponsored by Chase Home, Inc. The symposium brought together experts in housing and community development working to better understand affordable housing issues.

Keynote speaker Toni Strong Pratt, CEO of Peoples Builders Consulting, said she prefers the word “necessary” housing instead of “affordable,” which carries a negative connotation for some. Noting that a mortgage payment is often less than rent in our county, she urged participants to be relentless in their efforts to create inclusive, equitable, truly affordable housing and to reimagine a world in which people of different economic means live side by side. Her remarks were followed by four panel discussions, which are summarized on page 12.

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Approximately 200 supporters, including LWVAAC members Abby Root, Niecy Chambers, Alfa Stevens, and Amanda SubbaRao, recently gathered at The Peoples Park in Annapolis to advocate for passage of an affordable housing bill. Rally speakers included State Senator Pam Beidle (Dist 32), Delegate Shaneka Henson (Dist 30A), County Council members Pete Smith (Dist 1) and Lisa Rodvien (Dist 6), Annapolis Alderman Brooks Schandelmeier (Ward 5), and other community activists.

At the County Council meeting following the rally, Action Chair Abby Root testified on the League's behalf in favor of Bill 78-23, Essential Worker Housing Access Act. The legislation, as introduced by Chairman Pete Smith on behalf of County Executive Stuart Pittman, “would create county-wide housing opportunities for essential workers by requiring developers of new residential subdivisions to offer a percentage of units at an affordable price.” The bill is still before Council as members continue to assess bill provisions and offer amendments.



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Panel #1: Funding and Legislative Priorities to Support Affordable Housing

Moderator: Erin Karpewicz, CEO, Arundel Community Development Services, Inc. (ACDS)

Panelists: Owen McEvoy, Deputy Secretary, MD Department of Housing and Community Development; Steuart Pittman, Anne Arundel County Executive; Delegate Shaneka T. Henson, MD District 30A; and Dan Pontious, Housing Policy Coordinator for Baltimore Regional Fair Housing Group.

- Forty-five percent of county renters are cost burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing. According to HUD, affordable housing is generally defined as housing for which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities.

- Partnerships are the key to financing affordable housing solutions. Several programs support development and redevelopment of affordable rental housing units. The Affordable Housing Production program, administered by ACDS on behalf of Anne Arundel County, facilitates development of affordable rental housing units by managing several funding sources.

- Bill 78-23, currently being considered by the AA County Council, will require new development over a certain number of units to offer moderately priced dwelling units.

- There is a need to increase all housing supplies.

Panel #2: County Zoning and Housing Land Use

Moderator: Brian Lopez, President, Osprey Property Company

Panelists: Clifton Martin, CEO and President, Housing Commission of AAC; Janssen Evelyn, Deputy Chief Administrative Office of Land Use, AA County; Jenny Jarkowski, AAC Planning and Zoning Officer; W. Andrew Hanson, VP Development, Homes for America.

- Outdated land use regulations and exclusionary zoning laws restrict the number of homes that can be developed in specific neighborhoods, over time suppressing the housing supply.

- More people need to get involved with the county's regional plans.

- School redistricting to even out school enrollments across county schools will eliminate development barriers that take effect when schools reach their maximum capacities.

Panel #3: Fair Housing and Discrimination

Moderator: Pete Smith, Chair, AA County Council

Panelists: Asha Smith, Director, Equity and Human Rights, AAC; Heather Cassity, Executive Director, Lighthouse Shelter, President of Homeless Coalition; Pam Brown, Executive Director, AA County Partnership for Children, Youth and Families; and Melissa Maddox-Evans, Executive Director/CEO, Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis.

- AAC is experiencing a huge inequity in housing; a safe place to live with dignity is a basic human right.

- Wealth is a de facto proxy for race because economic status has become closely related to race.

- Gentrification displaces people without providing alternatives.

- Homes for developmentally challenged people who lose their parents/caregivers is a challenge. Emergency and temporary housing are in demand.

Panel #4: Advocacy 101 How to Influence Policies and Legislation

Moderator: Brooks Schandelmeir, Alderman, Annapolis Ward 5

Panelists: Henry Bogdan, Policy and Advocacy director, Maryland Nonprofits; Lisa Sarro, General Council, ACDS; Toni Strong-Pratt, CEO, Peoples Builders Consulting; and Patty Prasada-Rao, Senior Consultant, Maryland Nonprofits.

- People must be empowered to use their own voice to advocate for adequate housing.

- Lobbying for change requires identifying people who have the authority to create what is needed: quality, inclusionary housing.

- Important to create an advocacy plan that clarifies what the issue is and why it's important, timely and relevant. #

Advocacy partner news

By Kathy Larrabee, Director and Editor

Whether it's to take advantage of an opportunity or combat an issue, organizations that partner on causes build strength, power, and sway that individual groups may never achieve on their own. Thus, LWVAAC aligns with other nonprofits on common goals to strengthen advocacy and boost public voices.

Currently, LWVAAC is dues-paying member of two coalitions: the [Growth Action Network](#) (GAN), a coalition of community and civic associations, environmental groups, businesses, and individuals, and the [Anne Arundel Affordable Housing Coalition](#) (AAHC), working on solutions to the shortage of affordable housing in the county, particularly for low and moderately low income residents who are the county's workforce.

Growth Action Network news

Recently GAN requested a Zoom meeting with the AAC Office of Planning and Zoning Director Jenny Jarkowski and senior staff. LWVAAC members were invited via email. The purpose of the meeting was to address specific GAN questions based on recent observations and perceptions, including: recent increases in modifications granted for construction projects; any written amendments to the zoning code that would enable upzoning, a term that describes code changes that increase the amount of development allowed in the future; increased traffic at a result of new development near the Annapolis Towne Centre; and expansion plans at Ft. Meade. Requests for meeting details may be addressed to: ganlegcomm@growthaction.net.

In concert with our League and other local organizations, GAN also supports the County Council's efforts to increase workforce housing through legislation and to improve the [Adequate Public Facilities ordinance](#).

Anne Arundel County Affordable Housing Coalition news

LWVAAC Action Chair Abby Root recently participated in a virtual AAHC luncheon meeting. Erin Karpewicz, CEO of Arundel Community Development Services (ACDS) talked about the status of affordable housing in the county. While acknowledging that the county is far behind on solutions to the affordable housing shortage, Ms. Karpewicz observed that progress is being made. She reported there are currently 1,500 affordable units in the pipeline and specifically mentioned The Villages at Marley Station, which is a 750-unit redeveloped project, and Brock Ridge Landing in Jessup, which is a 38 unit newly constructed project. The AAHC also supports the workforce housing bill before the County Council and eagerly awaits its passage. #

League Events

LWVAAC kicks off a new program year

By Alexis Dorsey, Vice President

Mid-September, the LWVAAC Board hosted members at the Busch Annapolis Library for a social with an educational twist. Fall decor and a buffet of finger foods and homemade desserts provided the perfect setting for new and longtime members to catch up after the summer break. The group quickly got down to business when guest speaker Ryan Kirby, public policy specialist at the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, broached the weighty topic of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).

The RCV election method asks voters to rank candidates in order of preference and allows the race to be decided by an instant run-off. Mr. Kirby cited a number of benefits to RCV. Candidates must appeal to a diverse group of voters and address issues and their own qualifications. The majority rule ensures that all voters have a voice in a contested election. RCV also is more inclusive of military and overseas voters.

Critics are concerned that RCV ballots may be confusing to voters and create delays in reporting election results. However, Mr. Kirby pointed out that studies by the Resource Center found that any

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Ryan Kirby is a Towson University graduate and previously served as Chief of Staff for Maryland State Senator Cheryl Kagan.



Members enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect in person at LWVAAC's Welcome Back event held in September at the Busch Annapolis Library. Jeri Schoenfeld, Jane Garbacz, Alfa Stevens and Clyde Martin prepare to enjoy the buffet before delving into the intricacies of ranked choice voting. Kudos to the organizing committee: Abby Root (chair), Alexis Dorsey, Joyce Martin and Dona Sauerburger.

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confusion or delay was negligible. He noted that a potential barrier to implementing RCV initially may be additional costs for equipment, training and public education.

We thank Abby Root and her committee for organizing such an enjoyable and informative “welcome back” for members. #

Here's how RCV works:

We all vote just like we do in single-choice elections, except with RCV, we get to rank candidates in order of preference. In our everyday lives, we're accustomed to ranking things.

To start, all voters' first choices are tallied. If a candidate gets a majority (50 percent + one vote), then that candidate wins. This upholds the principle of majority rule. When we're selecting one candidate for office, the most fair and representative outcome is that they need to earn more than half of the votes to win. In single-choice voting, a majority winner isn't required, so a candidate can win with just 20 percent or 30 percent if no other candidate gets more votes.

If no candidate gets a majority of the first-choice votes, then the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. However, voters who ranked the eliminated candidate as their first choice will have their votes transferred to their second choice candidate. They still have a voice in the election.

After second choice votes are transferred, the candidate with a majority wins. But, if still no candidate gets a majority of votes, **the process is repeated until a candidate has 50 percent + one vote, a majority.**

Combatting Fake News

By Kathy Larrabee, Director and Editor

At a recent LWVAAC discussion of the book *TRUE OR FALSE: A CIA Analyst's Guide to Spotting Fake News* by Cindy L. Otis, members had an opportunity to talk openly about the impact of misinformation and disinformation.

Vice President Alexis Dorsey opened the discussion by recapping the first half of the book, in which Otis cites examples of fake news from ancient times to the present.

Member Tim Swann, an AA County public high school librarian, observed that teens are the intended audience for the book, which could almost be used as a classroom text. In his experience, students primarily rely on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube for information and news.

Alexis asked if the author's interspersed pop quizzes were helpful in learning how to quickly spot fake news by keywords and reporting patterns. Many in the group felt they are already cautious about fact-checking and knowing how to spot photo-shopped images. Participants also acknowledged the importance of identifying trusted sources and the danger of sharing posts, especially ones with sensational or polarizing messages.



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Keying in on personal biases is more challenging for many. In her book, Otis explains how to understand and see past your own information biases to think critically about important issues and put events into context.

President Amanda SubbaRao recommended the book *Freedom of Mind* by Dr. Steven Hassan. From his book, she learned best practices for conversing with family and friends with contrary strongly-held beliefs. Forming an emotional connection is key, because people cling to beliefs that make them feel safe.

In closing, Alexis quoted from the Afterword which the author wrote in 2022 for the 2nd edition of the book. Otis makes the sobering observation that the COVID pandemic, January 6 insurrection and Ukraine conflict occurred in the years since her book first came out and all three were influenced by fake news with deadly consequences. She calls on her readers to be vigilant. #

For more on the subject of disinformation, see A Deeper Dive on p. 18.



Following the November 4 LWVAAC book discussion on disinformation, members gladly turned to lighter topics of conversation over a convivial lunch at Paul's Homewood Cafe.





Leaguers recently rang in the holidays at the Light House Bistro in Annapolis, at the same time supporting an outreach program of the Light House, Annapolis' premier homeless prevention support center. LWVAAC's annual holiday charity drive for the Light House continues through December 31. To contribute, please click [here](#).



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A Deeper Dive

Build trust with intentional conversations to debunk false information

By Kathy Larrabee, Director and Editor

Since the 2016 presidential election, there has been no shortage of tips and lessons on how to spot false information and fake news. For those who have delved deep into the topic, taking next steps may prove harder: learning how to counter false information.

A recent webinar presented by the News Literacy Project (NLP) in collaboration with the National Institute on Civil Discourse and the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF) examined misinformation/disinformation, how to have the hard conversations with people taken in by a viral hoax, fabricated photo, or conspiracy theories, and how to combat misinformation that targets elections. Perhaps you too had a front row Zoom seat for this webinar offered via email to all League members.

DeMario Phipps-Smith, a senior manager of community learning for NLP, explained the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation is inaccurate, incorrect, and/or misleading information that has been shared without deliberate intent. Disinformation, a subcategory of misinformation, is false information created and spread to *intentionally* deceive.

Mr. Phipps-Smith pointed out there is not always a clear line between fact and fake because



Photo by [Jorge Franganillo](#) on [Unsplash](#)

misinformation often plays on an element of truth. The reasons people believe misinformation are complicated, he said. Sometimes fake news plays into our biases, touches us emotionally, and matches our perceptions.

Engaging in careful observation lessens your emotional response to fake news and allows you to engage in critical reasoning, he said. Photos create powerful impressions. If an image seems sensational, ask yourself if the photo is real. To check the authenticity of a photo, use existing online tools on your computer and smartphone to learn the origin and context. Google the words *reverse image*.

Dr. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, founder of the one-time nonprofit AmericaSpeaks* and leader in the field of deliberative democracy suggested people become angry with each other when there's a perception gap. Social sorting, which began in the 1990s with identities like urban/rural, religion, and race, is now correlated with political party to make politics tribal. She believes until trust is

*AmericaSpeaks was active from 1995-2014.

[continued from p. 17]

rebuilt within fractured institutions and among people in their relationships, there won't be adequate solutions to people's susceptibility to misinformation.

"Listening is powerful; it doesn't mean you agree," she said. "Focus on learning and sharing rather than debating or convincing... people rarely change their beliefs in a conversation, but people do often expand understanding through conversation." Lukensmeyer suggested trying these conversational approaches:

listen generously • assume good intent • show genuine curiosity • engage respectfully • practice humility • ask thoughtful questions • strive to understand • share personal experiences and/or stories • acknowledge areas of agreement • know when to end the conversation • express appreciation for the conversation.

Chelsey Cartwright, a program manager with the LWVEF Democracy Truth Project, spoke about her League work to counter misinformation/disinformation and to advance a better public understanding of the effects on democratic and electoral processes. She encouraged participants to investigate bad information and to call it out by sharing truth. But, she said, we should first "pause" before acting to be thoughtful about our approach. She encouraged civic engagement, such as working at the polls and serving on local government committees to keep lines of communication open. She promoted VOTE411.org as an important election information source.

To combat misinformation during elections, Ms. Cartwright offered these tips for local Leagues:

- Avoid information gaps
- Increase public knowledge on the voting process and procedures
- Plan voter education opportunities
- Develop partnerships with trusted messengers to ensure the amplification of community education
- Provide tools and resources to identify misinformation to communities in an array of languages and formats. #

How to build a new fabric of civic habits

Inventory your own relationships to ask where you have replaced trust with judgment.

Ask yourself which relationships are important to you and how you can elevate trusted information with those individuals.

Identify people with whom you want to reestablish personal relationships and take steps to do so.

Inventory your trusted information sources.

Assess whether you are spreading misinformation.

Join community civic organizations, especially ones working to build trust across divides.

Assess your level of trust with each of our democratic institutions.

Identify any actions you can take about what you learn.

Return to the most basic of our democratic practices: work the polls, observe the elections, tell your story.

In League

The Second Founding: Constitution Day 2023

By Marg Duffy

Attending the annual Constitution Day at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law in Baltimore is one of my favorite League-sponsored activities.

This year, the Constitution Day program fell on the birthdays of my husband and our close friend. So, we made the day a group outing to celebrate birthdays and honor the date the U.S. Constitution was signed.

Held in the University's Ceremonial Courtroom, the panel discussion never disappoints. Five Maryland Carey law professors addressed the historic and contemporary issues of the *Second Founding*, including interpretations and implications of the 2023 Supreme Court decision involving the equal protection clause and affirmative action.

President Lincoln never mentioned the word slavery in his Gettysburg address because ending slavery was the goal. However, a series of amendments to the Constitution became necessary; many believe these to be our Nation's *Second Founding*. Critical to providing African Americans with the rights and protections of citizenship, Constitutional Amendments 13, 14, and 15 were added: banning slavery, the equal protection clause, and black American men's voting rights.

Discussion centered on the 14th Amendment. In June 2023, the Supreme Court decision held that certain race-conscious college admissions policies violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. In *Students for Fair Admission vs Harvard*, the majority opinion by Justice Roberts stated an applicant "must be

treated based on his or her experience as an individual, not on the basis of race." Justice Thomas also wrote that the "policies fly in the face of our colorblind Constitution." Justice Sotomayor in her minority opinion contended that the 14th Amendment's commitment to racial equality can be upheld by employing "race-conscious means in a society that is not and has never been colorblind."

All in all, the day was uplifting in many ways. I encourage all League members to mark Constitution Day September 17, 2024, on their calendars for an engaging, patriotic program and energizing reception afterwards. #



Member Marg Duffy and her husband Carl Harbachewski (standing) are joined by Robin Faitoute and her husband Randy Schneider (seated) at the 2023 Constitution Day program, where they celebrated Carl and Robin's birthdays.