



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF PENNSYLVANIA
Making Democracy Work®
Grassroots leadership since 1920

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE STATE
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE**

**PUBLIC HEARING ON PENNSYLVANIA'S READINESS FOR THE NOVEMBER 4,
GENERAL ELECTION**

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2008

ETHICAL SOCIETY, RITTENHOUSE SQUARE, PHILDELPHIA

**Presented by Lora, Lavin, Vice President for Issues and Action
League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania**

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the League's preparations for the upcoming General Election. As you know, encouraging informed participation in the political process, including voting, is central to our mission and protecting the right of every citizen to vote is always at the top of our advocacy agenda.

In our advocacy role the League has actively worked alone and in coalition with other advocacy groups on fundamental issues related to the voting process including Pennsylvania's implementation of the requirements of the National Voter Registration Act, and the Help America Vote Act.

Of particular concern to the League is that administrative procedures ensure that every citizen who wants to vote can do so, that no citizen be wrongfully denied their right to cast a ballot. We applaud the efforts by the Department of State to upgrade Pennsylvania's centralized voter registration system to make data entry more efficient. We support the Secretary of State's strong directives to the counties clarifying that any citizen whose right to vote is challenged or any reason has a right to cast a provisional ballot, that when electors show up to vote only to find that the voting systems are inoperable, they have a right to cast an emergency paper ballot, and that a sufficient number of provisional ballots and emergency paper ballots be distributed to the polling places before the polls open to immediately handle situations that arise that require their use. Voters should not have to wait for voting systems to be repaired or for emergency ballots to be delivered.

We also applaud the Department of States efforts to make poll worker training more accessible through the distribution of DVD's and posting training materials on its

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
226 Forster Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17102-3220
www.palwv.org
717.234.1576

website. The League has long advocated a universal requirement for poll worker training. We encourage all those involved in working at the polls to take advantage of training offered by County Election Boards and to ask questions about issues they do not understand.

The League encourages citizens who encounter problems at the polls to report these problems to our toll free number (800-564-6598) or, especially if the problem requires immediate attention, any of several election protection hotlines including the Department of States 1-877-VOTESPA hotline. On the voter information page of our state website (www.palwv.org) voters can download our Citizens' Poll Watchers Checklist. In addition to the items listed it can be used to record other problems and returned to our state office. We also have a downloadable brochure called "Taking Charge" which has information on registration and voting including what to expect at the polls.

This brings me to our voter education and elections services activities. At the state and local level we continue to carry out the traditional activities for which we are well known including voter registration, voter's guides, and candidate forums. For example, we are happy to announce that Attorney General candidates Tom Corbett and John Morganelli have agreed to a televised debate at WPVI on October 28.

Thanks to modern technology we are able to make all of these services available to an ever wider public. Our Voters Guide to candidates for statewide office is posted on our voter information web page and citizens can visit our national voter information website, www.vote411.org for Presidential candidate information.

I call particular attention to Smart Voter (www.smartvoter.org), a unique new on line Voter's Guide tool launched by our local Leagues in Delaware County and the Greater Pittsburgh Area. For this election, a voters in any part of the state can enter their address and zip code and view the offices and candidates that will be on their ballot in November and the wording of the Act 64 Water and Sever Improvements Bond Referendum. Most important, Smart Voter provides candidates with almost unlimited space to post biographical and other information about their candidacies including endorsements, and provide links to their campaign web site, email addresses, phone numbers and other contact information. Unlike our printed Voters Guides, the information candidates post on Smart Voter can be adapted to changing circumstances like the current economic crisis. Opposing candidates can also respond to each others positions on issues. Personal attacks are not permitted. The Smart Voter committee is working hard to get 100% candidate participation and I am happy to report that we have nearly achieved that by the candidates running for the statewide offices of Treasurer, Auditor and Attorney General. Many candidates for Congress and the General Assembly have also posted information. We encourage all make use of this tool to reach potential voters in their districts. Smart voter also has links to the Department of State's polling

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania

226 Forster Street

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17102-3220

www.palwv.org

717.234.1576

place look up and other voter information. . The sponsors of this initiative hope to be able to make it available next year for candidates for local public office.

We are particularly proud of our grassroots organization which enables us to provide a variety of elections services in local communities around the state. Our local Leagues are delivering an impressive list of voter service activities in their areas. These include voter registration drives at places such as food banks, YWCA's, farmer's markets, and schools and colleges, print and on line Voters Guides and forums for Congressional and General Assembly candidate forums, some of which will be televised. Several local Leagues have met with local election officials to iron out issues germane to the upcoming elections. Our national president, Mary Wilson, recently met with election officials in Allegheny County. Some Leagues have listed telephone numbers that people call for information before and on Election Day. Members in the Philadelphia area will be staffing the Channel 6 ABC hotline on Election Day. Our League in Carlisle helped residents at a county retirement home fill out absentee ballot applications. The League in Wilkes Barre spoke to 400 Pennsylvania Job Corp students on the importance of voting. The Lackawanna League has helped draft a guide for poll workers and of course, many of our members are serving as poll workers. I am sure there is more that we don't know about.

As with any endeavor, our ability to provide a menu of election services is limited by available resources. Our work is very volunteer intensive. We always wish we could do more. The same is true of our advocacy role. In this regard we welcome the involvement and partnership of the numerous organizations that are working at the national, state and local levels to encourage participation in voting, protect the right to vote and improve the voting process.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
226 Forster Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17102-3220
www.palwv.org
717.234.1576