

# Taking Action

## WORKING TOGETHER TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC POLICY

In the League, we tend to focus our efforts on influencing legislative measures in the US Congress and state and local legislative bodies by preparing testimony, lobbying legislators, and initiating advocacy campaigns on issues of interest to our members. We also file lawsuits, file “friend of the court” (amicus) briefs in court cases, and monitor and comment when regulations are being written for executive branch agencies. The following guidelines apply to all these activities.

### General Guidelines

This section is organized with general guidelines for action, followed by the role of the national office and staff in advocacy, then how to use Impact on Issues to take action at the state and local levels, and finally how state and local Leagues can request permission to take national action on non-priority federal issues.

The goal is to work collaboratively among the levels of League with consistent messages and strategies. Effective advocacy efforts on national issues depend on a partnership at all League levels – lobbying in Washington and constituent lobbying at home. This one-two punch reinforces the League’s impact in influencing national and state legislation.

### *Working Together to Influence Public Policy*

The process used in formulating positions and acting at the grassroots level makes the League unique and sets the League apart from other organizations. The fact that we are members of not only a local League, but a state League and the League of Women Voters of the United States, makes us a powerful force.

### *Speaking with One Voice*

“Speaking with one voice” is one of the most important tenets of the League. The national League is responsible for determining strategies and action policies that ensure that the League’s message on national issues is consistent throughout the country. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for a consistent state message, and local Leagues must cooperate with one another to ensure that regional issues are addressed in a manner consistent with neighboring Leagues. Typically, the president of the national, state, or local League is the only person who speaks for the League in an official capacity, unless another person has been designated as the official spokesperson on a specific issue. This may be a League expert, a senior staff person, or a former board member. The key is that this designation is explicitly made by the appropriate Board. This helps to ensure that the League speaks with one voice, which is essential for our effectiveness as an advocacy and lobbying organization.

### *Voter Service*

The League’s nonpartisan voter services activities and lobbying activities must be kept separate and voters’ guides and other voter service materials and publications must not contain statements of League positions.



## **League Lobbying**

League lobbying is based on member study and agreement on selected issues and involves concerted efforts to achieve public policies consistent with League positions. League Boards at every level set their own priorities. League lobbying promotes or opposes specific pieces of legislation. The LWVUS public policy positions are the official statements of positions for each issue area and reflect the program adopted by the most recent national convention.

## **Advocacy vs. Lobbying**

Advocacy is a broader concept than lobbying. Advocacy activities are often considered “educational.” This is the case even when only one side of an issue is presented if no action on a piece of legislation is requested. Such activities can include: (1) developing public policy briefs that analyze issues and provide detailed information and recommendations for addressing them through specific reforms and (2) providing forums for discussing issues and educating policymakers and the public. Speaking in support of the organization is also advocating (i.e., for the overall cause of the organization).

Lobbying is defined as an attempt to influence specific legislation, both legislation that has been introduced and specific legislation that has been proposed. Lobbying includes actions that transmit a point of view on a specific piece of legislation to elected officials or their staffs, as well as actions urging the public to contact their legislators about a specific piece of legislation. It also includes communications to the general public expressing a view on specific referenda or other ballot measures.

## **Applying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Lens to Our Work**

Applying a DEI lens is a way of examining a program, process, product, or otherwise with an eye toward how it will be perceived by a variety of communities, voices, and perspectives, and what barriers may exist that prevent it from being equitable or inclusive to everyone. We recommend Leagues apply a DEI lens to any position that they utilize. When examining your work through a DEI lens you should ask these key questions:

1. Who is involved in the process? Leagues should consider whether this work impacts a group or community, if the voice of the impacted community is represented, and how diverse the group of decision-makers who represent a variety of relevant viewpoints is.
2. Who will be impacted? Leagues should consider who benefits or could be harmed, whether it helps meet the needs of underserved voters, how we considered various, specific marginalized groups, and how they'll be impacted.
3. What are the likely intended and unintended outcomes? Leagues should consider the issue we are trying to address, what we hope will happen, the potential negative impacts, who could be hurt by this, the supporting data or evidence, and how it might be perceived by others.
4. Does this align with our vision for an equitable and inclusive organization? Leagues should consider how equity is addressed, what barriers it might place in the way of achieving equity, and how it impacts the organization's culture.
5. What changes could we make to improve equity? Leagues should consider the short- and long-term goals, policies or bylaws that need to be added or amended, the benefits to members, and the benefits for partners and/or members of the community.



Leagues should be aware that this process will take more time in the beginning, but as the DEI lens is regularly applied it will become easier to move through the questions, identify opportunities, and react in a way that bolsters DEI. In instances where Leagues go through the questions and find that the DEI is not present fully or partially, Leagues should work to include as many factors as possible, consider obstacles that led to gaps in one area versus others, and determine how to continue to build on this work any time the League takes action. When applying the DEI lens to events, Leagues should consult the DEI checklist on the League Management Site.

Following the 2020 Convention, the DEI board committee met with other board members to review nine positions to provide additional insight into how Leagues could apply the DEI lens to the work. The positions reviewed were Selection of the President, Climate Change, Death Penalty, Equality of Opportunity/Equal Rights, Gun Policy, Health Care, Immigration, Sentencing Policy, and Violence Prevention.

These positions are indicated with a  symbol throughout this document.

### ***The following takeaways emerged:***

- Editorial changes were needed for the Gun Policy position, which included outdated language describing the types of guns.
- Editorial changes were needed for the Immigration position, which included the term “undocumented workers” and did not reflect current criminal law.
- Editorial changes were not needed for the Sentencing Policy and Violence Prevention positions, since both will be augmented by the new Criminal Justice position adopted at Convention 2022.
- The updated Health Care position, also adopted at Convention 2022, will replace and clarify language regarding the impact of health care access for communities of color.
- The Death Penalty position, Selection of the President, and Climate Change met DEI review.
- The Equality of Opportunity/Equal Rights position needed more in-depth, substantive changes.

## **Advocacy at the National Level**

### ***Establishing National Priorities***

To guide its work in Congress, the LWVUS Board adopts lobbying priorities every year. The goal is to maintain focus on issues of primary importance identified by LWVUS.

The goals are to:

- Project a focused and consistent message.
- Enhance the League’s effectiveness and impact.
- Build the League’s credibility and visibility.
- Ensure that the League has sufficient issue and political expertise.
- Reflect program decisions made at convention and/or council.
- Build on strong member interest and support.
- Enable the League to manage resources effectively.



## ***LWVUS Advocacy and Litigation Team***

The Advocacy and Litigation team works together to ensure the League's advocacy and litigation reflect our public policy positions.

The advocacy team, working in collaboration with the LWVUS Board, is responsible for developing and implementing strategies for lobbying and advocating on national issues. LWVUS staff lobbyists carry out the day-to-day monitoring and action plans for the League and oversee the LWVUS Lobby Corps. Advocacy staff work with LWV leaders and activists in targeted states and congressional districts to help develop and implement grassroots lobbying strategies.

The litigation team engages with state and national legal cases, researches national litigation and litigation trends, creates legal resources to educate Leagues, and consults with Leagues and legal partners in support of LWVUS priorities. Litigation staff work with LWV leaders and activists to help align litigation across the country, offering legal resources to state and local Leagues.

## ***Action Alerts***

The LWVUS advocacy team sends out regular Action Alerts based on League priorities detailing the subject under consideration, the proposed action steps, and the individuals to be contacted. Action Alerts are sent to the League's online grassroots supporter list and state and local League presidents, who are expected to respond with the appropriate action.

## ***LWVUS Lobby Corps***

The Lobby Corps (LC) is made up of Washington, DC-area League member volunteers who lobby each month on a targeted assignment at the direction of LWVUS advocacy staff when Congress is in session.

## ***Grassroots Lobbying***

Advocacy staff work with LWV leaders and activists in targeted states and congressional districts to help develop and implement grassroots lobbying strategies. In addition to working directly with staff on targeted requests, members can join the LWVUS online grassroots support list. League members with email addresses on file are automatically subscribed to this list. The list also includes activists and other interested members of the public who believe in the League's mission.

## **State and Local Advocacy and Lobbying on LWVUS Priority Issues**

Once LWVUS has identified its legislative priorities, state and local Leagues are requested to act on those issues under guidance from LWVUS. Optimally, state and local Leagues should encourage members to contact their national legislators on key League national issues following LWVUS guidance. Lobbying in Washington is vitally important, but direct lobbying of members of Congress by constituents is often the key to persuading them to support the League's position. The conversations that League leaders and members have with their representative or senators can make the difference in how they vote.

On key issues, LWVUS may call on League presidents to take state-specific actions before critical votes in Congress. LWV presidents also will receive sample messages for use on issues on which the organization is actively lobbying.



Each state and local League president is expected to take whatever official action is requested in response to the requests.

### **Local Leagues and Members**

While the LWVUS Board takes the lead in national action and keeps League action synchronized with the US Congress, there is a role for every League in national legislation in many circumstances. For example, when responding to an LWVUS action alert, a local League president sends a message on behalf of the organization (i.e., on League letterhead). Members are also encouraged to respond to Action Alerts. Please note that using the Action Alert tool to send a letter to your representatives does not require the submission of a Federal Action Request form.

### **State and Local Action on Federal Issues**

A state or local League wishing to act on an issue at the national level must consult with the LWVUS. **The state League must support a local League's action request.** Leagues and League members must lobby only their own legislators. Individual members are welcome to act on their own behalf without any mention of or attribution to the League. For regional issues, which touch multiple Leagues, all the Leagues in the affected region must be part of the decision-making process. LWVUS often helps to facilitate such regional efforts, particularly when the situation involves federal law.

### **Federal Action Request Form**

For League convenience and to ensure a prompt reply, LWVUS has developed an online form that goes directly to the Advocacy and Litigation team at LWVUS. The federal action request process exists to solicit LWVUS approval to take an action related to any federal office. All action at the federal level, relating to federal law or in federal court, must be authorized by the LWVUS office. This includes any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a federal issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, writing a letter to the editor, or signing with a legal partner using the LWV brand. Effective action on national legislative and litigation issues depends on a partnership at all League levels.

The Federal Action Request Form should be used any time a League would like to act at the federal level or is contemplating litigation in the federal courts. The form can be found on the LWVUS League Management Site at the following URL: <https://www.lwv.org/federal-action-request-form>

A state or local League wishing to take a federal advocacy action or participate in federal litigation should consult with LWVUS about the intended action. Depending on the action, the state/local League is asked to provide the following information, which is outlined in the Federal Action Request Form:

#### **Advocacy**

- The proposed action and the message to be conveyed.
  - If you are requesting to send or co-sign a letter, please attach that letter in the appropriate section of this form.
- The LWVUS position on which the action is based.
- The timeline for the action (e.g., sending the message, the deadline for signing the letter).



- Details about other groups that are involved in this effort.
- Evidence that the issue is a priority for that state or local League.
  - Evidence of an existing policy position is required. If a local League is requesting permission to contact its US Senator(s) on an issue that has not been the subject of an LWVUS Action Alert, it should provide evidence that the action has been authorized by its state League. If a local League is joining a coalition letter at the state level, it must also have sign-off from its state League.
- Any relevant additional supporting documents.

## Litigation

Leagues are encouraged to consult the League Guidance for Assessing Litigation Opportunities.

- The proposed litigation and basis for action (e.g., voting rights, improving elections, redistricting, money in politics, health care).
- Details about other groups that are involved in this effort.
- Name of legal partner(s).
- US court where lawsuit would be filed.
- Deadline for confirming participation.

LWVUS staff will review the advocacy and litigation requests to determine whether they are consistent with League positions, confirm that the proposed activities will not interfere with LWV actions in other federal spaces, and determine whether the matter involves a priority issue that does not compromise the overall national advocacy and litigation portfolio.

LWVUS's approval process for a federal action request outside of the Campaign for Making Democracy Work® includes assessing whether the action:

1. is an unforeseen or unexpected crisis, and
2. requires an immediate response, or
3. addresses a significant risk of harm to many.

When the League decides to work on issues outside of the Campaign for Making Democracy Work, we seek to ally with similar nonpartisan organizations that lead on those issues. Often our allyship takes the form of cosigning a letter written by an allied organization that has the expertise and credibility to lead on the issue. One common type of federal action request is League wanting to send a letter to a federal official or suggesting that LWVUS sign a letter. League members should use the Federal Action Request Form to request LWVUS approval for local or state Leagues to co-sign another organization's letter or send a letter of their own that is addressed to any office at the federal level. The state League must support a local League's action request.

## Offices Leagues Can Contact

Leagues may send a letter or communicate only with the office of an official who represents their jurisdiction. For example, a local League may communicate with its representative in the House of Representatives, but it must receive approval from the state chapter. The level of the League should be aligned with the level of government, so a local League wishing to contact one of its state's senators in Congress should do so through its state League. Local Leagues should coordinate with the state League office before submitting a federal action request to LWVUS.



Level of League	Federal Offices That May Be Contacted	Chapter(s) That Must Approve
Local	District representative in US House of Representatives Executive branch offices/federal agencies	State and National
State	State representatives and senators in US House and Senate Executive branch offices/federal agencies	National
National	US Congress, executive branch offices/federal agencies	LWVUS Board and through membership agreement from Impact on Issues Policy positions

### **Regional Advocacy**

In the event that the issue in question impacts multiple local Leagues or multiple state Leagues, it is imperative that all the Leagues in the affected region be part of the decision-making. Prior to submitting a Federal Action Request for a regional issue, please coordinate with all Leagues in the affected region to ensure that all parties agree to take that action. After confirming the participation of all affected Leagues, a Federal Action Request Form may be submitted with the name of the point of contact at each League that agreed to participate and their contact information. Rather than first acquiring LWVUS approval and then coordinating affected League participation, this process prioritizes local decision-making on local issues. Leagues considering engaging in regional advocacy should thoughtfully review the criteria in the next section for acting in the community to determine whether to accept an opportunity to partner on the issue or to request that other Leagues in the region partner on the advocacy.

### **State and Local Action Using Impact on Issues**

#### ***Using National Positions at the Regional, State, and Local Levels***

Both the Principles (broad statements of beliefs) and Positions (specific statements and guidelines) can be used at the state and local levels to develop support for actions taken at those levels. Impact on Issues, while often citing the federal level of government, is also designed as a guide to encourage state and local Leagues to develop plans for acting at the community level.

League positions at the national level are by their very nature broad and general in scope; they are guides for acting. Local Leagues are responsible for determining action at the local level, and state Leagues are responsible for determining action at the state level and ensuring that the action is consistent throughout the state. Therefore, state and local Leagues must determine that members understand and generally agree with actions taken based on League positions; they should ensure that the action reflects the unique circumstances of the affected community. As with other action, when there are ramifications beyond a League’s own governmental jurisdiction, that League must consult other Leagues that may be affected.

Typical actions include any effort aimed at influencing a decision on a federal issue, such as communicating with an elected or appointed official, joining a coalition, taking part in a press conference or rally, or writing a letter to the editor.



## *Acting in the Community*

Interpretation of a League position is the responsibility of the board wishing to take action based on a position. Local League boards are responsible for interpreting local, state, and/or national positions before acting. State boards interpret state, regional, and/or national positions; the national board interprets national positions. Interpretation may be influenced by local conditions. LWVUS staff is available for consultation related to national positions. A League contemplating action on a community issue should consider the following questions:

- Does the League have a position that supports the proposed action?
- Is there broad member understanding and agreement?
- Is it a priority for the League?
- Does the League have a unique role to play or a chance to take the lead?
- Are other organizations or a coalition already working on the issue?
- Is this the best use of the League's resources (time and money) or would they be better spent on other activities?
- Is the timing right? Is action likely in the near future?
- What kind of community involvement would best support the League's efforts?