



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Winter 2024

LWVVT Board Sets Legislative Priorities

(Lila Richardson)

The new legislative session has begun, and the LWVVT has identified our priority issues. They are: Elections/Voting; Ethics; Health Care; Environment; and Basic Human Needs. Should any new gun safety bills be filed, that issue will be added to the list.

Here are the bills that we are currently following closely, under our priority headings.

Elections/Voting

S.32: An act relating to ranked-choice voting for presidential primary elections

This bill passed the Senate last year. The House Committee on Government Operations tacked the RCV bill onto another elections bill that the League couldn't support, and that the majority of senators didn't support. Nevertheless, S. 32 still exists. The House could choose to take it up again or it could be incorporated in another elections bill.

If you are interested in volunteering, or learning more about this issue, email Betty Keller at bkeller@lwvofvt.org. (Use this email address only for RCV for Betty.)

Ethics

There will be a municipal ethics bill and a general miscellaneous ethics bill. The bills are currently in draft form.

24-0461 An act relating to creating a uniform Municipal Code of Ethics

24-0229 Executive; governmental ethics; State Ethics Commission; State Code of Ethics

Legislative testimony about the ethics bills was expected to start on Jan. 16th.

Health Care

H.118: An act relating to Medicare Savings Program eligibility

S.61: this is a companion bill to H.118

The bill would improve access to health care by raising the income limits for low income Medicare recipients who have difficulty paying for Medicare premiums and Medicare cost sharing. The League has joined a Medicare Affordability Coalition working to pass the bill. The bill is also incorporated into a larger Medicaid reform bill that is expected to be released this week. This larger bill proposes different changes in eligibility for Medicaid, mostly for Vermonters under 65, in addition to the Medicare Savings Program changes.

Cont'd on p. 6

Message from the Board

Winter 2024

IT'S A NEW YEAR. LET'S DEFEND DEMOCRACY.

It's mid-January, and with the flush of the New Year behind us, most of us are settling into our daily and seasonal routines.

Break free from your comfort zone by making the League of Women Voters your New Year resolution! Check our website www.lwvofvt.org/get-involved to volunteer for any one of a list of committees. Try something totally different. You have nothing to lose – and we have everything to gain.

The 2024 election cycle is here. Attacks on our democracy are constant and the League is active in building more trust in our elections and countering mis- and dis-information. Here are some of the ways, both big and small, where you can commit your talents to empowering your community today!

Registering Voters. We register voters at high schools, prisons, naturalization ceremonies, and public events. It would be terrific to have a Coordinator help organize and coordinate our efforts - a central hub, taking in requests and scheduling volunteers. Contact us if you would like to do this.

Empowering Voters. Be part of the team that engages citizens around the upcoming elections, as we host debates and forums for candidates running at all levels of government this election year that will give voters the opportunity to learn more about the candidates representing them.

Outreach to Vulnerable and Under-served Voters. Many citizens' votes are at risk of not being counted as they are unable to participate equally in the voting process. A member in Barre is interested in registering homeless voters and elderly residents in nursing homes. Would you like to help?

Passionate about defending democracy? Help our Advocacy team follow bills and provide public support for policy priorities through testimony and letters to the editor. If paid family and medical leave is important to you, think of representing the League at the Vermont Paid Leave Coalition bi-weekly Zoom meetings.

Health Care For All. If you are an advocate for affordable, accessible, equitable healthcare, the Health Care Committee needs you as they work for state-funded health care in Vermont and on the national level.

Tech help is always needed. If you have expertise and skills working with the media, branding, designing publications, writing newsletters, compiling databases, etc. Share your wisdom with us. Email league@lwvofvt.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Akin to our small state, The League of Women Voters of Vermont is both small and mighty. And this is because of you...our members. Thank you for your contribution of time.

Sue Racanelli

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Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.

If you would like to join the League, go to our website, <https://my.lwv.org/vermont>, e-mail, or write:

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Montpelier, VT 05601-1391

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LWVVT Adopts New Position on Privatization

At a Special Convention on December 14, 2023, the LWVVT adopted a new position on privatization stating, in part, “The League of Women Voters of Vermont believes that health care, like other programs that provide and protect basic human needs, should be considered a public good.” The full text can be found on p.5.

The LWVVT has long supported a national single payer insurance program, and also supports a state-based universal health care program as an interim alternative until we can achieve a national plan. In the meantime, Medicare, our national insurance program for the elderly and disabled, is becoming increasingly privatized. This is causing harm to patients and wasting taxpayer dollars by diverting funds from health care to wasteful administration costs and profit.

In response to increasing movement of Medicare money from traditional Medicare to private entities (e.g., Medicare Advantage policies) we sought permission from LWVUS to advocate against the ACO REACH program, supported by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid innovation.* That request was denied. Staff cited two reasons:

- 1) Health care is not in the list of public goods in our privatization position, and
- 2) The LWVUS privatization position stipulates criteria that should be met before a service or good is transferred from the public sector to the private sector; however, it is silent on what should happen if those criteria are not met. The

position does not talk at all about services that are currently provided by the private sector that would be better provided by the public sector. In addition, staff stated that LWVUS strongly supports Medicare and is not well-enough informed on the concerns to approve advocacy against a program *within* Medicare.

Stymied on this front, the LWVVT, encouraged by League health care reform advocates across the country ([tinyurl.com/Contact-LWV-HCR-4US](https://www.lwvvt.org/contact)), adopted a study *to examine and evaluate the various ways that health care fits the criteria to be included as a public good as defined in our position; and whether the position should be expanded to include the other direction as well: movement of services that are public goods from the private sector to the public sector.*

After months of research by a study committee, and a meeting of members to reach consensus on the subject, our new position was adopted.

At this time, we can use the position on the state level. However, the intent is to bring the position to the LWVUS convention in June 2024 to add health care as a common good to the LWVUS position on privatization by Concurrence. Health Care Committee Chair Betty Keller and others have begun work on this already. You will be learning more about this effort in the weeks leading up to the Convention.

*The League “speaks with one voice.” Therefore, for state and local Leagues to advocate at the federal level, permission must be obtained from LWVUS.

**MORE THAN 150 MILLION PEOPLE ARE THROWN
BELOW THE POVERTY LINE ANNUALLY DUE TO
OUT OF POCKET HEALTH EXPENSES**

Public Services International

(The global union federation of workers in public services)

Naturalization Ceremonies Return to State House

Help Us Register New Citizens to Vote



League volunteers attend all the Naturalization Ceremonies in Vermont to welcome new citizens and give them the opportunity to register to vote. We give our Voting In Vermont brochures to each new citizen and have translations of the brochure available in Nepali, Somali, Chinese, and Swahili. In 2023 we welcomed 422 new citizens and logged 89 volunteer hours.

This year in addition to ceremonies in the Burlington and Rutland Federal Courthouses, the September 11th ceremony at the Statehouse has returned after the Covid shutdown hiatus. The League prepares a reception for this one, so many volunteers will be needed. Also, some ceremonies will be held in schools.

The USCIS and the Federal District Court have released the schedule for 2024. There are no ceremonies scheduled for January. The first ceremony for 2024 will be February 16th at 2 PM in the Tuttle Middle School, South Burlington. The full schedule is posted on the Vermont League website. If you would like to take part in these ceremonies, contact Sonja Schuyler, sonjapeter@comcast.net, 802-899-3657.

Library Series Rounds the Bend

This year's LWV/Kellogg-Hubbard Library program series, "Election Issues in Democracy" has passed the half-way point.

Former Rep, Tim Jerman stood in for former Sen. Chris Pearson to talk about the Electoral College and National Popular Vote. In December, Susan Clark guided us through Constructive Discourse. Finally, Sec. of State Sarah Copeland-Hanzas joined AOE's Martha Diess to discuss the importance of civics education and civic engagement.

This program was moderated by Tom McKone.



Moderator Tom McKone, Martha Diess, Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, Michelle Singer, KHL Adult Programs Coordinator

Still to come are:

Feb. 14 – Redistricting, with Redistricting Commission Chair Tom Little

Mar. 13 - Mis/disinformation, featuring journalist Dave Gram and AI expert Prof. Emeritus Mich Kabay of Norwich University. VTDigger CEO Sky Barsch will moderate this discussion.

These programs are held live at the Library and live-streamed by Onion River Community Access.

"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country." ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

PRIVATIZATION OF HEALTH CARE POSITION

The League of Women Voters of Vermont believes that health care, like other programs that provide and protect basic human needs, should be considered a public good. The LWVVT believes that public funding, oversight, and delivery of essential health care services (including tests, treatments, facilities, etc.) are necessary to optimize equity and access (including for racially, economically, geographically, and other underserved populations). Similarly, quality, transparency, accountability and affordability are critically necessary for effective administration. Further, the League supports public oversight of all aspects of health care from policy-making to administration to accountability, and public participation in policy-making and accountability, as essential.

LWVVT believes the current private-enterprise, for-profit business model for providing health care is inappropriate for the common good, or to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable members of society. It is not working for most Americans, their providers, or their communities in the following ways:

- Private for-profit corporations have a fiduciary responsibility to their *shareholders* rather than to patients or public health. The LWVVT favors a system where fiduciary responsibility is to patients.
- Health care is not discretionary spending where consumers can choose what product or service, which brand, and how much to purchase. Patients do not have perfect information, and they are usually not able to make decisions and seek care based on comparison shopping. The LWVVT favors a system that ensures that patients needing health care have those needs assessed based on “standards of care,” offered equitably and constrained by public policy rather than the patient's ability to pay.
- Lack of a profitable market for providers can create health-care deserts in poor or low-population areas. The LWVVT favors a system where all communities have access to quality basic health care because this will improve both individual and public health.
- Free market principles require that anyone who benefits from a service must pay for it, and anyone who does not pay for it should not benefit from it. The LWVVT favors a system where health care needs are met regardless of a patient's ability to pay because this will improve our longevity, and general welfare.
- People do not consume health care on a supply-demand curve. A person without a disease has no interest in purchasing treatment for that disease even if it is free. A person whose child's life depends upon a standard treatment should not have to forego their child's care because its purchase price is beyond their means. In addition, patients cannot legally vary the amount of a prescribed product they purchase based on price, nor would such variation typically serve their health.

In addition, the League supports health care as a public good for fiscal reasons. Our current multi-payer, multi-layered system contains significant financial waste, including excessive administrative costs and misdirected marketing costs that create additional barriers to care.

Therefore, where private entities fail to deliver, the League supports de-privatizing.

In sum, the League opposes further privatization of needed health care and favors de-privatization of services and facilities that are currently owned, managed or financed by for-profit corporations.

Adopted at Special Convention, December 14, 2023

Priorities, Cont'd from p. 1

An op-ed by Health Care Advocate Mike Fisher explains the Medicare Savings Program bill: <https://vtdigger.org/2023/12/22/mike-fisher-vermonters-on-medicare-are-struggling-with-high-costs-a-bill-before-the-legislature-would-help/>

For more information about these bills, contact Lila Richardson at lilamrichardson@gmail.com.

Rep. Farlice-Rubio, a member of the House Health Care Committee, has introduced two health care reform bills that are currently in draft short form.

24-0539

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to prohibit for-profit entities from purchasing health care facilities in Vermont and would provide authority for the State Auditor to review the budgets of all entities regulated by the Green Mountain Care Board. It would require prompt payment of medical claims, regulate pay-per-performance models, and limit certain insurer practices. The bill would seek to address consumer confusion regarding the marketing and use of Medicare Advantage plans and would direct Vermont's Attorney General (AG) to take legal action against the federal government regarding both traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans. The bill would also direct Vermont's AG to take legal action against the federal government over certain aspects of federal health care reform initiatives. And the bill would direct the allowable uses of excess revenues generated by nonprofit entities in the health care sector and would limit the collection and use of patient data.

The League's new position on Privatization of Health Care is particularly applicable to 24-0539.

24-0540

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to direct the Department of Health to develop and administer a statewide electronic medical records system, with goals of improving individual and population health outcomes, protecting patient privacy, eliminating the need for multiple interfaces, and minimizing the

administrative burden on health care providers while making health information accessible for purposes of patient care and clinical research. For more information about these bills, contact Betty Keller at bjkellermd@gmail.com.

S. 211 - An act relating to health care reform and to the regulatory duties of the Green Mountain Care Board.

Environment

Due to the worldwide increase in public health and environmental concerns about PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," Vermont legislators are considering eleven bills on regulating and banning these toxins from products and from discharge into our water, air, and soil. More information about these chemicals is at: <https://www.ewg.org/what-are-pfas-chemicals>. Vermont has issued a PFAS Roadmap for 2023: <https://dec.vermont.gov/document/pfas-roadmap-2023>.

The League will be watching these bills, especially S.197 and H.152.

S.197, sponsored by Sen. Ginny Lyons, is an act relating to the procurement and distribution of products containing perfluoroalkyl and poly-fluoroalkyl substances and monitoring adverse health conditions attributed to perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

H.152, sponsored by Representative Kari Dolan, is a similar PFAS bill.

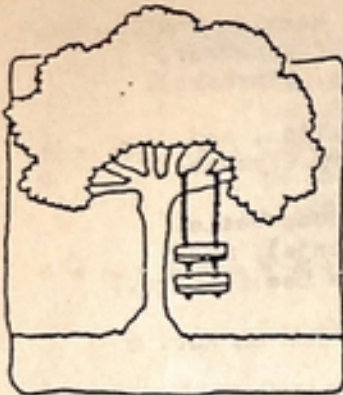
If you are interested in helping to move this piece of legislation forward this session, contact Marguerite Adelman at madel51353@gmail.com.

Basic Human Needs

H.66: An act relating to paid family and medical leave insurance

This bill passed the House last year and is currently in the Sen. Health and Welfare Comm. Housing: The legislature is expected to work on bills to increase affordable housing options. The League will send out weekly updates on legislative action scheduled for that week. If you would like to work on any of the legislative issues listed below, please contact Kate Rader at raderca2015@gmail.com.

How A Bill Becomes Law



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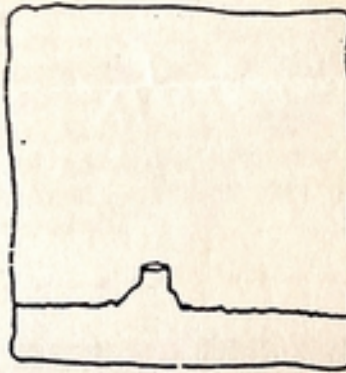
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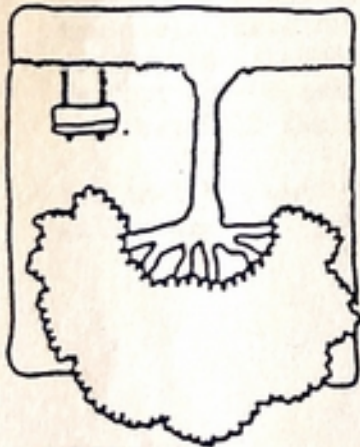
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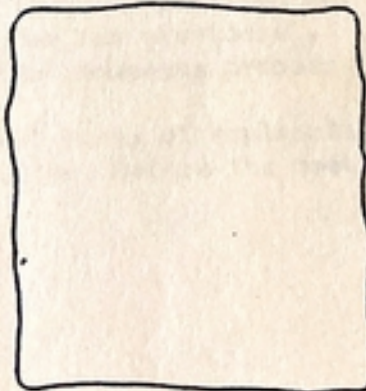
AS FUNDED BY JOINT
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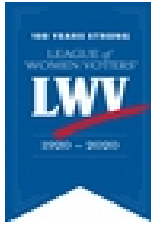


AS UNDERSTOOD BY
THE PUBLIC



WHAT WAS ACTUALLY
NEEDED

Source: Unknown



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