

Green Mountain CITIZEN

Spring 2024

LWVVT Partners with Sec. of State on Ranked Choice Voting

The office of Vermont Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas announced that LWVVT will co-host a two-part series of virtual forums to discuss Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). As interest has grown in RCV, in the state legislature and among municipalities, interest groups and voters, the Secretary and LWVVT hope these discussions will inform the debate and raise the profile of this system of voting.



“Ranked Choice Voting is a new and powerful way of choosing our leaders, and we know that Vermont legislators will be considering RCV legislation next session,” said Secretary Copeland Hanzas. “I wanted to work with the League of Women Voters to bring the public, stakeholders, and experts together to discuss, learn, and explore it as the legislative work continues.”

The first forum is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 1st**, from 7:00-8:30pm on Zoom. This session will offer an overview of Ranked Choice Voting, covering key concepts and presenting a simulation for participants to engage in to better understand what RCV is and how it works. Experts from the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center <https://www.rccresources.org> will guide the session.

The second forum will take place on **Wednesday, May 8th**, from 7:00-8:30pm on Zoom. This session will dive into the details of administering RCV elections in Vermont, featuring Burlington Assistant City Clerk Sarah Montgomery and Brattleboro Town Clerk Hillary Francis.

These forums are another chance for us to continue the League’s work on RCV and encourage informed and active participation in government here in Vermont.

Please register here <https://bit.ly/rcvoverview> for the May 1 forum and here <https://bit.ly/rcvforvt> for the May 8 forum. Questions for the panelists about RCV can be submitted in advance to bkeller@lwvofvt.org.

Message from the Board Spring 2024

I am a new board member of the LVWVT. Since moving to Montpelier from Turkiye, Vermont seven years ago, I have been deeply involved in the democratic processes that shape our communities. I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of education in empowering individuals to engage meaningfully in civic life throughout my career as a leadership professor. In my role as a city councilor, I strive to ensure that all residents' voices are heard and valued.

With its rich tapestry of cultures and backgrounds, Vermont exemplifies America's strength in diversity. However, immigrants can face challenges in integrating fully into our civic fabric. There may be barriers to full participation due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with local systems, and a sense of disconnection from traditional power structures.

The League of Women Voters Vermont plays a crucial role in breaking down these barriers. By promoting voter education, advocating for inclusive policies, and fostering dialogue across communities, our organization empowers individuals to become informed, active participants in our democracy. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential for building a society that is more just and representative, and I applaud the League's commitment to these values.

Due to my immigrant background, I understand the importance of representation at all levels of government. Individuals from diverse backgrounds serve in elected positions, bringing unique perspectives and lived experiences to the table, enriching policymaking processes, and ensuring all residents' needs are met.

I am proud to be one of the board members of the League of Women Voters Vermont whose members commit to supporting initiatives that promote immigrant inclusion and participation. Whether through voter registration drives, candidate forums, or community outreach programs, every action you take contributes to a more vibrant and inclusive democracy.

I would like to conclude by expressing my gratitude to the League for its unwavering commitment to civic engagement and social justice. As members and board members of the League, we can build a future that allows every voice to be heard, every vote to be counted, and every individual to make a positive difference in the well-being of our communities.

Pelin Kohn, PhD

The Green Mountain Citizen

is published four times per year by
The League of Women Voters of Vermont

Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.

If you would like to join the League, go to our website,
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The 2024 National Convention will take place June 27-June 30 at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC and online.

In-person and virtual delegates will have the opportunity to participate in our Convention Plenary and vote on our 2024-2026 Program, budget, LWVUS Board of Directors, and submitted bylaws amendments.

Other Convention activities include a pre-Convention Lobby Day on Thursday, a reception and dinner on Saturday night showcasing local DC culture, and a variety of breakout sessions hosted by all levels of League.

There will also be opportunities to network with your fellow League members, participate in a variety of workshops and trainings, and hear from dynamic speakers.

LWVVT is particularly excited about convention this year, because we will be proposing to amend the LWVUS position on Privatization to include health care as a public good. This proposal is based on the VT position on Privatization that we adopted in December. You can learn more about this campaign on p.

Cost Information

Registration fees (*subject to change*)

- Virtual: \$125
- In-Person: \$550
New in 2024: Registration costs will include breakfast and lunch on all plenary days
- Additional fees will be announced for participation in Lobby Day and evening events

Hotel Fees

Hotel rooms at the Washington Hilton will be offered to Convention attendees at a rate of \$239/night (pre tax and fees). Hotel reservations will open with the event registration and a special link will be offered to guarantee the group rate. Please do not call the hotel directly for these rooms.

Other Considerations

Attendees are responsible for their own travel to the area and any travel throughout the city while at Convention. Attendees are also responsible for meals outside of those offered as part of registration.

The LWVVT will provide financial assistance, depending on how many delegates attend.

Where We Are in the Legislature

We're going to press a couple of weeks before the Legislative session comes to an end, but here we give you a look at the bills we have been following most closely stand as of April 19.

S.25: Banning Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

On Thursday, April 11th, S.25 passed unanimously in the Vermont House with 130 votes. It will now return to the Senate for a Concurrence vote. It is expected to pass in the Senate and then be sent to the Governor's desk for signing.

S.25 is legislation that bans per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a man-made class of 15,000 toxic chemicals that easily travel through air, water, and soil; bioaccumulate in living beings; and can last for hundreds of years in the environment. PFAS are also known as "forever chemicals."

In 2023, S.25 passed unanimously in the Senate and was assigned to the House Human Services Committee which heard the bill after crossover in 2024. A new PFAS bill, S.197 was taken up by the Senate Health and Welfare Committee and passed unanimously in the Senate before crossover this year. The House Human Services Committee amended S.25 to include S.197, as well as S.20 (Act 36) which became law in 2021.

If S.25 becomes law, it will regulate PFAS in textiles, make-up and personal hygiene products, artificial turf, cookware, ski wax, children's products, rugs and carpets, firefighting foam, food packaging, and more. Product manufacturers will have to supply certificates of compliance. The Attorney General's Office will be in charge of enforcement via the consumer protection act.

PFAS, in even the smallest amounts, is linked to birth defects and chronic diseases, including breast cancer, endocrine disorders, kidney cancer, testicular cancer, liver disease, reproductive disorders and infertility, thyroid disorders, high cholesterol, and ulcerative colitis. 99% of Americans already have PFAS in their blood.

At the same time that S.25 passed in the VT House, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released six new maximum contaminant

levels (MCLs) for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water provided by public drinking water systems. These standards are stronger than Vermont's existing drinking water regulations and would have a direct impact in the state.

The truth is that we don't need PFAS; there are safe alternatives. The price we have already paid and the increased costs to come if we don't ban PFAS are staggering. Every day of delay in banning PFAS leads to more contamination that irreversibly accumulates in the environment forever, harming our health and the health of future generations.

Communities in Vermont and all across the nation have been contaminated by PFAS for decades. If you would like more information about PFAS chemicals and how you can reduce your risk and exposure to them, contact Marguerite Adelman at madel51353@gmail.com or visit this website: www.militarypoisons.org.

H. 721 Medicaid and Medicare savings programs expansions

Throughout the legislative session the League has been part of the Medicare Affordability Coalition that is advocating for expanding income eligibility for the Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) that provide coverage for premium costs and cost sharing for low income Vermonters on Medicare. Companion bills H.118 and S.61 were introduced at the beginning of the session. H.118 was incorporated into H.721, a Medicaid reform bill that included changes in eligibility for Medicaid, mostly for Vermonters under 65, in addition to the Medicare Savings Program changes.

The version of H. 721 that passed the House would expand eligibility for the MSPs and make approximately 19,000 Vermonters newly eligible for benefits under those programs. It would also provide Dr. Dynasaur benefits to 19 and 20 year olds and would increase the income eligibility limits for Dr. Dynasaur benefits for pregnant

individuals of any age. The bill also includes a technical study of the impact of making other changes to Medicaid eligibility. A corporate tax increase and adjustments to securities registration fees are included in the bill to pay for the expansions.

H.721 has been voted out of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee with changes that would increase income guidelines for the MSPs to levels lower than the levels in the House version of the bill. H.721 will now go to the Senate finance and appropriations committees. The League is continuing to contact Senate members in support of the MSP expansion.

Information about the MSP changes can be found on the website of the Health Care Advocate. <https://www.facebook.com/HCAVermont> League members with questions about H.721 should contact Lila Richardson at lilamrichardson@gmail.com.

H.875 State Ethics Commission and the State Code of Ethics

On April 2, the Vermont House of Representatives passed House bill No. 875 (H.875), an act relating to the State Ethics Commission and the State Code of Ethics. The bill, introduced by the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, seeks to establish a municipal code of ethics that sets minimum statewide ethics standards and allows the State Ethics Commission to provide free advisory and training services to municipalities.

The bill would also expand the Ethics Commission's authority to investigate allegations of unethical conduct by State of Vermont public servants in all three branches of government and modify disclosure requirements for candidates for State office and office holders. It also proposes to add staff to enable the implementation of the Commission's new authority.

The League strongly supports this bill, as it did its predecessors.

In 2017, the League was instrumental in passing legislation establishing the State Ethics

Commission. That was a significant victory for the people of Vermont, but it still lacked investigative and enforcement powers. In addition, while the Commission had a code of ethics to guide them, there was no state Code of Ethics that was written in law. In 2020, we supported the establishment of such a Code, which was finally done in 2022. This new bill now proposes to fill the large gap left in 2017: investigative and enforcement powers for the Commission, and an increase in staffing.

In our work since 2017 to establish and strengthen our state Ethics Commission, we learned that the Secretary of State's office frequently received complaints or questions about possible ethics issues at the municipal level, that they had no authority to respond to. Now the Ethics Commission hears from municipal officials and members of the public seeking ethics advice and avenues for accountability, but like the Sec. Of State's office, they have no authority to act on those requests. We believe the passage of this bill is an important step towards establishing a municipal ethics framework for Vermont and hope to see it pass quickly through the next stages of the legislative process.

The uniform code proposed in H.875 makes it easier for everyone to understand what is expected of our elected and appointed officials. That it closely follows the State Code enables a common understanding of the rules and simplifies ethics training of officials at every level.

The bill is now in the Senate Committee on Government Operations.



Advocacy for Vermont's new privatization position at June LWVUS Convention

After months of research by a study committee and a meeting of members to reach consensus on the subject, the LWVVT'S new position on privatization was adopted at a special convention on December 14, 2023. This new position builds on the LWVUS privatization position by adding health care as a public good and clarifying that currently privatized public goods can be moved to the public sector if privatization is not meeting the fundamental goals of providing a public good.

The full text of the position is at <https://lwvofvt.org/positions/position-on-privatization/>

At this time, LWVVT can use the new privatization position for advocacy at the state level. The state League believes that in addition to advocacy in Vermont, it is important to be able to advocate at the federal level against harmful privatization programs. Advocates in other states are also interested in the important changes in the new Vermont position. Therefore, advocates around the country are working to update the LWVUS position on privatization by Concurrence at the LWVUS convention in June 2024.

As of April 10, 2024, 66 state and local leagues supported this Concurrence. Detailed information on the efforts to update the LWVUS privatization position at the June Convention can be found at <https://lwvhealthcarereform.org/vermont-concurrence-page-2024/>

The 8th LWV/KHL Series Reviewed

The LWV/Kellogg-Hubbard Library's 8th partnership series, *Election Issues and Democracy* wrapped up last month with a panel discussion on mis- and disinformation in elections.

This year, for the first time since Covid, we again held the programs in-person at the Library, recorded and live-streamed by ORCA Media. Attendance at the Library was disappointing, demonstrating that we got too used to staying at

home during the pandemic. We were rewarded at the last program with a live audience of 20 people (pre-Covid, we regularly had 40-50 people in the room). People won't come if it's not offered, however, and we will continue presenting in-person programs.

Here is the 2023/24 lineup:

- Nov. 8 - Electoral College, former Rep. Tim Jerman, in for Chris Pearson
- Dec. 13 - Constructive Discourse, Susan Clark
- Jan. 10 - Civics Education, Sec. of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas and Martha Diess, Agency of Education
- Feb. 14 - Redistricting - Tom Little
- Mar. 13 - Mis/Disinformation, Journalist Dave Gram and Mich Kabay, Norwich Univ.

These programs are available for viewing at: <https://www.orcamedia.net/series/leaguwomen-voters>

In the 2024/25 season, we will be looking at creeping privatization of services that have been or those we believe should be publicly funded.



In closing, we want to express our deep gratitude to Kellogg-Hubbard Adult Programs Coordinator Michelle Singer for her help in producing the programs. Her good advice and technical assistance have made partnering with the Library a pleasure.



Nationwide call for urgent action for Equality

The League of Women Voters of Vermont joined other state leagues and the District of Columbia, in signing onto a memo calling on US Congress and Administration to take every action in their authority to ensure publication of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the US Constitution..

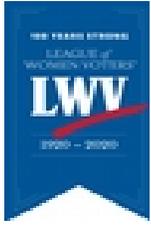
The League calls on:

Congress to pass S.J. Res. 4/H.J. Res. 25, a bipartisan resolution affirming the validity of the ERA as part of the Constitution and addressing the question of a time limit; or

Congress to pass S.J. Res. 39/H.J. Res. 82, a resolution affirming the validity of the ERA as part of the Constitution and that the US Archivist must certify and publish the ERA; and, in either event,

President Biden to instruct the US Archivist to fulfill their statutory duty and certify and publish the ERA in the US Constitution.

This year marks 101 years since the ERA was first introduced in the US Congress. The ERA would constitutionally protect the equality of rights under the law regardless of sex and is essential for the health of our democracy.



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