

Where We Stand **2009-2011**



League of Women Voters
Of Chicago

MISSION

To encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

PRINCIPLES

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHICAGO BELIEVES:

- in representative government and the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States;
- that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible;
- that every citizen's right to the vote should be protected;
- that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all;
- that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination;
- that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government;
- that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people;
- that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation;
- that government should promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest;
- that government should share in the solution of economic and social problems which affect the public welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies which facilitate the solution of international problems;
- that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

DEVELOPING THE PROGRAM

The Organization of the League of Women Voters parallels that of government with national, state, county and local bodies. Leagues at each level adopt a program. All programs are based on the **Principles**, which are “concepts of government” adopted by the membership at the national level. The Principles are outlined on page 1. In addition to being consistent with the **Principles**, a **Program Position** must be one that:

- Can be solved by government action;
- Meets a current need or interest;
- Can be influenced by effective citizen action; and
- Is appropriate for action at that League level.

The Chicago LWV Program is made up of governmental issues chosen by consensus of the membership. Published in Where We Stand each biennium the entire Program is completely reviewed. Local units have first action on the issues. Individual program items as presently worded must be retained or dropped. If an item is dropped, action may not be taken by the LWV on that item. The positions have been adopted over many years, and some of them do not seem to speak to “meets current need or interest.” A request for update may be made on one or more of the items. Local units may also suggest new items. A compilation of the consensus of the local units is made, and the Board determines whether there is need for change. The suggested version with proposed “items for update” is sent out to the members in time for consideration at the annual meeting where the members will then adopt, by consensus, the entire program for the coming biennium.

- A new item may require a *study*, which is done by the membership, researching the issues and providing a *position* to be adopted at the following biennial meeting.
- A Chicago League Committee may, after careful researching, *provide a position for adoption by Concurrence* (agreement with). Such *positions* also will go to the following biennial meeting.
- *Positions to be updated* usually go to the appropriate committee for researching and updating to bring into line with today’s needs. Again any final changes in wording go to the entire membership at the following biennial meeting.

Thus the entire membership has an opportunity to be included in the consensus which determines program positions.

Adopted positions may be prioritized to identify the most pressing issues and commit to focusing attention on those issues. Coordinated actions are taken in support of *Positions* by the Board members, units and individual members. Actions may include lobbying, educating the public, testifying or forming or joining coalitions or acting individually.

A League member does not have to agree with all of the LWV positions, but if the member intends to speak, write or lobby on an issue where the member disagrees with the LWV position, the member must not use the LWV name in any such activity.

Committee

Margaret Herring – Chair

Daphne Daume
Emelda E. Estell
Clara Fleming
Winnie Slusser

Updated after the 2009 Annual Meeting

LWV CHICAGO 2009-2011 PROGRAM

STUDIES

Education – Governance with special emphasis on Local School Councils and their equivalent in Charter and Contract Schools.

ACTION FOCUS

Olympic site – Letter opposing the choice of Chicago for the Olympic site. Citing Land Use positions.

POSITIONS

CITY GOVERNMENT: Chicago should have a mayor-council form of government. As provided in the Illinois Compiled Statutes, a definite line of succession must be retained to provide continuity in case of the death or incapacity of the mayor. The mayor should be elected on a partisan ballot for a four-year term. (1976, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1995)

CITY COUNCIL STRUCTURE: Aldermen should continue to be elected on a nonpartisan ballot from single member districts (wards); all 50 should be elected at the same time for four-year terms. (1990, 1995)

DISTRICTING: In election years immediately following a federal census, aldermanic elections should not be held until ward boundaries are redrawn in conformity with population figures, to avoid having a four-year term with districts not representative of the population. (1996)

CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURES: The city council should meet at a regularly set time. The mayor should be the presiding officer; in his or her absence, a president pro tem elected by the council should preside. The city council should be a primarily legislative body. Aldermen and committees should be relieved of administrative detail so they can exercise legislative oversight. The city council should make policy about but should not deal with individual cases of administrative issues such as specific loading zones, traffic lights, permits, abatements of fees, claims, etc. On such matters, aldermen should refer requests to the appropriate departments for action and exercise oversight of departmental performance but not introduce individual ordinances. (1974, 1991)

Committees: Committee structure should group like matters together and should be coordinated with the responsibilities of city departments (but there should not be a committee for each department). Before budget hearings, each committee should review the departments for which it is responsible. The workload of committees should be distributed as evenly as possible among the committees.

Chairs should be elected by the committees. Committees should meet on a regular schedule. Two or three committee members should be able to convene a meeting and place items on the agenda. (1974)

City council committees should provide timely advance notice of their meetings through broadcast and press media and internet. Committee meetings and votes should be recorded and reported. Testimony at committee meetings should be made part of a permanent record available to the public. All committees should have line-item budgets similar to the present (2004) finance committee budget. This budget should include employees of the committee. (1991)

The council should adopt a method of bringing a bill out of committee for consideration on the council floor. When an item under consideration contains several distinct propositions (*e.g.*, appointment of two school board members as a single package), one or two aldermen should be able to move a division of such a proposal for voting on each separately. [As of 1989, these provisions have been included in the City Council's Rules of Order.] (1974)

The City Council Journal of Proceedings should be available to aldermen and the public at least 48 hours before the next meeting. (1974, 1995) *The Journal of Proceedings* should be indexed. Summaries of debate sufficient to indicate legislative intent of proponents and reasons for opposition of opponents should be included. Matters passed as a group, as in the Omnibus Ordinance, should be indicated as such in the journal. To reduce the size and expense of the journal and make it more useful as a reference for the citizen, a way should be sought to publish in other documents of record (readily available to aldermen and to the public) the repetitive identical content of leases, contracts, bond issues, etc. (1991)

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR: The mayor should be freed for policy-making by assistants who coordinate the city's departments and agencies. An agency in the mayor's office should be charged with making long-term policy decisions, and an annual digest of its reports and recommendations should be published. The policy-making process should be open to public input, including neighborhood meetings. (1976)

A chief administrative officer should oversee administration, and this position, its qualifications and functions should be spelled out in an ordinance. This officer should be required to have previous administrative experience and should be appointed by the mayor with confirmation by the city council.

City department heads should have responsibility for administering their departments, with overall supervision by the mayor's office. The mayor with the approval of the city council should appoint them. A time limit should be set for the appointment and confirmation of department heads when a vacancy exists.

CITY BUDGET: Chicago should have a Municipal Budget Code set forth in an ordinance and incorporating state statutes and city procedures. The budget should present expenditures by program and it should show specific expenditures in line-item form under each program. It should also include revenue from all sources (including federal and state as well as all local funds) and planned expenditures from all monies. Insofar as practical, the budget should reflect the revenue and expenditures of governmental and quasi-governmental bodies not part of the corporate City of Chicago but which operate within the city. (1974)

A capital budget should be planned and presented as a separate document; however, it should be considered in conjunction with the operating budget.

Privatization of Functions and Services. Contracting with the private sector is an appropriate way to provide city services in cases where it will reduce costs and/or improve services; where skills, used infrequently, are required; or to permit rapid initiation of new projects without large investments in personnel or fixed assets. Except in extraordinary circumstances, it should be used only when there are enough potential contractors to provide competition and in cases where contracts can be detailed and specific. Contracting out should not be used as a means of bypassing labor unions and should not be at the expense of fair and safe working conditions or equal opportunity employment. Contracts should ensure equal access to services. In determining the comparative costs of contracting as opposed to performing work in house, the costs of negotiating and writing the contract and monitoring the work on the private sector side and the costs of fringe benefits, pensions and capital investments on the city side should be figured into calculations. Competition for contracts should be open to public scrutiny. Contractors should not be permitted to make campaign contributions. (1992)

BUDGET-MAKING PROCEDURES: The budget-making process should be scheduled to allow time for pre-budget hearings, department hearings, public hearings, consideration of amendments, and consideration of the budget as a whole. The mayor should present to the city council an executive budget prepared by the mayor and the budget director early enough to give the council time to deliberate before enacting the annual appropriation ordinance. (1974)

Pre-budget public hearings in the neighborhoods as well as downtown should be held before publication to obtain information that may lead to amendment of the budget. The budget calendar, all hearings open to the public and the budget document itself should be publicized; copies of the budget should be available to the public well in advance of hearings. Copies of the document should be available to all aldermen well in advance of council consideration and aldermen should be provided with expert staff.

Council hearings with department heads should be held early to allow time for consideration of reports and testimony prior to submission of amendments. Department heads' testimony should be scheduled with sufficient time for questions, and the schedule should be made public in advance of the hearings. Department heads should distribute written reports to the council before the hearings.

Amendments to the budget should be submitted in writing and be available to aldermen and the public before action is taken. Provision should be made for public response to amendments.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE: The present tax structure is inadequate and fails to provide a stable source of revenue. Statewide, the League supports equitable distribution of the tax burden and increased reliance on the state income tax to relieve sales and property taxes and provide sufficient revenue. The Chicago League supports a change in the present mix of taxes for local government. The sales tax should be reduced and the remaining 2 cent tax on food and drugs should be removed. The local sales tax should not exceed that of neighboring communities. Chicago League consensus did not support reduction of the property tax rate levied by the City of Chicago. The League statewide supports improvements in assessment practices.

Casino Gambling: The Chicago League strongly objects to gambling, particularly casino gambling, as a source of revenue. At the national level, the LWVUS position on urban policy is (in part) to “Promote the economic health of cities and improve the quality of urban life.” Casino gambling in Chicago meets neither criterion. The city’s emphasis should be on a long-term productive economic development policy focusing on family-supporting jobs linked with adequate job training. The Chicago League rejects casino gambling, as a means to improve the quality of urban life or to meet the long-term revenue needs of the city. We accept the studies that predict increased crime, gambling addiction (particularly affecting youth), diversion discretionary income from other forms of entertainment and drastic changes in our city’s image. (1984, 1992)

CITY PENSION FUNDS: The city of Chicago should have a greater voice in any changes made to the pension funds. Specifically, the city council should approve any changes in the pension plans before they can be enacted by the state legislature. The source of funding for the pension plans should not be restricted to the property tax, and the level of funding should more closely relate to actuarial requirements in order to reduce the unfunded liability to acceptable levels. The “acceptable” level of funding is defined as funding that meets the current year’s increase in accrued liability plus interest on the unfunded liability. In addition, the city should investigate the pros and cons of participation by city employees in the federal Social Security system. (1991)

CITY PLANNING: There should be an agency to undertake long-range planning, including coordinated planning at the departmental level, intergovernmental planning, research data collection and evaluation, graphic services including map updating and maintenance, and public information. (1997)

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT: A Department of Housing and Neighborhood (Community) Development should administer community development and housing subsidy funds and coordinate services of other departments relating to housing and neighborhood improvement. Services should include: neighborhood commercial and industrial development, housing rehabilitation and technical services, Mortgage counseling, fair housing counseling, urban homesteading, relocation assistance, weatherization assistance and code enforcement. The needs of housing consumers must not be overlooked. (1997)(2009)

LIVING WAGE REQUIREMENT: The League of Women Voters of Chicago supports the campaign for a living wage to be required for work involved in publicly funded projects. The wage is to be adjusted for increases in the cost of living. (1997)

HOUSING

FAIR HOUSING: National, state and local legislation should prohibit all housing discrimination by real estate salesmen and brokers, lending institutions, residential land developers and owners. Legislation should cover apartments, private homes and vacant land. The public should be educated to create an atmosphere of support for open housing policies. (1963, 1969)

The League supports: A city commission with power to investigate and initiate complaints; the use of conciliation and mediation to eliminate unfair practices, with recourse to the courts should these fail, and the right to petition the court for injunctive relief with safeguards for both parties; speedy resolution of complaints; educational programs on procedures and responsibilities; adequate funding for these purposes; and continuous evaluation of the programs.

Local government should enforce Fair Housing Laws aggressively and expand educational outreach to property owners, landlords, condo associations, and co-ops as to the rights and obligations of Fair Housing Laws for both landlords and tenants. (2009)

MULTI-FAMILY RENTAL HOUSING: The Chicago League supports property tax exemptions for multi-family rental housing targeted to buildings and/or tenants in particular trouble, but would not seek changes to lower the assessed value of all rental property. The Cook County League supports retention of a classification system in Cook County, with no further modification until the most recent changes are evaluated. As of 1989, the classification system has included a multi-family building rehabilitation incentive. (1981)

CONDOMINIUMS: Strong tenant and consumer protective measures should be included in the city's condominium ordinance to protect both tenants and prospective purchasers. These should include adequate notice of intent to convert together with the property report; information on financing and repairs; developer warranties on major systems and provision for costs of bringing the building into code compliance; the right of a tenant group to purchase the building; relocation assistance; mortgage assistance. Condominium associations should be made up of owners only. (1980)

LOW AND MODERATE INCOME HOUSING: Nationwide, the League supports programs and policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, with the federal government assuming primary responsibility. Statewide, the League supports tax incentives to provide an adequate supply of low and moderate income housing. Considerable Chicago League action has been taken under these positions, which included League involvement in the Gautreaux case concerning construction of low income housing. (1969) The revised court order from the 1966 Gautreaux Case still governs the CHAS's administration of its Scattered-Site Housing Program. (2009)

Though housing for displaced tenants when public housing is demolished is a federal responsibility, the city should actively seek funding for such tenants to be sure none are left homeless. The city should assure that a city agency provides for centrally supervised, uniformly available counseling services and assistance to low income people seeking housing. It should seek to contract to provide such services for agencies such as the CHA which is now required to

provide them for their displaced tenants. The city should encourage rehabilitation of existing housing where feasible and where it can be done promptly so that derelict buildings do not become neighborhood hazards.

The city should guarantee and facilitate low interest rehab loans, conditional on personal investment by the rehab person or agency. It should encourage lending agencies to make such loans. The city should encourage the reclaiming of abandoned areas for industrial parks surrounded by mixed-income housing, especially in the case of light industry. This includes brownfields and areas that have been abandoned through demolition or for other reasons. The interests of the environment are consequently served by avoiding the duplication of building of infrastructure and by reducing commuting time for workers employed in industrial parks.

The city should continue to encourage partnerships to create multi-family mixed-income rental units. It should encourage coordination of the requirements and deadlines of public and private funding agencies and set basic rules in order to expedite the process of rebuilding. Planning of city departments should be coordinated with community-based organizations and community representatives to reflect neighborhood priorities, but should assure safeguards against discrimination on account of race or socioeconomic status. (2009)

A city agency should collect reports on the federal monitoring of lending priorities, anti-foreclosure measures, predatory lending, anti-redlining legislation and compliance with the Community Reinvestment Act. Such reports should be submitted to the city council and made available to the public, with specific information on banks, insurance firms and others doing business in the city of Chicago. (2009)

Developers of housing should be required to set aside low-income units as a condition for doing business in the city. These units should be built and occupied simultaneously with the middle and upper income units. Public housing residents should be required to contribute to their rent, however small the amount.

LAND USE

LAKEFRONT LAND USE: The lakefront should be used for public recreation only, consistent with and enhancing its natural beauty of the lakefront. The planning guidelines should follow the concept of linear park development (the 1968 city council commissioned Johnson, Johnson & Roy Report), ensuring adequate pedestrian access to the parks and lakefront and leaving the lakefront free of obstacles such as buildings and roads. (1970)

The League opposes an airport in Lake Michigan.

PARKS: The parks should be used for public recreation only, consistent with and enhancing their aesthetic quality. Buildings should be kept to a minimum. Funds should be distributed equitably for maintenance and development of parks throughout the city. (1973)

SPORTS STADIUM: The League opposes use of public funds to subsidize construction or operation of a sports complex. It opposes any form of financing that lessens tax revenues. This includes subsidy for construction or for infrastructure, such as the use of general obligation bonds.

(1978)

EDUCATION

Chicago League positions on the public school system have developed continuously since 1969. Since many issues were dealt with repeatedly, the positions are organized by topic rather than by individual date of the studies.

GENERAL POSITION: The League strongly supports universal, compulsory education within the ages (5-18) and stresses the need for diversity to meet the range of needs. The League supports the meaningful use of student proficiency tests for diagnosis and remediation. Increased financial support is needed, especially increased state and federal aid. (Both the national and state Leagues support increased aid to education.) . (age change 2009)

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: Members of the Board of Education should be appointed, not elected, and should be selected by the mayor solely from recommendations of an advisory commission. Members of the screening commission should be representative of the city as a whole. Nomination and selection of school board members should be on a nonpartisan basis; members should be citizens, registered voters, Chicago residents for 3 years prior to appointment and have some familiarity with the public schools. The League opposes legal apportionment of membership by race, ethnicity, vocation, geographic area, gender, or any other classification.

The terms of Board of Education members should be staggered. The League supports compensation of members, at least for expenses.

The League supports a legally constituted local school council with some authority at each local school. The council should include parents, teachers, community representatives and the principal. The council should have final authority for the expenditure of discretionary funds and the student code of conduct and should have advisory roles only in the hiring and firing of the principal and teachers, preparation of the lump sum budget and textbook selection.

PRINCIPALS: Principals should select their teachers and staff, prepare a school budget and have use of the discretionary fund as approved by the local school council. They should consult with teachers to choose textbooks from an approved citywide list.

QUALITY AND EQUALITY: There should be improved facilities, programs, policies and innovative plans to provide both quality and equality of educational opportunity for all students, including integration of students and faculty. The League supports teacher certification, assignment, transfer and tenure policies flexible enough to allow faculty integration, encourage innovative instruction and ensure qualified and dedicated teachers in every school. Learning environments should be physically and psychologically positive and provide an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning. Pupil-teacher ratios should accommodate the diverse needs of each school. Professional and auxiliary personnel should be assigned to maximize the effectiveness of the school program with state-of-the-art materials and equipment provided for each school.

DESEGREGATION: Metropolitan integration would be ideal but seems unlikely. The League supports busing and magnet schools, among the many ways to make quality education available to all children. The long-range goal should be neighborhood integration through changing of housing patterns. A combination of voluntary and mandatory student placement in a desegregation plan is needed. Leadership should enforce laws to prevent racial isolation, upgrade education, improve teacher attitudes and classroom atmosphere and diminish social customs resulting in separation of or hostility among races. Human relations training should be provided at all levels of school administration.

FACILITIES AND REHABILITATION: Rehabilitation, maintenance and construction needs are immense. Plans, criteria and priorities must be compatible with desegregation, equal opportunities, preservation of housing and quality of education and they must be made public. Decision-making must include local and district councils and instructional staff. Innovative buildings must be staffed with trained personnel in advance of opening.

Regular disclosure of all financial arrangements, particularly with the Public Building Commission, is mandatory. Leases with the Public Building Commission must provide protection to the Board if the buildings are unsatisfactory.

CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO: The League's longstanding concerns with public education include monitoring the legislatively mandated missions of the City Colleges of Chicago to include consideration of how adequately and equitably funding resources are allocated.

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Chicago Public Library System should provide resources and services to meet the educational, research, informational, cultural and recreational needs of Chicago residents. An adequate budget must be available. An increase in property taxes should be provided and other governmental and private resources should be sought.

The League supports one central library with an adequate and well-maintained collection staffed by professional librarians and well-trained support staff using modern technology. The collection should be the primary source for information in the humanities, science and business and the primary source to supplement branch libraries.

BRANCH LIBRARIES: Each branch library should meet the special interests of its community, cooperate with neighboring schools, provide programs for children and assistance to parents selecting children's literature and serve the business community. Branch libraries should offer outreach programs to the foreign-born, the handicapped and homebound, the aged and new residents. Appropriate programs include: adult literacy, English as a second language, General Education Development (GED), Great Books, senior activities, citizenship and voter service.

Funding priority should be given to meeting the basic needs of existing branches before new branches are added.

Community participation in library decisions, lobbying and fund-raising by support groups should be encouraged. (1987, 1995)

CABLE TV

Freedom of expression must be guaranteed. All franchises should provide equal services. A minimum number of public access channels should be required. Subscriber privacy must be protected. Monitoring a subscriber's line, including the home, except for action necessary for service, billing or delivery should be prohibited unless the subscriber agrees to such monitoring. There should be stiff penalties for violations. (1982, 1995)

HANDGUNS

Both the state and Chicago Leagues support legislation for control of handguns and ammunition. The 1989 Illinois League Convention also voted support for measures to restrict access to semi-automatic assault type weapons. Both Leagues favor federal legislation. The Chicago League supports locally enacted controls for the City of Chicago.

The League supports a ban on the further manufacture, sale, transportation and importation for private ownership of handguns and their parts. It supports registration, licensing, permits and handgun education, if it is part of the licensing procedures. There should be strict enforcement of handgun laws. The basic causes of handgun violations should be attacked, especially societal factors and lack of public education. (1974, 1976, 1989)

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