

VOTER

League of Women
Voters of Indiana
County, Pennsylvania



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

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LWVIC Board of Directors, 2010-11

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Join the Library Issues Committee

The LWVIC Board recently established a Library Issues Committee to support our public library.

The first meeting will be held on Monday, March 28th from 7:00-8:30 pm, in the Indiana Free Library's second floor reading room.

We will be brainstorming our course of action at this initial meeting, so please come prepared with suggestions as to how the LWVIC can best support our local library. A library representative will also attend to ensure both that we don't duplicate what other groups are doing and that our plan of action will benefit the library's own long-range plans. We will also be looking at the Joint State Government Commission's December 2010 report, "The Pennsylvania Public Library Code: Findings and Recommendations," for ideas.

Please contact Beth Marshall (nextlife@comcast.net, 724-465-8974) or Karen Ross (ross.bert1@gmail.com, 724-349-0348) if you are interested in joining this committee.

Help the Indiana Free Library

The library is currently conducting a "Community Survey." If you haven't already completed one, please go to their website, www.indianafreelibrary.org and fill it out. (You'll find it at the end of the current newsletter.) You can also stop in the library to complete a survey there. The needs of the community will help shape the future of our public library, so make your voice heard.

Sunshine Week 2011

On Friday, March 18, from 12:00-1:30 pm, the LWVEF again will co-host the Annual Sunshine Week National Dialogue. The event, "The Road Forward to Open Government," will be broadcast live via the web and is a great opportunity for Leagues to gain visibility on a core League issue. State and local Leagues are encouraged to host "viewing parties." Panelists will take questions from the live and viewing audience. To learn more, visit our event partner at www.Open the Government.org. "Sunshine Week: Your Right to Know" was launched in March 2005 and will be celebrated in 2011 from March 13-19.

Like the League?

**Then "like" the League on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/leagueofwomenvoters**

LWVIC ANNUAL MEETING—SAVE THE DATE

Our Annual Meeting will be held on May 16 at the Indiana Fire Association's White Township Station, 1555 Indian Springs Road. Dinner will start at 6:00 pm, followed by a brief business meeting to elect officers and board members and to adopt a budget and program for next year.

LWVPA Position on School Vouchers

Below, for your information, is the testimony LWVPA submitted to the PA Senate Education Committee for the public hearing held February 16 on SB1, The Opportunity Scholarship and Educational Improvement Tax Credit Act. A summary of the bill and the pertinent sections of the LWVPA Education position regarding school vouchers follows. The complete text of SB 1 can be found at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/PN/Public/btCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&sessYr=2011&sessInd=0&billBody=S&billType=B&billNbr=0001&pn=0226>. The link to the complete text of the LWVPA position on education policy is <http://palwv.org/issues/education.html>.

SUMMARY OF SB1

Senate Bill 1, introduced by Senator Anthony Williams, D-Philadelphia, and Senator Jeffrey Piccola, R-Dauphin, would establish a means to use taxpayer funds to provide tuition vouchers for public and nonpublic schools for low-income children. In the past, Governor Corbett has indicated his support for tuition vouchers.

Phased in over three years, SB1 would provide vouchers for low-income children to attend nonpublic schools (including parochial schools) or public schools out of their residential district. The program would be administered by an Educational Choice Board within the Department of Education consisting of three members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of a majority of the members elected to the Senate. There would be an Executive Director and such staff as the Director deems necessary to administer the program whose salaries would be funded by the Department of Education.

During the first year, low-income students attending persistently low-achieving schools would be eligible. In the second year, all low-income students residing within the attendance boundary of a persistently low-achieving school would be eligible. In Year 3, all low-income students, regardless of school or district, would be eligible for Opportunity Scholarships.

Parents (or guardians) of a school-age child from a low-income household would be able to apply for an Opportunity Scholarship to attend a nonpublic school or a public school in a different district. The scholarship would be the equivalent of the state's per-pupil subsidy of the district. This could be augmented by the nonpublic school (if the

nonpublic school chose to do so) or by the local school district (if the district chose to do so) to match the cost of tuition of the receiving nonpublic or public school. The state per-pupil subsidy for that student would go to the receiving school.

Public schools would not be required to accept out-of-district scholarship students but could develop their own admission plans requiring that if any students are accepted, they are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. Nonpublic schools would not be allowed to discriminate against scholarship students but would be allowed **not** to accept students for whom the schools do not have an adequate program. (This would limit the availability of placements for special education students because many nonpublic schools do not have special education programs.) Students whose home districts provide transportation for students for either school attendance or field trips would be required to provide transportation to the nonpublic or the public out-of-district schools within a ten mile radius.

SB1 also provides for an increase in Educational Improvement Tax Credit funding level to \$100 million, an increase of \$25 million over the amount in effect in fiscal year 2011-2012.

LWVPA POSITION OPPOSING SCHOOL VOUCHERS FOR NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS

The 2003 LWVPA education position directly addresses the tuition voucher question. "The LWV is firmly opposed to tuition vouchers for nonpublic schools. Our opposition is based on several beliefs and concerns: 1) We believe that Article III of the state Constitution clearly forbids use of public education funds for the support of religious schools. Furthermore, we believe such support violates Article 1 of our US Constitution, a treasured principle, often referred to as "separation of Church and State." The League believes that taxpayers must not be forced to support schools which are indoctrinating beliefs contrary to, and even antithetical to their own beliefs. 2) We feel that vouchers may encourage the separation of our society into ethnic and religious groups, which is the antithesis of the principles on which our country was founded. 3) Nonpublic schools are rightly called independent schools and in any of the voucher proposals thus far there is no process nor requirement for accountability either fiscal or financial, and no requirement for disclosure of admission policies, dismissal policies, or

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It's Time for a Late Winter Resolution—Join the Observer Corps!

As a League member, please consider making an effort in 2011 to attend at least one government meeting. Local government bodies are making important decisions that affect our lives, and it is important that elected officials know that the public cares about their decisions.

Be sure and turn to the Indiana Gazette's classified ads section and read section 002, the Sunshine Notices. In addition to well-known public meetings, there are also smaller committees and authorities that you may be interested in, like the White Township Comprehensive Plan Committee or the Indiana County Transit Authority. **Make it your personal, late winter resolution this year to be an observer.**

If you receive your newsletter electronically, you also will receive an attachment with a simple checklist (reproduced on the right) to fill out and submit after you attend a meeting. If you have any questions or are interested in becoming an observer, please contact Karen Ross at (724) 349-0348 or ross.bert1@gmail.com.

The LWVIC Annual Garage Sale will be held on May 7. (The bag sale will follow on May 14.)

This garage sale is our major money maker, so please plan to help out with it. We will be setting up from 9 am until noon Monday through Friday the week before the sale, and workers will also be needed on both sale days.

Items to sell are also needed. Scour your house and ask your neighbors and friends for donations. Bring the items to Susan McClure's garage (527 Shryock Avenue,) during the setup times.

Please contact Betsy Pfeffer at (724-464-0608 or betsypfe@starpower.net) to sign up to work the sale.

OBSERVER CHECKLIST

Meeting attended:

Date:

FEATURE EVALUATED	YES	NO	COMMENT
1. Agenda available			
2. All members present			If no, who is missing?
3. Members courteous to each other			
4. Members attentive and alert			
5. Members discussed issues			
6. Roberts Rules of Order followed			
7. Audience in attendance			How many?
8. Time for public comment			
9. Public treated courteously			
10. Media present			

Other comments:

Observer's Name:

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rejections policies from the nonpublic schools which would receive taxpayer funds.

Whatever the final form of a voucher proposal, we know that School Choice always means the school gets to choose! No voucher plan ever guarantees admission to any nonpublic school. Nor does it prevent the disenrollment of a child if the school decides that the child is not satisfactory in some way. Proponents of vouchers for nonpublic schools say that they want to let parents decide how their money is spent to educate their children. Of course, parents have always had that right. It is whether they have the right to take the money of other taxpayers and spend it in nonpublic settings that is the question! But more importantly, there is an obligation of the state to educate all of its children and not just those with a caregiver able, alert and sophisticated enough to seek out special opportunities. Those children are already advantaged. Helping a fortunate few at the neglect of the most needy is not only unjust but also poor public policy.

A newsletter of the
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We're on the
Web!

www.palwv.org/indiana



CALENDAR of UPCOMING EVENTS

March 7, 2011, 7:00 pm—Board Meeting, All Members Welcome, Sandy Whitson's home (402 Elm Street, Indiana)

March 19, 2011, 10:00 am—3:00 pm—Family Fun Fest, Indiana Mall

March 28, 2011, 7:00 pm—8:30 pm—Library Issues Committee Meeting, Indiana Library (2nd Floor Reading Room)

May 7, 2011—LWVIC Annual Garage Sale (527 Shryock Avenue, Indiana)

May 16, 2011, 6:00 pm—LWVIC Annual Meeting, Indiana Fire Association's White Township Station (1555 Indian Springs Road, Indiana)

Know someone who may be interested in membership? Let President Sherene Hess know at 724-762-4162 and she will send a brochure & short letter describing LWVIC's activities.

Family Fun Fest! Saturday, March 19, 2011, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm, Indiana Mall, Indiana PA. There will be activities for children, information for parents, and entertainment for all ages! The Family Fun Fest promotes the importance of early learning in Indiana County through play for children, information for parents, and education for the community. Approximately 60 child serving agencies, civic groups, faith organizations, businesses and others will provide information for adults and activities for children which will center around the theme of "Oh, the Things You Can Do!"

Our Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

