



## LWVIC Board of Directors, 2011-12

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## Child Advocacy Committee Seeking New Members

**Submitted by Pepita Jimenez-Jacobs, LWVIC child advocate**

We didn't call ourselves the Child Advocacy Committee. Children's needs were there, and we responded accordingly.

Years ago we did a study on day care availability for children of working mothers and IUP students. Another year a state League study on health care coverage for children and their families got us to do a comprehensive local study whose findings lent support to the state League position for single-payer health care as well as the more immediate state CHIP legislation, the Child Health Insurance Program that covers all uninsured PA children and teens under age 19 not eligible for or enrolled in Medical Assistance, regardless of family income. Locally that study also helped the community push for a dental clinic manned by 7 local volunteer dentists at the Indiana Hospital for children whose families could not afford dental care. The program continues now at the Jacksonville clinic with a hospital-employed resident dentist.

Stand for Children, started as an annual community project in 1996, was spearheaded by myself and then LWVIC president Aida Shotts and was inspired by an idea from the Children's Defense Fund, a national children's advocacy group. As a member of the Citizens Advisory Board of the Children and Youth Services, LWVIC managed to get the support of the Indiana County Commissioners, our legislators, the schools, and many child service groups. This annual celebration was held for 17 years until we concluded that awareness of children's needs have become an integral part of almost all community celebrations county-wide.

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## National Program Planning Concurrence Proposal—Sentencing Reform

The LWVUS has no position on sentencing reform; therefore, the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia - LWVDC (Washington, D.C.) and the ad hoc committee on sentencing reform formed at Convention 2010 propose that Convention 2012 adopt through concurrence the following position based on LWVDC positions adopted in 1982 and reaffirmed in 2009.

- 1) The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime.
- 2) The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

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## Call for School Board Observers

The Indiana Area School District is currently facing many difficult issues, including projected 2012-13 budget cuts of over a million dollars and selection of a new superintendent. With so many important decisions being confronted by a board that is a majority of newly elected members, it is more important than ever that the public attend meetings.

The regular meetings of the IASD Board are the second and fourth Mondays of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the East Pike District office. Be sure and read the Indiana Gazette classified section 002, Sunshine Notices, for any changes and also for the meeting times of the special committees the Board has recently formed.

As a member of League of Women Voters, you have demonstrated an interest in government issues. Observing the IASD Board or any other local governing body is an important way for you to promote open, transparent and accountable government. Call or email Karen Ross (724-349-0348 or [ross.bert1@gmail.com](mailto:ross.bert1@gmail.com)) if you have any questions or if you wish to fill out an observation form.

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Presently LWVIC's advocacy for children involves being an active member of the following groups: the Human Services Council which meets at 8:30 a.m. every second Thursday of the month; the Community Engagement group, now named LEARN (Local Education and Resource Network), which meets from 12:00-1:30 p.m. every first Tuesday of the month; the Children's Advisory Commission (which includes members from schools, children's service groups and parents appointed by the Indiana County Commissioners) which meets from 1:30-3:00 p.m. (immediately following the LEARN meeting); the policy committee of the Children's Advisory Commission which meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 10:00-11:00; the 0-3 committee of the Children's Advisory Commission which meets at 2:30 p.m. the last Wednesday of the month; the Integrated Children's Services Project or ICSP and Family Group Decision Making or FGDM, (action committees mandated for Children and Youth by OCDEL), which meets from 9:00-11:00 a.m. the third Wednesday of the month, and the Children's Roundtable (lawyers, child advocates, and school representatives) chaired by Judge Hanna in Courtroom One, at 1:30 every other fourth Monday.

Add to these regular meetings the special activities these various groups sponsor (the Back-to-School Bash, the Day of Play, the Family Fun Fest, Mom's Day Out, Family-Friendly Business Awards, and Cross-Systems Initiatives such as Parent Awareness of Child Drug Involvement in Their Homes, The Medical Side of Children's Drug Involvement, and Indiana's Drug Facts and Trends), and you can see that **the Child Advocacy Committee is extremely busy and in great need of new members.**

Participation by LWVIC in all these activities gives us a well-rounded view of the state of our children's world, their homes, their schools and the community resources that are harnessed toward meeting their needs. Indiana County appreciates the role that the League plays in support of that world.

## Department of Peace Proposed

The LWV of Columbia-Boone County (MO) proposes the adoption by LWVUS of a resolution or national study in support of violence reduction in the United States and the establishment of a cabinet level Department of Peace. The materials for this study have been developed by a national group of League members who volunteered at the 2010 National Convention to help develop this Department of Peace proposal. For additional information contact Richard Parker at [rbparker1@centurytel.net](mailto:rbparker1@centurytel.net).

### Summary

Over the past several decades the medical profession has focused more and more on "preventive medicine" programs and the management of disease in its early stages. The Department of Peace aims to do this for violence. The U.S. has a well developed ability to intervene after violence has occurred. We have excellent police forces and a very strong military and many social agencies for after the fact intervention. What we need much more of is violence prevention programs. The League has several positions whose goals will be advanced by a Department of Peace. Two major ones are domestic: **Early Intervention for Children at Risk** and **Violence Prevention**. Two are international: **The United Nations** and **U.S. Relations with Developing Countries**.

In the domestic arena, voluminous research findings across all disciplines of human behavior and sociology document the long term effects of violence on children. National and international research refutes the generally accepted attitude that child abuse is impossible to prevent. The Department of Peace has an emphasis on promoting best practices by supporting local communities in identifying, funding, replicating, and expanding programs to reduce and prevent violence. The Department of Peace also has a strong educational component which will produce professionals in violence prevention practices. In the international field the League has strong positions on the **United Nations** and on **U.S. Relations with Developing Countries**. The Department of Peace will support these positions with an emphasis on strengthening non-military means of peacemaking and early identification of potential conflicts.

The mission of the Department of Peace *shall be to hold the cultivation of peace as a strategic national policy objective*. By being a cabinet level department, violence prevention at home and abroad will receive a hearing when problems are first being considered, thus greatly enhancing adoption of preventive measures.

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**Arguments for supporting alternative to imprisonment for appropriate offenders:** Alternatives include drug and mental health courts, halfway houses and day reporting centers, restitution requirements, rehabilitative services, etc. They save taxpayers money. They keep offenders with their families and jobs, instead of in prison or jail with inmates convicted of violent crimes.

**Arguments for opposing mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses:** Harsh mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses have led to an overrepresentation of drug offenders in the criminal justice system, many of whom are low-level and nonviolent. Restoring judicial discretion in drug cases would allow judges to determine punishments that are proportional to the offenses committed.

**Background:** The United States has 5% of the world's population, but 25% of the world's prisoners—it is the world's biggest jailer. More than half the growth in the prison population over the last 30 years is due to changes in sentencing policies that prioritize long, mandatory sentences, including for drug and nonviolent offenses. Mass incarceration has led to huge financial costs to taxpayers, and millions of ex-offenders who carry lifelong, daunting burdens of a criminal record after release. Moreover, appalling racial disparity pervades the criminal justice system, and excessively impacts communities of color.

A newsletter of the  
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#### CALENDAR of UPCOMING EVENTS

**Monday, February 6, 2012, 10:30 am**—Environmental Issues Committee Meeting, Clarice Reber's home (1235 Oak Street, Indiana)

**Tuesday, February 7, 2012, Noon**—Committee Meeting, Peggy Clark Grassroots Environmental Leadership Award, Donatello's Restaurant (Indiana)

**Monday, February 13, 2012, 7:00 pm**—Board Meeting, All Members Welcome, Karen Ross's home (341 Ann Circle, Indiana)

**Saturday, March 24, 2012, 10am-3pm**—Family Fun Fest, Indiana Mall

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 LWWIC's activities.

**March is National Women's History Month  
2012 National Women's History Month Theme:**

**Women's Education – Women's Empowerment**  
<http://nwHP.org/whm/index.php>

#### **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.*