



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WASHINGTON

Empowering all Washingtonians to engage in a more responsible and responsive democracy

2018 ISSUE PAPER – REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

In the 2018 session, it is anticipated that there will be a number of election reform bills introduced or re-introduced, with a goal of increasing citizen participation in elections by simplifying voter registration and moving obstacles to voting. Most are based on laws that have been successfully implemented in other states. These include the WA Voting Rights Act, Automatic Voter Registration, Same Day Registration, Preregistration for 16 and 17-year-olds, and Postage Free Ballot Return

Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA) is a response to situations where a jurisdiction with at-large elections has demonstrated racially polarized voting that results in members of a protected class lacking an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. There is no question that minority populations are vastly underrepresented among elected office holders in many areas of the state.

The city of Yakima was one of those areas. Until 2015 city council members were elected citywide. Yakima has a 44% Latino population, and has never elected a Latino city council member. The city was sued under the Federal Voting Rights Act, which prohibits states and localities from using election practices that impair the ability of a race or language minority group to elect its candidate of choice on an equal basis with other voters. The city lost and as a result broke the city council down into districts. In the fall of 2015, for the first time, Yakima held district elections in which three Latinas were elected. That election also saw record Latino turnout. However, fixing broken election systems through the Federal VRA involves a long, complex court trial that is costly to both sides. The WVRA would provide local jurisdictions with the opportunity to tailor a local remedy to the problem of voter exclusion, instead of relying on expensive and time-consuming litigation.

In 2015, 16, and 17 the WVRA passed WA House of Representatives but died in the Senate. For more information see the Bill Analysis for 2017 [HB 1800](#) and [SB5267](#). The WVRA is one of LWVWA top priorities for 2018. Please follow the bill and contact committee members and your representatives when appropriate.

Automatic Voter Registration Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) would give every eligible citizen in Washington a chance to have their voice heard and their vote counted in Washington. AVR bills have passed in Oregon, California and 9 other states. In these states, AVR is implemented through the Department of Licensing. Washington's proposed AVR legislation would extend to more state government agencies to reach more disenfranchised voters and protect people who are not citizens from being inadvertently added to the roles.

Same Day Registration (SDR) Period Washington law requires that in order to participate in any election, a person must register by submitting an application online or by mail no later than 29 days before the day of the election or register in person at the county auditor's office no later than eight days before the election. Currently 16 states and the District of Columbia allow Election Day registration. Average voter turnout was over 10 percentage points higher in SDR states than in other states. Four of the top five states for voter turnout in the 2012 presidential election all offered Same-Day Registration (SDR).

LWVWA supported two SDR bills in the 2017 legislative session, [SB 5192](#) and [HB 1727](#). We will support them again in 2018.

Extending the deadline for registration means extending the opportunity to vote to more people. This legislation would allow those citizens motivated to vote, even if on the last days of the election cycle, to step forward and be counted. Citizens often become energized by candidates or issue campaigns in the last weeks of

an election only to find they are not registered to vote or are not registered at their current addresses. The League believes that voters should be encouraged not discouraged.

The League recognizes the importance of encouraging young people to be active in the political process. Many universities in the state begin fall quarter just two weeks before the deadline for the general election registration period. That deadline does not allow enough time to get students registered.

Allowing motor voter preregistration for sixteen and seventeen-year olds. We supported [SB 5110](#) in 2017. This bill would allow 16- and 17-year olds to pre-register to vote at the same time that they receive their driver's licenses. Most people register to vote through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). After receiving their driver's licenses, most young people do not visit the DMV again until they are in their 20's, when their license is due for renewal. As a result of not having the Motor Voter option, young people are much less likely to be registered to vote.

The League has supported similar legislation in other states. Those states have seen increased turnout by those who pre-registered and have encountered no difficulties with the law. This bill has no fiscal impact for the state and requires only software modifications for counties.

The good news is that those who register are very likely to vote. Eighty-three percent of young adults registered voted in a recent election.

Removing the stamp "poll tax". Mail-in ballots require a stamp, and occasionally more than one. For many of us that seems like a very small thing, it is after all only 49¢. But most young people, and persons with low income do not keep a book of stamps in the house. And those same people with transportation and work schedule obstacles cannot necessarily visit a post office while it is open to buy one stamp. One can buy a book of stamps at a grocery store, but many don't have \$9.80 to tie up in a book of stamps and do not intend to use snail mail 20 times in the near future.

There have been a number of options proposed to overcome this obstacle. In 2017 we supported [SB 5019](#) which would have eliminated the need for stamps on ballots by having the county pay the postage. Another proposal is to have the state provide funds to County auditors pay for ballots that are sent in without a stamp and to make it known that a ballot without a stamp will still be delivered.

LWVWA Position Statement:

- EL-2: "Voting procedures should serve the voter with a maximum of convenience, simplicity and efficiency while insuring that the requirements of secrecy, accuracy and impartiality are maintained."
- EL-3: "Permanent, personal registration should be continued. Registration should be simple and convenient for voters while ensuring accuracy... No proof of citizenship other than the sworn signature on the registration form should be required for Voter Registration"

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