

## 1. Voter Registration

Since its founding, the League's primary activity has been to encourage informed citizen participation in government starting with participation in voting. In almost all states, citizens must register to vote. Therefore, local and state Leagues have supported programs to make voter registration more accessible and to have active voter registration outreach programs made possible by the institution of registration by mail. These include setting up voter registration tables at events such as meetings, street fairs, new citizen naturalization ceremonies, places frequented by coming of age voters, such as high schools and colleges, and places where unregistered citizens might congregate, such as hospitals. Some Leagues have also set up voter registration events for employers and public housing residents.

The League has also participated in programs calling attention to voter registration, such as National Voter Registration Day and Rock the Vote. Most importantly, the League advocated for enactment of the National Voter Registration Act, sometimes nicknamed Motor Voter, which requires state governments to offer voter registration to citizens applying for government assistance and driver's licenses. The National Voter Registration Act established the responsibility of government to offer voter registration to citizens actively rather than passively expecting citizens to apply.

The League also supported the Help America Vote Act, which requires states to setup centralized voter registration databases. Pennsylvania calls this the

Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE). The Act also requires anyone showing up to vote, whose name is not on the voter rolls, to have the opportunity to cast a provisional ballot, which is counted later if the voter's registration is verified.

It also assists voters who have changed their address of registration. Their provisional votes count for those national and statewide candidates who are on the ballot at both the old and new address, such as president, U.S. Senator, and governor, and possibly members of Congress and the state legislature.

The League has also advocated for programs allowing citizens to register online, and has supported allowing citizens both to register and to cast a ballot on the date of a primary or general election. The latter has significantly increased voter participation in states that have it.

Local Leagues can be active in registering voters in several ways.

1. Attend naturalization ceremonies and register new citizens during the reception that follows the ceremony.
2. Visit local nursing homes and retirement communities and register residents.
3. Set up a table on move-in day at a local college or university to register students, and to remind them that, if they want to vote in their home election district, that they will need an absentee ballot.
4. Ask the PTA at local schools to allow registration of voters at their first meeting of the year. Many parents

move over the summer, and this is a good time to find them.

5. Colleges often have a day when they introduce new students to the school's co-curricular offerings. A voter registration table works well at these events.
6. Develop a program in your local jail, in conjunction with the Department of Corrections, to register inmates and to provide absentee ballot applications. Inmates jailed for misdemeanors or awaiting trial are eligible to vote. Those reentering society after incarceration can also receive registration applications.

### **LWVPA Position on Voter Registration**

According to "Where We Stand," the League supports:

- increasing the ease and accessibility of registration, and
- maintaining accurate and current voting lists.

Adding the following actions can expand the LWVUS position:

- allowing citizens to both register to vote or change their registration status on the day of a primary or election, and
- allowing voters to provide information that was missing on their voter registration forms on the day of a primary or election.

### **Election-day voter registration**

In 14 states voters can both register to vote or change their registration status and cast a ballot on the day of a

primary or general election. This makes voting more accessible for first-time voters and those who have changed their name or address, and for those who wish to change their party affiliation. In 2012, voter turnout was 10 percent higher in the 14 states that have same-day registration.

### **Providing registration information on Election Day (LWVUS supports)**

Voter registration offices are required to try to contact applicants if their registration forms are missing information. Sometimes attempts to obtain the information are unsuccessful. This policy would allow applicants, who show up to vote but are not on the rolls because of an incomplete application, to supply the missing information and cast a provisional ballot.

### **National Voter Registration Act ([NVRA](#))**

The National Voter Registration Act (sometimes known as motor voter), requires Pennsylvania and other states to offer voter registration to eligible citizens whenever they apply for or renew a driver's license, at all offices that provide public assistance, and at all offices that provide state-funded programs primarily engaged in providing services to persons with disabilities. The Pennsylvania Department of State publishes an annual report documenting compliance with this requirement. Now that Pennsylvania has begun to implement online voter registration, it should be possible to link Department of Motor Vehicles and other offices to the Department of State online system, making compliance easier and more

efficient. Furthermore, under the settlement of a lawsuit, school districts must offer voter registration to students with disabilities as part of their transition to adult life. Again, school districts can satisfy this requirement by offering voter registration to all eligible students.

NVRA requires that citizens, who sign up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, receive an offer of voter registration. This is happening in most states that have state-run health care exchanges. However, citizens applying for health insurance in states using federal exchanges do not receive this opportunity. LWVUS is working to expand the reach of NVRA by requiring the offering of voter registration in connection with all applications for insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

## **Non-incarcerated felon voting rights**

In Pennsylvania, ex-felons no longer incarcerated, inmates jailed for misdemeanors, and jailed inmates who are awaiting trial may vote. Only incarcerated felons may not vote. However, there is no program for offering voter registration and absentee ballot applications to eligible inmates and to inmates upon their release from jail.

## **Documentary proof of citizenship requirement for voter registration (LWVUS opposes)**

Kansas, Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, and Tennessee are looking to require proof-of-citizenship for voter registration. These laws face legal challenges, and the LWV is a party in some of these cases. Advocates say this requirement would prevent fraudulent voting by non-citizens, such as illegal immigrants, and is necessary. In most states, registrants affirm their citizenship on the registration form, and there have been virtually no instances of fraud. The requirement would affect new registrants and others, including, those who change their surname at marriage or their address, and those who wish to change their party affiliation.

Documentary proof-of-citizenship is either a birth certificate, a passport (which you need a birth certificate to receive or a naturalization certificate. Many people do not have or do not have easy access to a birth certificate. The requirement would put an undue burden on would-be voters. Furthermore, it would preclude community-based voter registration drives that have added millions of voters to the nation's voting rolls.

## **LWVPA's Position on Registration Could be Expanded by Adding the Following Issues**

### **Youth pre-registration**

High schools would be the primary place for pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds. The League's High School Voter Registration Project currently applies only to 18-year-olds. Hawaii and Florida are the only states that offer youth pre-registration. The NVRA requires special education offices within public school districts to offer voter registration to special education students when they become eligible. Special education offices can offer voter registration during annual Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings with students and their parents. As an alternative, school districts could satisfy this requirement by implementing a school-wide program for all voting age students that would include assistance in filling out the forms.

According to LWVUS's "Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow," approximately three-quarters of young people, who register, end up voting in major election years. Youth pre-registration would reach more people who do not frequent places that hold voter registration drives. Furthermore, too many young people report that it is lack of information and access – not lack of interest – that keeps them from voting.

<http://lww.org/files/Empowering%20the%20Voters%20of%20Tomorrow.%202015.%20LWVEF.%20Full%20Manual.pdf>

### **Primary voting at age 17**

At least 21 states and the District of Columbia allow citizens who will be 18 on or before Election Day to vote in the corresponding primary or caucus. They are barred from voting on ballot issues or in special elections that may be on the primary ballot. Currently, Pennsylvania 17-year-olds who will be eligible to vote on Election Day do not have a voice in determining who will be on the ballot. Allowing students to vote while still in school reinforces what they are learning in their civics classes, and they can participate in voting with their peers. This policy could establish a habit of voting that carries throughout life.

## **Automatic voter registration (AVR)**

Under an AVR program, a state department of motor vehicles automatically shares its database of the names and addresses of license holders with election officials. Entries include applications for original, renewal, lost or stolen licenses, and changes of name or address. Election officials then inform these prospective voters by mail that automatic registration will occur in 21 days, unless they opt out. Thus, as opposed to merely offering registration, the burden of registration shifts to government agencies rather than citizens.

On January 1, 2016, Oregon became the first state to implement AVR. The Election Division mails to each eligible voter a card and a stamped return envelope. If the recipients do nothing, they become a registered, non-affiliated voter (not a member of a political party.) To vote in primaries, they indicate their chosen party and mail back the card. Alternatively, they may opt out by so stating on the returned card. The institution of automatic registration added 34,000 new voters in the first three months of the year.

This program, as well as the current non-automatic motor voter programs in the other states, is currently limited to applicants for driver's licenses, who are usually owners of automobiles. African Americans are five times less likely than whites are to own cars. Residents of urban areas are also less likely to own a vehicle. Therefore, AVR leaves out these segments of the population. Senator Bernie Sanders introduced an [ARV bill](#) on August 15, 2015, that would require each state to designate additional agencies

that would transfer prospective voter information electronically to election officials for automatic registration. Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has called for automatic voter registration since 2011 and, on May 18, 2016, stated, [“Governments can, and should, automatically register citizens to vote by compiling –from existing data bases—a list of all eligible residents in each jurisdiction.”](#)

LWVUS thinks automatic voter registration is a good idea but has concerns over current proposals that would rely on the use of department of motor vehicle records. One concern is the possible automatic registration of those who are not citizens. In order for automatic voter registration to work, it must connect to citizenship status.

Using lists of citizenship status raises concerns regarding privacy and the accuracy of the lists used. Additionally, this becomes a civil rights issue. Automatically registering non-citizens could expose them to prosecution and deportation by putting them in a position for which they are not responsible. Oregon has addresses these concerns in the following ways.

- The system ensures that it automatically registers only U.S. citizens, because you must provide proof of legal status in order to obtain a driver’s license.
- The Election Division will only mail out registration cards to people who have provided documentation that they are citizens.

Privacy is not a concern, because DMV records are not generally public. Only police and other agencies may access them and only for legitimate government purposes

More information about automatic voter registration appears at

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/289377031/Automatic-Permanent-Voter-Registration-How-It-Works>

### **Universal automatic registration**

Most democracies make voter registration automatic at age 18, or the age of majority. Therefore, the government, rather than its citizens, carries this responsibility. Government officials typically possess a large and current database of citizens, including names, addresses, and dates of birth. By using data-matching technology widely deployed in the private sector, it is not difficult to establish a universal voter registration list. Without safeguards preventing inadvertent registration of non-citizens, however, universal registration raises the same concerns as automatic voter registration does.