

President's Report

This has been an unusual year in all our lives. As we recognize 101 years of women's suffrage in the United States and the League of Women Voters, the need for the League's work is as great as it has ever been. Voter suppression and unfounded reports of voter fraud are only two of the issues that threatened the national election in 2020. There have been more than 20 laws enacted in 14 states to make voting more difficult this year and many more introduced in state legislatures. We have crucial challenges to our democracy that the League must and will address.

A highlight of this past year was to be named the Inspire Change Organization of the Game recipient for Week 17 of the Buffalo Bills season. Because there were no spectators at the game, the League was featured in a brief video and I received the football in the mail. Several of us had fun posing with it in the snow. The League was selected by the players' Social Justice Fund committee and received a \$2,500 check from the Bills Foundation.

In 2020, we had 120 people, mostly League members, who volunteered their time and talents to carry out the work of this League. Many of them volunteered for several different projects. This number is especially impressive, since we spent most of 2020 doing our work remotely.

This winter, we hired a new office manager. Victoria Mueller brings much business experience to the League. Barbara Gunderson was relieved to be able to return her energies completely to Voter Services and we eagerly welcomed her back as a board member.

As you will plainly see from the reports that follow, we had a very productive year despite the need to meet remotely. Never doubt what a group of savvy, resilient, and committed people can accomplish!

Please contact the committee chair if you have any questions about a committee's report. Committees are always interested in increasing their membership. Please consider volunteering for something new.

Board: *Marian Deutschman, Nancy DeTine, Susan Dombrowski, Barbara Gunderson, Shirley Joy, Rebecca LaCivita, Nora Mikes, Lori Robinson, Alberta Roman, Mary Ann Turkla, Liz Zausmer, and Terri Parks, president*

Voter Services Committee

Highlights:

- Zoom with the Buffalo Bills
- Partnership with NAACP Buffalo Branch and SANYS on two "Fighting for Our Vote" webinars
- Co-sponsoring bus signs with PUSH Buffalo and NAACP Buffalo Branch
- More than 50 volunteer members who wrote postcards and distributed doorknob hangers

Education Presentations:

Live: 3. Via Zoom: 6. Via video: 1. Via radio: 3.
Collaborative education presentations: 2.

Projects: Lovejoy District postcards: 3,000 written and mailed

North District doorknob hangers with information cards: 2,000 distributed

Voter Registration Events: 7

Voter registrations/preregistrations at events and presentations: approximately 100

Voter registration forms distributed to schools/colleges/groups: approximately 3,000

Early Voting Site Lists Distributed: 5,000

November 2 General Election information cards distributed: 10,500

June 22 Primary Election information cards distributed: 2,500

LWVNY Voting Guide 1 for Primary/General Election 2021: 3,000 ordered and distributed

Bus Signs: 17 rear bus signs and two queen bus signs co-sponsored with NAACP Buffalo Branch and PUSH Buffalo

Ongoing Relationships/Meetings with Community Organizations:

NAACP Buffalo Branch, NOAH/Niagara, SANYS, SUNY Buffalo, PUSH, Get Out the Vote Planning Committee, VOICE Buffalo

Students Inside Albany (SIA): sponsored high school students Lily Janik and Maria Evancho to virtual event in May 2021

Candidate Forums: Two for school boards; one for Buffalo Democratic mayoral primary to take place via Zoom on June 10

Naturalization/New Citizen Services: In-person naturalization ceremonies are not being held due to COVID. USCIS is holding individual naturalization meetings. We are working with the Erie County Board of Elections to provide voter registration forms and new voter information to these new citizens.

Committee: *Liz Zausmer, GOTV Subcommittee Chair; Terri Parks, Candidate Forums; Deborah Shiffner, Naturalization/New Citizen Ceremonies; Linda Koenigsberg, Voter Registration Team Chair; Liz McGough and Patti Meyer-Lee, Voter Registration Volunteer Coordinators; Barb Jezioro, Vote411.org; Janet Goodsell, SIA Coordinator, and Barbara Gunderson, Voter Services Chair*

Waterfront Committee

The Waterfront Committee met November 18, January 13, February 10, and May 12. We met via Zoom from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Despite few in-person meetings, the committee participated in actions concerning the Outer Harbor. We developed comments to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) concerning their General Project Plan and submitted these comments in December. Our comments supported efforts to maintain the Outer Harbor area as an ecological treasure, which buffers the City of Buffalo from storms and lake surges. We oppose development of an amphitheater at the water's edge, on the basis of the LWVBN position that insists on "appropriate use of a waterfront location" or "recreational activities within a framework that protects and enhances the natural environment at the water's edge."

LWVBN continues to be an active member of the Our Outer Harbor Coalition.

The committee coordinated the planning for a public event, "Claiming Our Outer Harbor Park," held via Zoom from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. on April 21, with the Our Outer Harbor Coalition and 21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor. Hosted by the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) and moderated by Terri Parks, the event attracted more than 80 participants to hear Sam Magavern present the report, "Buffalo's Outer Harbor: the Right Place for a World Class Park." State Assemblyman Patrick Burke opened the meeting by stating his strong support for the park concept and his strong opposition to removing the Skyway. We will continue to press our New York State elected officials to support the park initiative.

Winter storms did severe damage to parts of the Outer Harbor breakwater. Most of Times Beach remains closed to the public.

The LWVBN has joined as an interested party to a lawsuit related to the ECHDC plans.

We maintain an email contact list of 40 people.

Committee: *James Carr, Ellen Gibson, Joanne Kahn, Beth Kauffman, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Terri Parks, Lynda Stephens and Gladys Gifford, Chair*

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (DEI)

We formed the DEI Committee in the fall of 2020. An important goal was to increase community outreach and to connect with civic organizations that serve various communities. The following is a description of our work and purpose.

The DEI Committee

- Works to help the League maintain a presence and relevance in a wide variety of communities.
- Equips League members with information and experiences around DEI
- Actively seeks out and partners with other civic organizations to utilize their experiences and expertise while collaborating to provide services within the Buffalo and Niagara communities

The DEI Committee meets on the third Tuesday of each month to plan activities and develop LWVBN's understanding and implementation of

DEI principles. We welcome anyone who is interested in working to help the League be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in its membership and work.

Since the committee’s origin we have collaborated with SANYS (Self Advocacy of New York State) and the NAACP Buffalo Branch to produce two webinars.

The first webinar, “Fighting For Our Vote” in February, reviewed the history, present and future of voting as experienced by African Americans, Americans with disabilities and women.

The second webinar, “Fighting For Our Vote 2.0,” was presented on May 13. We addressed myths and truths about voting, voter accessibility, voter suppression, and the requirements in New York State for exercising one’s vote. The speakers included the Democratic Commissioner of the Erie County Board of Elections who discussed what happens to our ballots once they are submitted, how votes are counted, and what security measures are employed.

Future plans:

At our last meeting, April 20, we discussed:

- Auto Ballot Device initiative. We will encourage League members to learn to use the Auto Ballot Device and use it when we vote. The goal is to increase the use of the device and encourage enhanced training for poll workers who would be able to better assist persons who cannot vote without the device. We will work on setting up a training session with the BOE for League members.
- Sponsored memberships. Develop, through anonymous donations, a League fund to be used to sponsor in part, or in full, individuals who would like to become members, but find the dues to be financially burdensome.
- Explore the diversity within our board and then within our membership.
- Explore social justice initiatives with Voice Buffalo, NAACP Buffalo Branch, Buffalo Jewish Community Relations, and other community groups to see where the League might be able to contribute to their efforts.

Committee: *Barbara Gunderson, Nina Lukin, Marian Deutschman, Patti Myer-Lee, Ramona Gallagher, Andrea Baldi, Terri Parks, Alberta Roman, and Elizabeth Zausmer, Chair*

LWVBN Website Report

The total number of visits to the LWVB/N website, **lwvbn.org**, from May 2020 through April 2021 was 30,252, with a low in April 2020 of 2,285 and a high in November 2020 of 2,767. Recent years have shown less of a stark contrast in the number of visits to our site in election months vs. non-election months – whether this is due, this year, to the effect of the pandemic in general, or to voters being absolutely surfeited with election information from every source known to man in the 2020 election (and therefore not needing to seek us out in particular) or even due to visitors who seek Voters Guide information being directed to Vote411.org, is anyone’s guess. Traffic directly to Vote411.org is not reflected in our own statistics. Web traffic statistics for the past five years are given below.

Visits During Year from May to April with Comparison of Election Months Activity

	Total Visits	Non-Election Months Average	Election Months Average (Sept - Nov)
May 2016 - April 2017	19,612	903	2175
May 2017 - April 2018	28,358	1877	2926
May 2018 - April 2019	26,534	2320	3028
May 2019 - April 2020	25,583	2140	2109
May 2020 - April 2021	30,252	2447	2843

Nora Mikes, Webmaster

Local Government Committee

The pandemic put municipalities in a precarious position. We concentrated on a program to address the fiscal cliff faced by local governments without aid. We scheduled a March meeting on Zoom with a keynote speaker and two panelists with a focus on city/town/county shortfalls. The keynote speaker was Dr. Mildred Warner, a

professor in the Department of City & Regional Planning at Cornell University. The panelists were Greg Rabb from Jamestown Community College and Geoff Kelly from the Investigative Post. The program was titled “Scaling the Fiscal Cliff: The Post Pandemic Challenge for Local Governments.” Dr. Warner complimented the program, saying that she enjoyed the experience and learned so much from the discussion.

This committee made sweeping recommendations to be considered for significant changes in the annual local program focus for LWVBN in 2022-2023.

Committee: *Kathleen McCarthy, Lynne Vallone, Nora Mikes, Dot Brown, Lisa Parshall, Susan Czynny, Lynda Stephens, and Marian Deutschman, Chair*

Program, Issues and Events Committee

Representatives from the program committees form this committee. We welcome other members to help us plan programs. Committee chairs distribute summaries of their committee meetings to this committee and to the board.

Our role is to discuss and recommend approval of program events and actions proposed by those committees and other League members. Based on our recommendations, the board decides whether to grant approval or denial. Most actions are in the form of letters to media or elected officials, and must conform to League positions. The president kept us informed of program items for LWVNYS, LWVUS and conventions. In its role as a clearinghouse for programs, this committee was involved in a pandemic year of hosting and co-sponsoring a wide array of primarily virtual meetings.

We cancelled our traditional potluck summer luncheon. We co-sponsored an event at Larkin Square with Larkinville and Leslie Zemsky on August 27. Mark Sommer of The Buffalo News interviewed Margaret Sullivan of the Washington Post. A rain and windstorm moved the event indoors and many of us had to watch it online with a few additional technical difficulties. Our goal was to promote getting out the vote.

We launched a virtual book club/discussion group meeting on Zoom on September 10 and continued on October 8, November 12, December 9, January 14, February 17, March 17, April 28, and May 26. We haven't solved all the world's problems but we gave it a good try and had fun doing it!

Our October 7 event was a successful co-sponsorship on healthcare policy with the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York and WNED/WBFO. The program was available statewide with an array of healthcare experts. Promotion/publicity highlighting the League was distributed by WNED/WBFO.

The November 19 virtual program, titled “So We Voted, Now What?” featured Lee Coppola, retired Dean of the School of Journalism at St. Bonaventure University; Peter Yacobucci, Associate Professor of Political Science at SUNY Buffalo State; and Bob McCarthy, political reporter for The Buffalo News. The meeting was co-sponsored with the American Association of University Women.

Our holiday party was cancelled. On December 8, we had a meeting to educate us on the update of two separate LWVNYS positions related to healthcare. On January 19, we had a follow-up consensus meeting on healthcare using materials from the State League. On February 20, Ramona Gallagher conducted a citizens lobbying workshop.

The February 23 meeting, “Fighting for our Vote,” was a collaboration of LWVBN, SANYS, and the NAACP Buffalo Branch. The panel consisted of Jennifer Wilson, Deputy Director of LWVNYS; BJ Stasio, President of SANYS; and L. Nathan Hare, former President & CEO of the Community Action Organization, with City Court Judge Lenora Foote-Beavers as moderator.

The March 23 Zoom program, “Scaling the Fiscal Cliff,” addressed the budget challenges facing local governments in New York State with a keynote speaker and two panelists (*see the Local Government Committee report for details*).

The April 21 meeting, “Claiming our Outer Harbor,” was a collaboration with the Our Outer Harbor Coalition, 21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor,

and the Partnership for the Public Good. It featured Sam Magavern presenting his report, "Buffalo's Outer Harbor: The Right Place for a World Class Park."

On May 13, we hosted "Fighting for our Vote 2.0" with our partners from SANYS and the NAACP. The panelists were L. Nathan Hare, BJ Stasio, Jeremy Zellner, Commissioner of the Erie County Board of Elections, and Barbara Gunderson, LWVBN Voter Services Chair, with City Court Judge Lenora Foote-Beavers as moderator.

The May 19 virtual panel discussion was "The Effect of the Covid-19 on Schools." Panel members were representatives of students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

Committee: Janet Massaro, Nancy DeTine, Liz Zausmer, Nora Mikes, JoAnn Mecca, Terri Parks, Lynda Stephens, Susan Czynny, Alberta Roman, Judy Huber, Gladys Gifford, Ramona Gallagher and Marian Deutschman, Chair

Membership Committee

The year of living with Covid-19 has been challenging for all us. For the Membership Committee, it meant finding new ways of recruiting members without the luxury of in-person communication. Members who worked so hard to get out the vote also brought valuable information to the public about our goal of civic involvement and education. We were able to grow our membership slightly; we currently have 236 dedicated men and women in our organization. This year we are hoping to return to our monthly events to greet current members and provide potential members with information about the League that will encourage them to join. A new PowerPoint presentation is in the works that will highlight the activities of our many committees and will be a tool for new members, and current members, as they decide where to focus their endeavors.

We also revised the Membership Committee Guidelines and wrote a job description for the committee. These will give us direction as we strive to build our membership with individuals eager to continue the work the League has done over the past 100 years. Thank you to all who

worked so hard this past year to keep our League vibrant.

Committee: Ramona Gallagher, Janet Massaro, Terri Parks, and Mary Ann Turkla and Lori Robinson, Co-Chairs

BMHA Election Services

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, our League of Women Voters conducted the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) Tenant Commissioners Election in September 2020, and hosted two candidate forums for that election. Our League has the contract to conduct this election and tenant council elections at housing sites. Nora Mikes chaired this effort and deserves much credit for coordinating all of the disparate parties in order to conduct a fair and open election. Ramona Gallagher, Terri Parks, Mary Ann Turkla, Janet Goodsell, and Alan Dozoretz assisted in the efforts to conduct this election.

Covid-19 disrupted elections for tenant councils this year, until recently. I want to personally thank the following Election Services members who stepped up to assist with a recent 1,250-count mailing that at times proved to be both challenging and chaotic: Nora Mikes, Sally Metzger, Scott Gehl, Sharon Cramer, Shirley Joy, Onda Simmons, Mike Egan, Lee Tetkowski, Mary Herbst, Judy Huber, Janet Goodsell, Judy Capodicasa, Sue Stievator, Marlene Katzel, and Ramona Gallagher.

Next month, we will conduct nominations at the Kensington-Langfield Housing Complex, and in July we will conduct elections at that site.

Alan Dozoretz, Chair

Money in Politics Committee

This past year the Money in Politics (MIP) Committee focused much of its attention on the issue of redistricting following the 2020 U.S. Census count. As expected, New York State lost one seat in the House of Representatives, not because we lost population, but because we did not gain as many people as other states. We will now have 26 seats in the House. On April 29, 2021, the national League initiated its nationwide

redistricting activities with a “Redistricting Day of Action.” Our MIP Committee worked closely with Jennifer Wilson from the state League to make this kick-off event a success in our area. The MIP Committee has contacted legislators from Erie and Niagara Counties and the City of Buffalo. We will be monitoring their local redistricting activities when these begin in the fall.

Although less prominent this year, campaign finance reform remains our first concern. We also recognize with growing alarm new voting restrictions being enacted in many parts of the country to keep citizens from exercising their right to vote. Our work on these issues continues at all government levels. We anticipate a busy year as we enter the 2021 election season.

Committee: Janet Goodsell, Jennifer Hoffman, Shirley Joy, Beth Kauffman, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Margaret Meyer, Laura McDade, Alberta Roman, and Janet Massaro, Chair

LWVBN Healthcare Committee

This year we created the Healthcare Committee to be a source of education and empowerment on healthcare issues for League members and local residents. Its goals are:

- To support state and national League healthcare positions
- To inform members of healthcare issues
- To support community healthcare issues and activity.

The committee consists of a chair and /or co-chairs and members. Members do not need to be members of LWVBN.

Committee: Sandy Cummings, Debra Kosko, Christine Reichmuth, Terri Parks, Elaine Puchlerz, Kathy Lyons, Jennifer Hoffman, Therese Warden, John Buckley, and Judy Huber and Alberta Roman, Co-Chairs

Education Committee

The primary focus and effort of the Education Committee culminated with a panel discussion on May 19, 2021, on “The Effect of COVID on Schools.” We heard from multiple perspectives including views from school administrators, Board

of Education members, community activists, teachers, parents and concerned citizens. Covid-19 has had a profound effect across multiple spectrums. We have an opportunity to continue the dialogue going forward and plan on future discussions addressing the effects of the pandemic on education and the community.

Recent additional charter schools restarted our interest in monitoring them. We learned of the controversial closing of two of the original ones, Westminster and Enterprise. Our committee was planning to visit the new ones when Covid-19 resulted in meeting by Zoom. We hope to receive information on the most recent changes in the New York State Charter Schools Act and to continue to be informed.

Committee: JoAnn Mecca, Nora Mikes, Maxine Insera, Marlene Katzel, Marian Deutschman, Lee Tetkowski, and Susan Czyrny, Chair

Communications and Public Relations

With much gratitude, I salute our committee’s achievements during this most unusual year. Thanks to our extremely talented volunteer designer, *Krysta Doerfler*, we provided professionally designed flyers for League events. Thanks to our layout editor, *Kathleen McCormick*, the Voter has been executed beautifully, and thanks to *Sally Metzger*, printed copies are sent by mail. Thanks to webmaster *Nora Mikes*, our website is current, well organized, easy to navigate and convenient for making payments and donations online.

Thanks to *Michelle Perkins*, our Facebook page regularly provides interesting, timely and relevant posts that continue to attract new followers, comments and “likes.” We also use posts to promote our online events, as well as action items initiated by the state and national Leagues.

Press releases regularly go out to virtually every media outlet in the area, as far away as Springville, Lockport and Niagara Falls. Our ever-growing list now comprises more than 60 contacts. While it’s difficult to know how many of them publish our information, The Buffalo News has carried several events, boosting attendance considerably.

Finally, we send a shout-out to Victoria Mueller and Barbara Gunderson, current and past office managers, respectively, who diligently send email reminders about our activities and events – not to mention Mary Ann Turkla, who held the post for many years and trained them so well.

Nancy DeTine, Chair

Western New York Women’s Suffrage Centennial Celebration Committee

From Suffrage to the ERA – Equity, Resilience, Advocacy

The Western New York Women’s Suffrage Centennial Celebration Committee (WNYWSCCC), a partnership of 11 women’s organizations, was formed in September 2019 at the invitation of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara to celebrate the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The program originally scheduled for August 2020 was designed to pay homage to the suffragists who fought for the 19th Amendment and to illuminate the challenges and inequalities of women that still exist.

In March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted our planning and caused the committee to reschedule the celebration to October 2, 2021, at Wick Center, Daemen College.

The committee decided to focus on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and renamed the event “From Suffrage to the ERA – Equity, Resilience, Advocacy.” It will be a half-day in-person and online program on women’s rights from the suffrage movement to the Equal Rights Amendment.

The program will feature noted women’s studies scholar Sally Roesch Wagner, PhD, as keynote speaker and moderator of an interactive panel discussion. Dr. Wagner will provide a historical perspective of the women’s rights movement.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed many crises facing women including political, economic, health and wellness and domestic violence. The program will address these issues, demonstrate why they

are relevant to the ERA and inspire active involvement in pursuing its adoption.

The passage of the 19th Amendment that enfranchised women was a major victory. Passage of the ERA will establish gender equality in the U.S. Constitution and end the idea that equality is a debatable issue.

The ERA has been stalled since 1979 when it failed to gain ratification from 38 states, the requirement for a constitutional amendment. In 2019, Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the ERA. In 2021, Congress reintroduced a joint resolution to remove the deadline this year, which the House of Representatives approved on March 17, 2021.

The 11 partners of the WNYWSCCC are organizations dedicated to education, religious tolerance, good government and human rights. They are:

- AAUW, Buffalo Branch
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority
- Daemen College
- Erie County Commission on the Status of Women
- League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara
- NYS Women, Inc., Buffalo/Niagara Chapter
- UB Gender Institute
- Women’s Auxiliary of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
- Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York, WNY Chapter
- WNY Women’s Foundation
- Zonta Club of Buffalo

Lyle Toohey, Chair

Finance Committee

Our investments with TIAA-CREF as of 6/2/2021:

Core Bond Fund	\$ 9,385.25
Green Bond Fund	7,318.89
Growth & Income Fund	56,195.97
Social Choice Equity Fund	50,841.31
Money Market	3,043.52
Total	\$ 126,784.94

Committee: *Deborah Schiffner, Shirley Joy, Janet Zehr, Terri Parks, and Lori Robinson, Chair*