

Winter 2011

From the President's Desk...

Officers and Directors

Liz Tentarelli, Co-President
603-763-9296
LWV@kenliz.net

Sally Davis, Co-President
726-3775
rsdavis@emlot.com

Peg Fargo, Vice-President
Greater Capital Area President
226-4574
pfargo@hotmail.com

Mary Perry, Treasurer
648-2488
marybperry@tds.net

Jane Armstrong, Membership
526-2066
janenlnh@tds.net

Virginia Higgins, Voter Editor
768-3379
cghiggins@myfairpoint.net

Local League Contacts

Peg Fargo, Greater Capital Area
226-4574
pfargo@hotmail.com

Joan Timmerman, Manchester
Co-coordinator 626-7410
excelsis2@juno.com

Sue Capano, Manchester
Co-Coordinator 622-1031
pscapano@comcast.net

J.L. Tonner, Kearsarge/Sunapee
526-6858
itonner@msn.com

Upper Valley League
www.uppervalleyleague.org

A new year, a new Congress, many new state legislators—an exciting time to be part of the League of Women Voters. Your state board will try to meet with our new Congressional representatives to hear about their priorities and to share ours. We will also continue to follow state legislation on election issues and incarceration topics. Through our coalitions, we will keep track of and may speak in hearings on bills related to taxation, death penalty, and gambling.

Our almost annual Day at the Legislature will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 15 this year (snow date is Feb. 17). This event is an easy and pleasant way for League members and friends to attend committee hearings, meet the legislators, and then debrief over a simple but tasty lunch. See the registration form and more information elsewhere in this newsletter. I hope to see you there!

Our study of the impact of women incarcerated in NH continues to fascinate many of our members. Short articles about several incarceration topics by study committee members are included in this newsletter. There is more on the study page of our website for you to read when you have time. HB500, implemented last year as a way to save money on incarceration and to reduce recidivism, has been much in the news since last fall. Watch for articles and editorials in the newspapers.

On behalf of the state board, I close with a heart-felt thank you for all that League members do in NH. Thanks to the local Leagues that offer stimulating and informative programs for members and the public. Thanks to the many members who helped with voter service last fall, including making phone calls to candidates regarding VOTE411.org. Thanks to local Leagues for hosting candidate forums and to members who asked challenging questions of the candidates. Thanks to our members at large, who continue to support the League with their dues even when they live far from League meeting venues. You, our members, make possible the non-partisan influence the League can have in Concord and in Washington.

Liz Tentarelli, co-president

2011 Day at The Legislature

Join League members for our annual Day at the Legislature, Tuesday, February 15. Snow date is Thursday, Feb. 17*.

We will meet in the League office** at 9 am for coffee and an introduction to the bills being discussed that day. Then in small groups we will visit the state house, sitting in on committee hearings of interest to the League.

Lunch will be served in a building near the capitol. For those members who reply quickly, the state board will phone your senators and representatives and invite them to join us for lunch, giving members and legislators a chance to chat informally about our priorities and theirs. We will debrief after lunch and be done by 2 pm. Lunch charge of \$5 is payable on the day of the event.

*If weather is bad, call 763-9296 for a recorded message about postponement.

**The League office is at 4 Park St, Suite 200, on the corner of Main St. and Park St., adjacent to the capitol. Parking is available at 50 cents an hour in nearby parking garages.

Please reply as soon as possible, via email to LWV@kenliz.net or phone Liz Tentarelli at 763-9296 (evenings). Please give your name and where you live so that we can identify your legislators and invite them. Or mail this form by Feb. 12 to Liz Tentarelli, 27 Bowles Rd., Newbury NH 03255

I/we would like to attend the League of Women Voters Day at the Legislature on February 15

Name _____ town _____

Phone or email: _____

State League Legislative Priorities

The state board voted in January to focus our efforts in the state house on election law, education funding, incarceration, and redistricting issues. We will track bills, attend committee hearings when possible, and testify in the name of the League when appropriate.

Through the coalitions to which we belong, we will also follow and testify on gambling legislation and death penalty changes, if such bills come up during this session. (See coalition priorities on next page.)

We expect to see one or more constitutional amendments proposed. Depending on the content and the extent to which we think the League can have an impact, we will either testify during hearings or focus voter education efforts on the proposals next fall.

The state board invites all members with specific interests to follow legislation and to bring it to the board's attention if the League has a position on the topic.

Reports from Coalitions

1The objective of the **Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty** during this year will be to focus on public education about the death penalty. The three main messages will be: (1) the death penalty fails the murder victims family (2) the expansion of the death penalty was not recommended by the NH study commission that studied the issue and released their report in November 2010 and (3) that the death penalty is more expensive to prosecute and implement.

Led by chair Laurel Redden and executive director Cathy Silber, the **Granite State Fair Tax Coalition** has completed a strategic plan that will continue framing the message of tax reform to the public.

The coalition will encourage supporters to become more active in dialog with their own legislators and to monitor and testify on bills that are related to the state budget and legislative decisions with town and school budgets.

The coalition will also take a position on selected legislation and budget decisions, maintain a consistent statewide media presence and work toward providing a credible statewide voice on the budget/revenue issues.

The **Coalition for Open Democracy** will be working in 2011 to frame the debate for passage of a voluntary public funding system for New Hampshire in 2012. There will not be a public funding bill in the current legislative session. We are working hard in three areas: ...Research on campaign contributions and spending in the 2010 NH election; Legislative organizing around campaign finance reforms; and Capacity building of the organization. COD will reach out to its member organizations – including LWV – for help with all three of these areas.

On February 9, COD will host an event to honor the late Doris ‘Granny D’ Haddock. There is legislation in the current session to make January 24, her birthday, an official annual Granny D Day. The event will be from 11:30 – 1:30 in the State House with a program from 12:15 – 12:45. League members are encouraged to come.

New Hampshire Children’s Alliance will support an adequate source of revenue for the state, the first time the group has addressed the inadequate revenue structure. They have also listed a series of seven educational priorities including support for the full funding of constitutional adequacy for all children served in public schools in New Hampshire.

As a participant in the **NH Coalition Against Expanded Gambling** we will follow several bills now only identified as LSRs that are predicted to propose several ways of expanding gambling in NH. Senators Jeanie Forrester and Mandy Merrill, and Reps. Peter Schmidt and Dan Itse have agreed to lead the new 2011-2012 Legislative Anti-Gambling Caucus.

Update on Women Incarcerated Study

Interim Position - Based on the results of consensus meetings held by four local Leagues in spring 2010 and 8 additional members who participated via mail-in responses, the board of the LWVNH adopted this interim partial position on 10/20/10:

The League of Women Voters of New Hampshire supports efforts by the state and county correctional systems that would reduce recidivism and would address the unique needs of women offenders and their families.

The League believes that increased access to programs in the county houses of correction (HOCs), the first place of incarceration for most offenders, is money well invested to reduce recidivism. Some of the programs should be gender-specific, such as healthcare, trauma-related counseling, substance abuse treatment, anger management, and some parenting skills. The houses of correction should take advantage of communications technology to offer more programs, especially in the HOCs with small numbers of female inmates. Work opportunities in the HOCs and on crews working in the community should be increased for women offenders.

The county houses of correction should focus attention on building life skills capacity and preparing plans for inmates upon release. Plans should include further drug and alcohol treatment and referrals for counseling and education so that recidivism will be reduced.

Having a position, even one that does not yet directly address the women's prison or the court system, will allow the League to take a position in this legislative session on any legislation that may arise concerning the houses of correction.

Continuation of the study - When the state board proposed this program, we had no idea how many aspects there are to the issue. Nor did we realize that very few other independent organizations are addressing the topic. Although League members voted at convention 2009 to conclude the study in spring 2011, the steering committee has asked the state board to extend the study through January 2012 and the board agreed. We will vote on the extension at state convention this spring.

So far we have studied and reached consensus on the county houses of correction. In this issue is a consensus question about the women's prison, which we visited in June. We have also been following closely SB 500, the parole revision bill, and we have met with parole and community corrections officials. From that work comes a question for consensus on the issue of recidivism.

More remains to be done. We have yet to schedule a speaker or two from the courts, to help us understand both sentencing and alternative sentencing as practiced in the state. Several counties have come to our attention as offering "islands of excellence" in their re-entry planning, their work opportunities for inmates, and comprehensive treatment programs for offenders. We would like to investigate these

further. Finally, changes in parole and post-incarceration support are crucial to our understanding of the impact of incarceration.

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Repeat Offenders in NH Prisons

We all can make a mistake, but to make the same mistake repeatedly warrants examination. The NH Dept. of Corrections has made such a study for the past 4 years, following the inmates released from the state prisons for three years after their release. The recidivism rate of each year's released offenders (those inmates who were returned to the prison system, either for a new crime or for violations of parole) has been carefully broken down by factors of age, sex, type of crime, length of stay, and number of previous incarcerations.

These studies are available on the state Dept. of Corrections website: <http://www.nh.gov/nhdod/divisions/publicinformation/index.html>. If you want just a quick look at the actual studies, read pages 3-5 and the section summaries of each. The latest study came out in May 2010, covering 1,073 inmates released from state prisons between July 2005 and June 2006. Three years later, 49% of them had returned to prison. Although only 10% of the offenders released were female, their recidivism rate was 52%--that's 55 women for whom prison did not deter further criminal activity.

As we already learned in our study of women incarcerated in NH, few women commit violent crimes. Most (78%) had been in prison for property or drug crimes. Unfortunately, both drug use and theft/fraud are hard behaviors to change, especially for young female offenders (in their 20s) who had a recidivism rate of about 65%.

The first few months after release are critical for all. Of all those who re-offended, 10% returned within 2 months, 50% within the first 7 months, and 90% within 2 years. Those women who had been incarcerated four or more times already had a recidivism rate of 71% (because of the relatively small number of females released each year, that was just 5 women).

For a national perspective, visit the LWVNH.org website. On the "study of women incarcerated" page is a PDF file titled "Justice Report Reducing Recidivism."

SB500 allows inmates to be released at least nine months prior to the maxing out of their sentence. After release, high-risk offenders will be supervised closely as they find housing, get referrals for treatment for addiction and find employment in the community. Mandatory supervision will help to protect the community during the period that offenders are most likely to re-offend. Current practice sets them completely free when they finish their maximum term with no supervision and no community protection.

The other provision in this bill requires a mandatory 90-day return to prison for parole violators. Prior to this, those violators had to wait for a hearing from the parole board and sanctions were not swift.

While the bill has generated a lot of publicity, it is too soon to tell whether providing closer supervision for high-risk offenders upon release and finding community support for their underlying problems will result in reduced recidivism in NH.

There is a bill to repeal SB500 in the current session of the legislature and if it is not repealed, will it be funded in the next budget?

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(Continued from page 5.)

Local League study committees have been sent summaries of the latest recidivism study for discussion. Other interested League members should visit the League's website, LWVNH.org, then click on the "study of women incarcerated" page for various documents on recidivism.

Phase Two Consensus Questions

Members at large, nationally recruited members, and all other League members in New Hampshire are now invited to participate in **phase two of the consensus process**. If you are not able to attend a local League consensus meeting, you may participate by filling out and mailing in the form below. One local league consensus meeting is scheduled for March 9 at 9:30 at the New London Lake Sunapee Bank on Newport Road. Any member is welcome to participate.

This form must be received in the League office by March 15, 2011, at the latest.
Mail to LWVNH, 4 Park St Suite 200, Concord NH 03301 attn "study"

Your ZIP code _____

Question #1

The ideal women's prison in New Hampshire would have a core philosophy of rehabilitation rather than punishment.

It would have safe and humane conditions for inmates and staff.

It would use gender-specific assessment tools to determine the most beneficial placement, programs, and treatment for inmates.

It would have the space, staff and funding for treatment of mental health issues and substance abuse.

It would have well-trained staff with adequate female staffing at all times to cover the requirement for two corrections officers, at least one of whom is female, when transporting or searching inmates.

The ideal women's prison would include the following:

Space and funding for vocational training

Space and funding for educational programming, including high school courses, GED preparation and testing, and college-level courses

Space and funding for outdoor exercise and year-round recreation

Space for visitation that allows mother/child relationships to continue and parenting skills instruction to improve those relationships.

The ideal halfway house for women who are approaching their prison release date would include access to mental health and substance abuse treatment.

It would also be located so that inmates can safely travel to jobs in the community.

Circle one: Agree Disagree Other comments

Question #2

The New Hampshire corrections system should use current research and national best practices to guide them in reducing recidivism.

Circle one: Agree Disagree Other comments

Please check the item(s) below that apply to you.

To prepare for answering the consensus questions I did the following:

attended one or more League meetings on the topic of incarceration

read articles on the topic in recent issues of the NHVoter or on the League's website (LWVNH.org)

read other articles or books on the topics of women offenders/incarceration/recidivism

visited a county house of corrections and/or the women's prison

other (please describe)

Voter Service in 2010

The League board takes very seriously its voter service role. In preparation for the September primary and the November 2010 election, we participated in the national League's voting information website, VOTE411.org, for the first time. On the site we posted candidates' profiles and responses to a few key questions, covering the races for Congress, Governor, Executive Council, and state senate.

The Upper Valley local League also contacted Grafton County candidates and posted their information and answers on VOTE411.

Visitors to the site came from 86 towns and cities in NH and viewed a total of 21,525 pages in the candidate information pages. In addition, people used VOTE411 for general voting information, such as polling places and absentee voting procedures, through a link to the secretary of state's website.

None of this would have been possible without the work of many people. We thank all who assisted in this effort including Secretary of State Bill Gardner, whose website offered visitors a chance to see the actual ballot they would be given on election day just by typing in their address and ZIP code. Many thanks to League members who made follow-up phone calls to candidates, urging them to post their information.

In addition to the online voters' guide via VOTE411, Leagues also scheduled and moderated forums to let voters meet and question their regional candidates. Forums were held in Meredith, Concord, Lebanon, Hanover, and New London. Thanks especially our member-at-large Paula Trombi in Meredith who arranged for the local Republicans and Democrats to jointly host a forum and requested the state League provide a moderator.

DUES REMINDER FOR MEMBERS-AT- LARGE MAL's who haven't paid their dues (\$40) for 2010 should do so immediately in order to maintain their membership. Those who have been paying dues to LWVUS should switch to paying dues to LWVNH if they wish to continue receiving this newsletter. Mail dues to:

League of Women Voters of New Hampshire
4 Park Street, Suite 200
Concord, NH 03301

ACTION REMINDER Our website will provide each week's updated Committee Hearing information on bills we are following and others of interest. The information will be posted over the weekend of each week. We benefit from coalition efforts and League members interested in issues who alert us to upcoming legislation and hope to encourage and empower League participation in the legislative process. I will also send out the alert to anyone interested in receiving information directly. Please let me know if you want to be on my alert list. Sally Davis league@lwnh.org.

League of Women Voters of New Hampshire
4 Park Street, Suite 200
Concord, NH 03301-6313
Tel. 603-225-5344
www.lwnh.org

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