



NH Voter

League of Women Voters New Hampshire

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Presidential Primaries - February 9

The wait is nearly over. The secretary of state announced that **Tuesday, February 9**, is the date for New Hampshire's "first in the nation" presidential primary voting.

If you are fleeing NH for warmer climes, or if for health or work reasons you are unable to get to the polls on February 9, you can request your absentee ballot, now through Feb. 8. Pick up an application at your town or city clerk's office or download an application from the state's website: <http://sos.nh.gov/ElectForms.aspx>

When you receive your absentee ballot, plan to fill it out and deliver or mail it back so it reaches your town clerk's office by 5 pm on election day. A family member with ID can hand-deliver your ballot to your town clerk. You are not allowed to hand-deliver your own absentee ballot on election day.

Primary tidbits:

On this year's primary ballots for President, there are 30 Republicans and 27 Democrats listed.

As of Sept. 2015, there were 872,171 registered voters with nearly 381,000 "undeclared." They can vote in either primary on Feb. 9. Registered Republicans outnumbered Democrats by about 32,000.

Helping others vote:

- Share your knowledge of voting with others who may be new to NH or just deciding to vote for the first time.
- Remind them that they can register to vote at their town/city clerk's office through January 30, or they can register on election day itself.
- If people are worried about not having a photo ID or they leave it at home on election day, remind them that they can still vote by signing an affidavit at the polling place. A poll worker will take their photo and attach it to the affidavit for verification. Their ballot will be counted with all the others.
- Remind your friends 65 and over that an expired driver's license or passport "counts" as voter ID.
- Suggest that people who don't know where they should vote should call their town/city clerk in advance to find out.
- Refer people to our Elections page of LWVNH.org, for fliers and brochures that explain voting in NH.

- Liz Tentarelli, President

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League Board Sets 2016 Legislative Priorities

At its December meeting, the State Board of the League of Women Voters NH set three priority areas of activity for this year’s legislative session. They are: election law; alternatives to incarceration (including drug courts); and redistricting. There was also interest in financial stability for New Hampshire, food safety, education funding and gun violence prevention.

The Board has established a protocol for choosing its legislative priorities. In order to be designated as a priority, there must be active and consistent activity by League members throughout the legislative session. Members must be willing to:

- research legislation
- contact legislation sponsors and determine whether we support or oppose the legislation based on League positions
- prepare written testimony for committee members and, if designated by the State Board, deliver testimony at hearings
- work with the State Board on press releases and/or letters-to-the-editor to publicize our position and generate public support
- track the legislation and prepare brief legislative alerts to keep League members informed

League members are invited to suggest other legislative priorities (for instance, from the list of additional interests above). If there are members who wish to do the work on other issues, the Board would love to hear from you. If you are interested in becoming one of our dedicated corps of State House activists, please contact Liz Tentarelli, Peg Fargo or Joan Flood Ashwell. Our emails and telephone numbers are on the first page.

-Joan Flood Ashwell, LWV Greater Capital Area

TIME FOR ACTION!

Hearings are beginning in the State House on bills that the League is following, supporting some and opposing others. We’ll be trying to keep League members up to date on committee meetings they may want to attend. We’ll also be posting testimony we deliver at <http://www.lwvnh.org/action.html> We encourage League members to contact their own Legislators using talking points from our testimony. Just remember to talk to them as constituents. That’s what makes your voice so powerful. (See Peg Fargo’s article in this newsletter for tips on talking to Legislators.)

Wednesday, January 13

Senate Public and Municipal Affairs, room 102, Legislative Office Building (LOB)

9:00 a.m., SB 4, relative to domicile for voting purposes (rereferred) – LWVNH opposes this bill

10:15 a.m., SB 346-FN-L, relative to hours for polling – LWVNH supports this bill

Tuesday, January 12

House Election Law, room 308, LOB (many very interesting bills but only one on our priority list)

10:00 a.m. HB 1564 – A, establishing an independent redistricting commission - LWVUS is in the process of reviewing and updating its redistricting position. See the article in this newsletter and at <http://forum.lwv.org/category/member-resources/our-work/redistricting-task-force>

Pen and Paper – Sometimes the Old Ways are the Best Ways

In December, League members Peg Fargo and Sylvia Gale were honored to participate as speakers in the 2016 Granite Leaders Program sponsored by the NH Coalition to End Homelessness. This program seeks to empower the homeless and formerly homeless to become advocates for their issues and needs.

A panel composed of Senators Chuck Morse and Jeannie Forester and House representatives David Cote and Susan Ford spoke about how to make an impact on legislators. Senator Morse spoke emphatically about the best way to reach a NH Senator, and that is by writing a letter. He is also available by phone but he takes the time to read every letter, does not like emails when he is busy and seldom prints them out. But a letter stays in his hand or on his desk. He said that he reads the first two paragraphs, and does not read the entire letter if it is lengthy. He does not like form letters but wants very much to hear from constituents in their own words, concisely and clearly with contact information included so he can respond. The other legislators completely agreed with him and it was sort of refreshing to hear that the tried and true method of communicating constituent concerns are still the best.

With a new legislative session starting this week and the League jumping right into our priority issues, we hope you are getting your legislators addresses and a couple of stamps ready. We need your help in communicating our concerns about priority bills and your legislator needs to hear from you.

- Peg Fargo, LWV Greater Capital Area

From LWVUS:

U.S. Supreme Court Considers the Idea of Representation

By: Jessica Jones 12/11/2015

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments this week in a case that could forever change the way we view the political map. [Evenwel v. Abbott](#), a case out of Texas, has the potential to upset the criteria for drawing state and local legislative districts so that districts would be determined by the total number of voters instead of total population. This case only effects state legislative districts as Congressional apportionment is covered in a different provision of the Constitution and would not be directly impacted.

Currently, state legislative districts are drawn using data collected by the Census Bureau and are based on the total number of people who live in a community or state. Total population includes not only voters, but also children, non-citizens and unregistered voters. If the plaintiffs in *Evenwel v. Abbott* were to win their argument, state legislative districts across the country could be unconstitutional and practically [all state legislative maps would need to be redrawn](#). The whole concept of representation would be changed and the influence of minority communities and those districts with significant numbers of children would diminish.

Changing the criteria for how we establish legislative districts in the states would not only have far reaching impacts on equal representation and geographic distribution of power, but it would put many states in limbo for years to come. The last time the Supreme Court considered [the question of representation](#) in the 1960s, it took nearly a decade to settle the matter through the court system. Moreover, there is no reliable measure available to determine the number of voters in a state – the Census directly [counts total population](#) but citizens self-identify on voter registration questions during their surveys, making the data unreliable for so important a purpose. Lawsuits are sure to be filed as soon if a decision in favor of the plaintiffs is reached, in every state across the country challenging district lines

The League submitted [an amicus brief in Evenwel](#) that supports the current practice of drawing district lines based on population counts. Counting population ensures that every man, woman and child has an equal representation in our democracy. Population counts ensure that everyone has a seat at the table and is simply the fairest way to protect our democracy and ensure equal representation for all. A decision in this case is expected by June 2016.

Alternatives to Incarceration

Since the LWVNH study of the incarceration of women in NH began in 2009, we have become much more aware of the need for alternatives to incarceration for some offenders. Prison or jail is costly to taxpayers; the impact on the offenders and on their children carries a huge price tag; and children of incarcerated parents are six times as likely to become incarcerated themselves someday. Some children move into the foster care system, another burden to taxpayers and difficult for all concerned. Upon release, many offenders have a much harder time finding a job.

The first alternative to incarceration we studied was new to NH at the time. This was the drug court operating in Grafton county, where a committed team provided oversight and encouragement to help felony drug offenders stay out of prison and find a way to live straight in the community, working and paying taxes and keeping their families intact. At first women were less likely than male participants to succeed in drug court; gradually that changed as recognition of the unique needs of women offenders developed. In exchange for finishing the program (generally 18 months or so), the felony records of offenders were cleared, thus allowing them much more opportunity to succeed in their work lives.

Now, as the burgeoning drug overdose crisis hits New Hampshire as well as other states, drug courts with their close supervision and emphasis on taking responsibility for one's actions have spread to other counties. The League testified in support of legislation a few years ago to allow drug courts in all counties. In addition to Grafton's pioneering efforts, Strafford and Cheshire counties have had drug courts for several years. Rockingham and Hillsborough counties also now have drug courts, and Belknap county has a drug court for juvenile offenders.

Legislation was being considered at a special NH legislative session in December 2015 and will be considered again early in 2016. The NH Opioid and Heroin Task Force Committee is looking at many possibilities, including decriminalization of some drug offenses, increased funding for treatment programs, and possibly funding for the establishment of more drug courts. It would also create a drug advisory committee that would include a Dept. of Corrections representative. Incarceration can cost NH \$35,000 per year per inmate; if effective drug treatment programs outside of prison cost less than that (which is a logical assumption), both taxpayers and drug abusers will win.

Another alternative to incarceration is mental health courts. Hillsborough county was the NH leader in this effort several years ago, reporting a large decrease in the number of people incarcerated for misdemeanor offenses related to their mental health issues. As in drug courts, committed court officials and community treatment providers believe that keeping people with mental health issues in the community, under treatment and supervision as needed, is better for not only those afflicted but also for society. Mental health courts now operate also in Grafton, Cheshire, Rockingham, and Strafford counties.

Some counties have other programs as alternatives to jail for misdemeanor offenders. These include diversion, community service, home confinement with electronic monitoring, and restorative justice programs. From the Belknap County Corrections website comes this definition of their goals: "Through the programs we offer, our goals are to: 1) encourage a sense of responsibility and accountability on the part of the offender for their illegal acts, 2) save the county money/resources by minimizing the offender's involvement into the justice system, 3) help build stronger communities by leading in the effort to address the needs of crime victims and community reparation, and 4) provide appropriate education to reduce the amount of re-offending (recidivism)."

When public safety is at stake, of course incarceration is logical. But if safety can be achieved while at the same time helping an offender change behavior and remain in the community, alternatives to incarceration must be available, and we as a society must be willing to pay for the resources to make that possible. From the NH Department of Corrections website, we are reminded of the mission of corrections: "...to provide a safe, secure, and humane correctional system through effective supervision and appropriate treatment of offenders, and a continuum of services that promote successful re-entry into society for the safety of our citizens and in support of crime victims."

Read more about drug courts and mental health courts on the NH Judicial Branch's website: <http://www.courts.state.nh.us/drugcourts/> The NHVoter from 2010 through 2012 included numerous articles on incarceration and alternatives as we conducted our statewide study. Those back issues are available as PDFs on the Publications page of our website. Other aspects of our study and background readings are available on the Women Incarcerated Study page of our website: <http://lwvnh.org/StateStudy.html>