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April 3, 2019

To: House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee

From: Liz Tentarelli, president, League of Women Voters NH
LWVNewHampshire@gmail.com

Re: **SB51, establishing a commission to study expanding mental health courts statewide.**

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization whose focus is voting rights. But the League also chooses issues and through a process of study and consensus develops positions from which we advocate. In 2009 we began a study of the incarceration of women in NH that formally lasted until 2012.

At the time of our study a group of members investigated the new drug court in Grafton county. We were given inside access to the workings of the court and were much impressed. Eventually we testified in favor of allowing and supporting drug courts in all counties as an alternative to incarceration.

We didn't visit the mental health court in Hillsborough County but did read every article about it we could find. We saw at the time that it had the potential to do good in the same way that the drug courts do for many participants. Attached is a pdf of one article that ran in the Nashua Telegraph in 2011 about the Hillsborough mental health court.

The League's position is that alternatives to incarceration are to be considered, for several reasons. They are less costly, they are less disruptive of individuals' and families' lives, and they may produce better long-term outcomes.

The League supports creating a commission to study mental health courts in NH and elsewhere as a logical step to their expansion in our state.

Please recommend OUGHT TO PASS on SB51.