



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

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SOCIAL POLICY

EQUAL RIGHTS

The broad thrust of the Social Policy positions is aimed toward alleviating discrimination and poverty. Action efforts have been directed toward equal access to education, jobs, and housing as well as equal rights for all.

Beginning in 1928, positions have been adopted covering support for services and opportunities for Native Americans, opposition to discrimination in public employment based on sex and marital status, support of the merit system, opposition to discrimination against minorities, and recognition of the responsibility of government to share in the social and economic problems which affect the social welfare.

Using its positions, the League has consistently supported legislation to prohibit discrimination in public and private employment, public accommodations, including transportation, and housing. It has supported legislation to strengthen, through increased appropriation and stronger enforcement powers, the agencies which deal with discrimination.

Women

As early as 1927, the League opposed any legislation which threatened to weaken the laws which had been passed for the protection of women in industry. In the early years the League opposed the ERA because it would have meant overturning such laws or applying them to both sexes.

Nevertheless many of the "women's" issues in the '60's were supported by the League based on positions on preventing poverty and racial discrimination. The League supported publicly funded child day care based on children's needs rather than the mother's. Opposition to discrimination centered on race rather than sex,

and support for family planning was based on the concern for poverty.

In 1972 action on the state and national level expanded the equal rights position to include opposition to sex discrimination and support for the ERA. The ERA was quickly and easily ratified by the Wisconsin legislature in 1972, although it failed to receive ratification by the necessary 2/3 of the states. A similar amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution was approved by the legislature in two successive sessions, but failed to win approval in the subsequent referendum. The League, in conjunction with other members of an equal rights coalition, continued to work for equal rights. In 1975, a concerted and successful effort was directed toward the passing of a bill that implemented the intent of the ERA by removing sex distinctions from all statutes except those dealing with family law. Family law statutes were revised later under divorce reform and marital property law.

The League, along with other groups, was successful in preventing the rescission of Wisconsin's ratification of the federal ERA in the late 1970's. In 1983, it also found itself in the unusual position of opposing a state ERA because of the potential negative impact on the passage of a federal ERA. Failure was a real possibility and would have had a devastating effect on the momentum of the national amendment at that time. Success, paradoxically, would only have strengthened opponents who held that rights can be guaranteed state by state. Also, the restrictive clauses added to the amendment which dealt with the military draft, shared toilets, abortion and sexual orientation would have set a dangerous precedent.

In 1979 with the demise of the Governor's Task force on the Status of Women, the League with five other statewide organizations established

the Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN) as an on-going coalition working on issues affecting women. Since that time, the WWN has coordinated efforts on many issues and the League has remained a staunch supporter of it.

League members were also instrumental in the creation in 1982 of the Wisconsin Women's Council, a statutory state agency to replace the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. The Council's purpose is to ensure that state policies and practices take into account the well-being of women. The 1995 budget greatly reduced the Council's funding, consequently reducing its effectiveness. In addition, the state League has supported specific legislation intended to eliminate sex discrimination in housing, in access to credit, selling or leasing automobiles, in the language of public documents, employment, education, and such.

Native Americans

The League recognizes the special status of Native Americans and their unique relationship to the federal government. On the state level, the Wisconsin League has supported legislation extending health, welfare, educational and housing assistance to Native Americans. On the national and state level the League supported the return of the Menominee to reservation status in 1975. Support for services has continued through the monitoring of state budget appropriations.

Employment

Over the years, the League has taken action on many issues affecting equality of opportunity for employment. Since 1946, League has opposed discrimination based on race, sex and marital status. It supported the strengthening of the Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1951 and has consistently supported affirmative action. The League also supported a civil service reform limiting the use of veteran's preference points to a one time entry.

In 1983-85, the Wisconsin League updated its position on efforts to obtain equal opportunity for employment, centered around monitoring the application of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to women. Local Leagues were given a monitoring guide and worked to insure that women and advocates were appointed to the

Private Industry Councils statewide. The League supported the expansion of the jobs program in 1986, but opposed the mandatory "workfare" proposals which required welfare recipients to do community work where job training and other employment services are not available.

The League strongly supported the 1984 establishment of the Governor's Task Force on Comparable Worth to develop a job evaluation system for state classified employees and University of Wisconsin system academic staff. Implementation of the Task Force recommendations was vigorously supported in the 1985-87 state budget.

Awareness of the problems of displaced homemakers in the early 1980's led to League support for state funding and establishment of displaced homemaker centers attached to the vocational education system. The centers assist displaced homemakers to get necessary counseling and job training to assist them in entering the workforce.

In 1992 the League supported the Wisconsin Women's Network in its work with veteran's groups and legislators to satisfy a veterans' proposal to eliminate their "preference" system and to make them a "protected class" in the affirmative action system. A compromise passed, enhancing the veterans' preference system without sacrificing the affirmative actions standards intended to make up for past employment discrimination.

The League has supported all legislation to end sexual harassment. Under previous law, complaints of sexual harassment could only be taken to the Equal Rights divisions and awarded only restoration of job and back pay. In 1992, a Wisconsin Civil Rights law was passed, permitting the aggrieved party to sue in court for punitive damages.

In 1987 the League supported successfully the Family Medical Leave Act which would allow parents to take time off without pay for six weeks at the birth or adoption of a child. The act was extended to include more employers in 1991. Since then there have been repeated attempts to make the act consist with the federal

act. League has opposed these attempts because we believe the Wisconsin version is better.

Housing

The League not only supports fair housing legislation based on state and national positions, but also equal access to housing, which means measures to increase the supply of low-and moderate cost housing.

In 1965 the League was instrumental not only in the passage of the state fair housing law but in gaining open housing ordinances in local communities as well. Continuing efforts included support for measures to promote low cost housing in all communities, removal of exemptions to fair housing and improvement of migrant worker housing. The League also supported increased enforcement power and responsibility regarding migrant housing conditions.

For a number of years, the League supported the establishment of a uniform building code for one and two family dwellings and statewide standards and inspections of manufactured housing. The uniform code was finally established in 1979.

Other initiatives supported by the League are the Housing and Rehabilitation and Conservation program, which made deferred payment and low cost loans available for rehabilitation of deteriorating housing; creation of a Migrant Labor Council to regulate employment and housing; group homes, supported under *Administration of Justice* and *Social Policy* positions.

The League supported the 1982 omnibus housing bill which created the state Council on Housing charged with developing a state housing plan and requiring the Wisconsin Housing Finance Authority (WHFA) activities be consistent with the plan. In 1984, WHFA became the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). League expressed concern that the emphasis would be switched to economic development rather than housing.

Education

The League believes that every child should

have an equal opportunity for a quality education. The League supports Head Start programs and school district integration and believes that busing can be a necessary tool to achieve equal opportunity in education. On the state level, the League has supported compensatory programs for the disadvantaged, equalized educational financing, and assurance that no segments of the student population are excluded from public school systems.

SEX EQUITY

Measures to prohibit discriminatory practices and provide redress at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels were first supported in 1976 when League supported a state statute prohibiting sex discrimination in school sports. In 1983 the law was strengthened by the passage of Sec. 118.13 mandating sex equity in elementary and secondary schools. The same protections in state law were extended to the post-secondary systems in 1990 when the League took the lead in a coalition promoting the bill. The League has continued to work in coalition with other organizations to monitor the enforcement of Sec. 118.13 through the Department of Public Instruction.

In 1976, legislation was introduced to provide an alternative to court-ordered busing for racial integration in the Milwaukee metropolitan area schools and any school attendance area with more than a 30% minority population. The state League, in consultation with the Milwaukee area Leagues, supported the compromise measure (Chapter 220) finally adopted.

In 1984, the Milwaukee School District filed suit against suburban school districts to force a restructuring that would provide greater opportunities for area-wide integration. Local Leagues in the area provided a valuable forum for information.

(See *Government Financing* for positions and action on school financing, and *Health Care* for related education issues.)

Public Accommodations

Public accommodations are such things as public transportation, restaurants, swimming pools, etc. League action has been primarily to

oppose discrimination in public accommodations on the basis of race.

League supported a new law enacted in 1990 that extends to private non-profit organizations prohibitions against discrimination in providing accommodations or amusements unless the event or service is restricted to members only. Previously such restrictions applied only to commercial enterprises.

DIVORCE REFORM

The 1976 state League Council voted to modify support for equal rights for women to include the area of divorce reform. In the 1977-79 legislative session one of the most significant achievements was the passage of divorce reform legislation. The measure, sometimes referred to as a "no fault divorce bill," established irretrievable breakdown as the sole ground for divorce. The law also specified criteria that the court must take into account when making judgments regarding support, child custody, maintenance payments, and property division.

Major initiatives were pursued in 1983-85 in both child custody and child support. The League supported the concept of shared custody as an effective means of maintaining the parental bond after divorce, but questioned many provisions of the unsuccessful 1983 legislation. The Child Support Initiative would have provided for automatic wage withholding, a percentage standard of set support and a state supplement if parental resources are inadequate to meet a prescribed support level. The thrust of the pilot is to provide incentives for parents to work, which the income maintenance program does not do. The initiative was supported by the League. The standards of child support and the wage withholding provisions were adopted. The wage supplement provision was never adopted.

MARITAL PROPERTY REFORM

With the accomplishment of divorce reform, the League realized that marital property laws are often unfair in their assumptions, and following study, the resulting position was adopted in 1979. The LWVWI supported major reform legislation which was introduced that same year.

After an enormous education and lobbying effort orchestrated by the League and the newly formed Wisconsin Women's Network (WWN), the Marital Property Reform Act became effective on January 1, 1986. In each successive legislative session, League worked with Legislative Council Committees to deal with technical problems while maintaining the basic purpose of the law and supported several trailer bills solving those problems.

MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Income Assistance and Family Planning

League support for public assistance grants to low-income families arose primarily from the national Human Resources study. The national consensus following the Meeting Basic Human Needs study in 1986-88 reaffirmed League's commitment to adequate income assistance for low-income families.

In Wisconsin major activity focused on achieving adequate level of income support in welfare proposals. In the 1970's the League worked with the Public Assistance Coalition composed of representatives of labor, church, and welfare organizations. The coalition worked to translate concern for the poor into effective education and action. League lobbied for continued funding for Community Action programs, legal services for the poor, family planning and research programs, day care facilities and the Social Services Amendments Act of 1974.

Concern about financing of programs to meet human needs led the LWVUS to examine General Revenue Sharing (GRS) as a possible alternate source. Because the intent of GRS was to allow for comprehensive planning at the local level, it seemed reasonable to assume that some of the funds would be spent on human needs programs. As local Leagues familiarized themselves with the process, they realized that this would not occur without long-term, broad-based public demand. Many Leagues began to get involved in the GRS community planning process.

Early in 1974 a statewide coalition was formed to press for changes in General Relief (GR). The coalition lobbied for written policies and

procedures, oversight by the Department of Health and Social Services and specifying the rights and responsibilities of recipients. In 1977 the League lobbied for state aid for general relief expenditures in counties choosing a county-wide relief system and continued to support those provisions. In 1985 the budget included a program for the gradual state assumption of part of general relief costs along with mandatory payment levels.

In the 1980's economic conditions led to a great increase in the income maintenance caseload at a time of declining state revenues. As a result, payment levels fell far behind the rate of inflation and in spite of heavy lobbying by League and other groups, little progress was made in keeping benefit levels at even bare subsistence levels. In 1987 the governor used the line item veto to make an actual cut of 6% in benefits as passed by the legislature. The savings were used to fund state jobs training programs in a few counties. The League had opposed the cut throughout the budget process.

In 1988 the League also opposed the cut in benefits to a family with a teenager who is not attending school on a regular basis (Learnfare). Opposition was based on the national position that benefits should not be cut in any new program, that payments should be uniform and that without additional funding for special programs for the teens, the program would not work.

The national position on meeting basic human needs encourages self-sufficiency. To promote that position the League supported education and job training programs for people on income assistance. League stressed that the training lead to jobs providing adequate income to help a family to become independent. League also opposed the action of the department of Health and Social Services to limit recipients to two years of college education as a means of fulfilling the job training requirement, even though the educational costs were covered by grants and loans obtained by clients on their own.

A number of changes occurred in the income maintenance system in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In addition to Learnfare, additional

benefits were provided for mothers who marry. League questioned its effectiveness, but supported it because the provisions of the AFDC program discouraged marriage. League opposed a two-tiered system, which gave lower benefits to AFDC recipients moving from other states because there was no good evidence that higher payments were drawing people to Wisconsin and because payment levels were already inadequate.

Pilot programs called "Work Not Welfare" were instituted in 1994 and became the basis for a complete overhaul of the welfare system, passed into law in 1996. The new program removed assistance from entitlement status, requiring that recipients fulfill a number of requirements aimed at making them self-sufficient and limiting to two years the time a participant could remain on the program as well as a five-year limit on lifetime participation. It provided child care assistance, job readiness training and other services to assist the participant in getting a job. League supported the underlying philosophy but objected to many of the implementation provisions: high co-payments for child care and health care were unrealistic for low income families, the lack of real job training that would lead to jobs paying a living wage, the lack of cash assistance when jobs are not available, the requirement that women go to work 12 weeks after child birth, the lack of provision for evaluation of the program, and many others. League lobbied hard in conjunction with the Policy Group on Welfare Reform to correct some of these problems without much success.

W-2 was fully instituted in 1997. Co-payments were reduced for child care, although they are still too high. There is little evidence so far about how well the program is working, because no evaluation of the program was provided and no one knows what has happened to those AFDC recipients who never joined the program, or who joined and have since left it.

Support Services

Also in line with the national income maintenance and basic human needs positions, the state League feels that supportive services should be available - but not compulsory - for participants in income assistance programs or

for those whose physical, mental or emotional condition prevents them from being self-sufficient. For many years, activity was largely in support of day care services and family planning services. The League worked for removal of restrictions on the sale of contraceptives and for the expanded assistance in family planning by the Department of Health and Social Services.

Activities in the 1970's included support of the Foster Grandparent program, distribution of information on Supplemental Security Income, gathering of information on nursing home codes, the Food Stamp program and the supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), including greater outreach. The League opposed overly strict requirements for day care centers.

In 1980, the decline in state revenues led to a fear that the legislature would seriously cut social services and that those services without a vocal constituency would be the most vulnerable. The League took the lead in forming the Wisconsin Difference Coalition, to work together to ensure a fair level of funding for all the needed services. The coalition provided extensive educational materials about services and lobbied for funding for all. In 1989, the coalition zeroed in on the funding of Community Aids, the basic allocation for counties for funding human service programs, which had received little increased funding for ten years and had lost ground to inflation. Services at the county level were being eroded or funded through the property tax. A heavy, well-organized lobbying effort to achieve a 6% increase was successful. The League's role in this effort had a large influence on its success.

Part of the W-2 program was a major expansion of support services and considerably more money was provided for them. However, the introduction of a less regulated form of day care, which required less training for workers, was opposed by the League in addition to the high co-payments required. In 1997, League supported a bill requiring training for child care workers. It also would have allowed W-2 parents to remain at home until their children were one year old. The bill died in committee.

Other services, such as transportation assistance and job training, are not guaranteed.

LENDING INDUSTRY PRACTICES

At Convention in 2007, delegates unanimously voted for concurrence and adoption of the convenient lending practices position below as developed and approved by the League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County in May 2007.

Note: Chartered financial institutions cover banks, savings & loans and credit unions. Convenient lenders are not regulated or chartered.

HEALTH CARE

In adopting positions on access and containment of costs in health care in 1986-87, members supported the view that state government's role in under-served areas would not generally include direct provision or financing of services. In supporting state government involvement in a program of health insurance for the uninsured, members expressed a preference for the state working with private insurers and for including individuals who are uninsurable for medical reasons or who are employed by firms that do not offer health insurance as a fringe benefit. Members also expressed concern that a state program for the uninsured did not encourage employers to eliminate health care benefits.

Members preferred a balance between competition and regulation. A number supported state regulation in the setting of hospital rates, including review of hospital policies to provide compensated community care. A number of Leagues reported that their members were interested in having the state investigate setting standards for and licensing lay midwives, speech therapists, and respiratory therapists. Containment of costs calls for emphasis on competence and efficiency. The state should avoid exclusive allocation of functions so the occupational groups may function in all areas where they are qualified by training to provide services. Payment systems and health insurance plans should provide the health care consumer choice in selecting the type of health care

professional, provided care rendered is within the professional's lawful scope of practice.

Members supported state government facilitation of timely access to available organs but not decision-making about who gets the organs. They supported establishment of hospital ethics committees but saw no state involvement in the decisions of those committees. All Leagues supported a stronger state role in prevention programs to attain long-range savings in health care.

During the 1987 legislative session, the League supported pilot programs for the State Health Insurance Plan and efforts to increase funding for prevention programs. Insurance issues were introduced in 1991 as part of health care reform but were defeated.

In 1986, when welfare benefits were reduced, Wisconsin lost eligibility for participation in an expanded program providing medical care for low-income pregnant women and children under 6. In its place a limited program called Healthy Start was established for pregnant women and children under one year. The League opposed the welfare cut under its welfare and support services positions, in part because of the loss of the health care funds. Since that time, it has supported expansion of the program under its health care positions. In 1990, the federal government made Wisconsin eligible for federal funds and the number of pregnant women and children receiving health care increased.

School-linked health clinics were supported in 1989-90 to reach young people who cannot afford or do not seek private health care. Opposition came from those who object to providing contraceptive information or devices to teens. League and other supporters cited the experience of cities in other states showing that reproductive health care was a very small part of the services rendered whereas physical examinations, nutrition education, dietary supplements and similar services are the major benefit. The bill did not pass.

In 1985, a Legislative Council Study Committee proposal was adopted containing a number of provisions intended to reduce teen pregnancy. Using our Social Policy provisions, League

supported the establishment of the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Board, which grants funds to non-profit organizations providing appropriate services. It also increased the funding for the Human Growth and Development (sex education) program in the schools.

In 1992, further proposals to prevent teen pregnancy were offered but not adopted. In 1995 most prevention programs, except for the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Board, were eliminated.

The governor attempted to make health care a part of W-2 welfare reform, making medical assistance a part of the services offered to participants who met the requirements and followed the rules. Co-payments would be required. Because welfare would no longer an entitlement under W-2, the federal government would not grant the necessary waivers for the use of Medicaid funds. In 1997, a plan called BadgerCare was offered, but again the federal government would not provide the waivers. Even though the new program was open to all low-income families with children, who do not have employer-sponsored health insurance, it did not meet federal government standards. The League has concerns about the levels of co-payment and the mandatory withholding of premiums.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The 1979 convention directed the LWVWI Board, under the Human Resources positions, to draft guidelines for action in the area of domestic violence. Local League members can play a significant role in establishing and supporting services for victims of domestic violence in the community. Leagues can help create citizen awareness and understanding of the problem. Guidelines for action adopted in 1979 are:

- Establish that physical violence among individuals in a domestic setting is no less a crime than in any other relationship and requires special enforcement provisions and victim compensation;

- Require law enforcement officers to receive training in domestic relations problems and causes and handling emergencies;
- Promote community responsibility for long-range remedies;
- Appropriate funds to develop, assist, and coordinate community services.

At Council in 1982, the League modified the position to include children, the elderly and other persons living in domestic situations. In the past several years, the legislature has established a Council on Domestic Abuse to monitor needs and propose programs. Funding has also been provided for shelters in the state.

In 1992, League supported a bill allowing victims of domestic violence to have an advocate with them in a court proceeding.

In 1996, League supported revisions in the Children's Code giving paramount consideration to the best interests of the child. It defines needs of children, seeks preservation of the family unit, and includes definitions of neglect, emotional damage, abuse and reasonable discipline. As a follow-up to this, in 1997 League supported the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (POCAN) program which would provide family-focused programs for parents to prevent child abuse. The program was included in the biennial budget.

MENTAL HEALTH

The mental health position was adopted by the League in 1991 after a two year study. There has been little activity in the area either by League members or by the legislature since then.
