

League of Women Voters of Fremont, Newark, Union City

"Because democracy is not a spectator sport"

INFORMATION FOR NEW MEMBERS

Thank you for joining the League of Women Voters of Fremont, Newark, Union City. Your membership dues support the League. A portion is kept locally, the rest sent to regional, state and national leagues. A budget is adopted at the annual meeting.

The League of Women Voters is a national, non-partisan organization, which encourages informed and active participation in government and influences policy through education and advocacy. The League's membership includes men and women of all political parties who study and act on governmental issues at the local, regional, state and national levels.

When you join the League of Women Voters of Fremont, Newark, and Union City, you also become a member of the Bay Area, California and National Leagues. The League is where the hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. We are a grassroots organization. Joining the League helps you be directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong, safe, and vibrant. All levels of League positions and actions (local, state and national) are determined directly and indirectly by members of local leagues throughout the country.

Membership in the League offers you the opportunity to:

- Stay informed about local, state and national legislative issues by:
 - Receiving the VOTER newsletter, State and National publications
 - Attending special meetings and events
 - Participating in workshops and unit meetings
 - Joining a committee to study special issues
 - Observing local governmental bodies in action
- Register voters and distribute nonpartisan election materials
- Lobby and campaign on issues
- Develop leadership skills
- Meet interesting, well informed people and HAVE FUN

How the League of Women Voters Works

We hope that the following information will serve as a basic reference on how the League works. We encourage you to contact one of the Board members for additional questions about procedure. Your membership Directory and Information Handbook lists the Board members and includes a roster of all current members. The League's goal is to promote the democratic process by helping people become well informed about all levels of government structure and operation, important issues under consideration, and how individuals can make his/her voice heard in support of the common good.

The League process of adopting a position on an issue starts with a planning meeting where members identify either a new issue they wish to study or an existing position they wish to re-study or update. A committee forms to decide on the scope of the study and choose background information that will help educate members. Information is posted on the League web site and published in the VOTER. Meetings featuring experts talking about the issue may also be held. A members' consensus meeting follows where questions developed by the study committee are discussed and a meeting of the minds of the members leads to a consensus on the issue. The study committee then forms a position that it takes to the League board. The board will put it on the agenda for the Annual Meeting for all members to vote up or down. When adopted it becomes a position the League can use for action through letters and testimony.

Annually each local League chooses issues for study. State and national Leagues do not impose issues on local Leagues. Only governmental issues are chosen for study. When the local Board and a consensus of its members agree that the time is right for action on an issue, then members are encouraged to write letters to legislators, newspaper editors, give testimony, offer speakers to interested groups, organize forums, feature the issue on our local cable program. All actions are *political but non-partisan*.

League Terms

Study: a committee is formed once members choose an issue; information is gathered through research and interviews in the community; periodic progress reports are given to the local League board.

Concurrence: the act of agreeing with or concurring with a position; groups of League boards can concur with recommendations of a resource committee or a unit group; decision statements formulated by League boards or positions reached by another League(s).

Consensus: technique most often used for reaching member agreement; after a group discussion an overall sense of the group is reached, whether in a membership meeting or a series of general membership or unit meetings.

Unit Meeting: a group of league members meeting regularly to exchange opinions through discussion; to learn facts about issues; to decide how League goals can be achieved through positive action. These meetings are generally open to the public.

Position: a statement of member agreement based on consensus and approved at the appropriate board level (either local, state or national).

Action: once a position has been adopted, the league can take action on an issue; a continuing process directed by the appropriate board (local, state, national) through letters, testimony, petition drives, etc.

Local League Services and Activities

The League's involvements in its communities include the following activities.

Action

All levels of League action are based on League positions or principles, which represent past study and consensus of our members. A League that is involved in action is visible, viable and strong.

The League of Women Voters of Fremont, Newark, Union City takes action to lobby or inform others in a number of ways, including:

- distributing leaflets or other publications
- talking to friends, neighbors or associates about League concerns
- offering speakers through our speakers' bureau
- monitoring agencies or elected bodies
- joining or forming a coalition
- helping draft legislation.
- testifying at hearings
- visiting or sending letters to our elected officials.

The League must set action priorities to be effective. When members choose programs, add new programs or keep the old, they set the direction of League action. Frequently a "Call to Action" comes from LWVC or LWVUS, which usually indicates the type of action needed, for example, a letter to a legislator. Many of our actions are directed out of the Action Committee.

It is imperative that the League speaks with one voice. When you write as a League member and not in response to a "Call to Action", do so only with the agreement of our Action Committee Chair or President. Our board sets priorities for local action, just as the state and national boards have done for state and national action.

Voter Service

The League sponsors candidate forums for local elections in the Tri-City Area. We often work with other community organizations to get wider participation. Before state elections, members of the speakers' bureau are available to explain the state ballot propositions to interested groups. We also produce a local cable program "Voting Matters", which covers both issues of local concern and interviews with local people about topics of interest. The VOTER provides the times Voting Matters runs on cable in the tri-city area. LWVC publishes "Pros and Cons" which we distribute locally. "Pros and Cons" explain the issues with an impartial synopsis of ballot initiatives. We have an ongoing effort to distribute registration materials in our communities and to register voters. If you wish to help with any of these activities, please contact our Voter Service Vice President. Training is provided for new members.

Publications

Each member receives the monthly local "Voter", the quarterly California "Voter" and the National "Voter". A description of other League publications can be found on the websites of either the local, state or national leagues. See the last page for full information.

Resource People

Resource people are members who help us deal with information available on the topic of their choice. They write articles for the "Voter", give brief updates at our meetings, alert us to needed action and might also suggest topics for study. They may also help arrange a special meeting.

A partial list of topics in which the League is interested follows. We have a position at some League level (local, regional, state or national) on most of them. Please contact the Program Vice President if you are interested in learning more about any one of them.

Education	Voting Rights	Housing
Transportation	Land Use	Water
City Planning	Air Quality	Energy
Health Care	Libraries	Welfare
Hazardous Materials	Child Care	Women's Issues
Campaign Finance	Juvenile Justice	National Security
National Security	Sustainability	Environment

Observer Corps

League observers attend meetings of public bodies and monitor how the laws and policies are being carried out. A League observer does not speak at these meetings but reports back to the League membership. Many of the local meetings may be 'observed' by watching live local cable broadcasts. If observing any of these public entities interest you, please contact the Observer Corps coordinator.

- City Council (Fremont, Newark, Union City)
- City Planning (Fremont, Newark, Union City)
- School Boards (Fremont, Newark, Union City/New Haven)
- Ohlone College
- Alameda County Board of Supervisors
- Alameda County Water District
- Union Sanitary District
- Washington Hospital Board
- Alameda County Transit

Useful Contact Information

Most elected officials are accessible by email. When sending an email, be sure to include your street address to indicate that you are a constituent. If you do not, your message will probably be ignored.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives' web sites include updates on legislation and other information. Here is a list of useful phone numbers, email address and web sites

- Capitol: The office of any member of congress and all committees and subcommittees can be reached through this number: (202) 225-3121.
- Legislative Status Office: Information includes status of House/Senate legislation, date of committee hearings: (212) 225-1772
- President@whitehouse.gov;
- Vice.President@whitehouse.gov (202) 456-1414.
- The Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/>
- The House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov/>
- The Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>
- The White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

SACRAMENTO

For information about California State and local legislative issues use one of the following: daily information updates, schedules of committees, etc. try:

- CA Assembly: <http://www.assembly.ca.gov/>
- CA Senate: <http://www.sen.ca.gov/>
- CA State Association of Counties: <http://www.csac.counties.org/>
- League of CA Cities: <http://www.cacities.org/>

LWVFNUC AND OTHER USEFUL WEB SITES

Our web site: www.lwvfnuc.org contains useful information, including our positions, bylaws, calendar and links to our Members Only web site: www.lwvfnuc.org/memonly. All Board Members and Committee Chairs can be contacted via email using links in the Members Only web site. You will also receive a Membership Directory with our current League Roster.

For general information about voting and for links to many other interesting web sites try the League of Women Voters of California's voter information web site Smart Voter at <http://www.smartvoter.org>.