

July 2004

LWV/LAC

InterLeague Newsletter

The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County in both its values and practices affirms its belief and commitment to diversity, pluralism and affirmative action.

The League of Women Voters welcomes new members, both men and women, who are citizens of voting age.

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President's Message

The President is on vacation. Her letter will resume when she returns.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

California's state-supervised, county-administered Child Welfare Services (CWS) program provides services to abused and neglected children, children in foster care and their families. Despite continual work to improve CWS many children in the foster care system suffer from more abuse, neglect, lack of medical and mental health care, drift from one foster home to another and from school to school. When they leave the system at age 18 (or 21) they are on their own; 40% end up on public assistance, 25% become homeless, and one in five ends up incarcerated.

Over the last few years, California has undertaken three major efforts designed to improve the outcomes for children and families in the CWS program. The first effort was driven by the federal government when it established in 2000 a **performance-based review** of the states to determine the success of their children's programs. (Historically, child welfare reviews have focused on case record documentation.) States that failed the reviews were required to develop a **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)**. Unfortunately, California failed on all 14 areas (seven systems & seven outcomes) and, like every other state, entered into a PIP in June 2003. It is a 2-year agreement to meet specific goals associated with improving outcomes. If the outcomes are not met fiscal sanctions may be applied.

The second effort originated with the prior administration, which in the 2000-01 Budget Act obtained authority to establish the **CWS Stakeholders group** to review the current CWS system and make recommendations for restructuring the program (referred to as the **CWS Redesign**). The final effort is embodied in the **Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636 Steinberg)**. This bill, that was LWVC supported, called for the development of a county review process to identify strengths and weaknesses in local child welfare services programs and assist in sharing and implementing

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best practices. Los Angeles County has many committees working to meet upcoming deadlines on the new review that is comprised of four components: Quarterly Outcome Reports, County Self-Assessment (due June 30, 2004), Peer Quality Case Review and a System Improvement Plan (due Sept. 2004). The Governor's Budget provides a total of \$39 million in federal funds, state General Fund, county funds, and special funds to implement a variety of changes tied to these three efforts to improve child welfare services.

The new Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), David Sanders, has set three goals for his Department. They include improving the safety of children, reducing timelines to permanency, and reducing reliance on detention (foster care). These goals are consistent with PIP goals. To meet the goals Sanders believes that children should remain at home with their families, if possible, and receive services in the community. Presently the county's \$1.4-billion child welfare system relies heavily on federal funds geared for children who are removed from their unstable families rather than providing services to keep the families intact. To change the funding mechanism the Director has applied for a Federal Waiver that will allow the Department to be more flexible with funding. It would loosen restrictions on an estimated \$250 million each year in public funds that the county could use to support networks around dysfunctional families. The Waiver application has been approved by the Board of Supervisors and forwarded to the state; hopefully it will reach Washington before the June deadline. Los Angeles County is optimistic in winning approval to start its program in October.

I have been following the County foster care system for 18 years and although there have been some improvements for children and families the system remains in crisis. Let's hope that focusing on outcomes and providing services early on for families will lead to improvement in CWS programs.

Harriet Chase
Children's Services Consultant

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Housing Choice Voucher Program, also known as Section 8, has been instrumental in providing shelter to more than 2 million families nationwide. With its origins in the Depression-era U.S. Housing Act of 1937, Section 8 was launched in 1983 and was expanded under the presidential administration of George H.W. Bush in 1990.

Under Section 8 a qualifying low-income family applies for and receives a voucher from the Public Housing Authority. The "tenant" is then expected to find qualifying housing in the private sector within six months. The PHA, landlord and tenant then become co-signatories to a rental contract. The tenant is responsible for 30 percent of the rent; Section 8 subsidizes the balance.

The administration of President George W. Bush proposes to cut more than \$1 billion of the \$16.4-billion program in fiscal year 2005. As pointed out by the *Los Angeles Times*, "[t]he result would be more than 12 [percent] below the funding needed to reach the same number of families that Section 8 served in the previous budget year." The Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness cautions that the PHAs "would have [three] main ways to address large voucher funding shortfalls: reduce number of families assisted; raise rent burdens by increasing tenant share or cutting payment standards; shift vouchers from needier households to those with more income." In July 2003 (a benchmark period for the proposal) there were 84,451 authorized vouchers in Los Angeles County. The coalition predicts that if the cuts are addressed by reducing the number of families served, the county effect will be 10,235 fewer vouchers in 2005 and 24,568 fewer vouchers in 2009.

A *Los Angeles Times* editorial notes that "Acting [confirmed 3/31/04] Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson acknowledges that the administration is proposing 'some reductions' but says the goal is more high-minded than just budget-cutting. Local housing agencies would be ranked by HUD each year. Those that move the

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most recipients from Section 8 apartments into unsubsidized homes and jobs would be 'rewarded with additional fees for administering the program.' Others would be held accountable for 'poor performance,' as yet undefined.

"Housing experts say that Jackson's plan could end up serving the least needy: healthy, able, temporarily unemployed people who can quickly move off welfare rolls. In order to minimize penalties for 'poor performance,' housing authorities are likely to resist aiding those who cannot be easily moved onward...."

Former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros and Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution point out that in addition to capping "the federal contribution [to Section 8] at the level of August 2003, adjusted for inflation, ... [t]he Bush budget would also withdraw support of all kinds (for example, Medicaid, supplemental health insurance, nutrition assistance) for working families earning less than \$35,000 a year - the very families that struggle to make rent each month...."

LWV/LAC President Margo Reeg has been in contact with LWVUS to lobby for rescinding the proposed cuts and protecting Section 8. LWV/LAC has been given permission to contact Los Angeles County congressional representatives to ask that proposed Section 8 cuts be rejected.

Daphne Lake,
LWV/LAC Housing Consultant
Sally Rivera,
LWV/LAC Social Policy Director

LWVC EDUCATION STUDY UPDATE

School Finance and California's Master Plan for Education—http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/R_601JSR.pdf—this document, published by the Public Policy Institute of California, was used by the Finance & Facilities Working Group for the

K-12 Final Report of the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan. It contains information on governance, adequacy, and possible funding options for state and local revenues.

The Education Study committee is also working on several other public education-related areas, including governance, school district organization, accountability, teaching, curriculum and the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

We encourage local Leagues to host forums using these materials as we bring them forward. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with other organizations in your communities, such as your local PTA and other parent groups, your local school district, your business communities, and other individuals and organizations.

There are many ongoing discussions in Sacramento regarding changes in how we fund schools. It is important that we all have a good understanding of what we have now before exploring possible changes in education funding.

Barbara Inatsugu and Joanne Leavitt,
LWVC Education Study Chairs

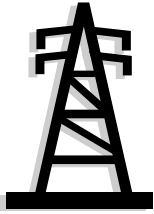
TRANSPORTATION

The eastside extension of the Gold Line light rail received a full funding Federal grant. This project will now be able to begin construction. This is a welcome addition to Los Angeles County growing public transit network.

Chris Carson
LWV/LAC Transportation Director

First in a series of informative articles for an Update of the LWVC Energy Position

KEEPING CALIFORNIA'S LIGHTS ON The League and Energy



electricity systems in California and their governance.

The LWVC recognizes that a full study of Energy would cover more than electricity. However, due to the timeliness and complexity of questions relating to electrical energy, and due to limited resources, the delegates at the 2003 Convention instructed that this Update should be restricted to

For one startling moment at the LWVC convention 2003, the lights went out all over the auditorium. And for a long hot summer in 2001, the threat of rolling blackouts was part of the daily life of all Californians. And although the West Coast has not had a major multi-state transmission outage since August 1996, the August 2003 blackout of the eastern U.S. and Canada only serves to point up our vulnerability.

All of these warnings point up the crucial need in this new century to find the **best way to secure and deliver an adequate and reliable supply of electricity for our state. This needs to be done in a way that respects the social and natural environment.** New decisions will be made in Sacramento and in our local communities; new sources of energy and new techniques of delivering it will continue to evolve. The League must be in a position to bring its principles to bear on public energy policy. Unfortunately, our Energy Position was last updated in 1980—a quarter of a century ago! In its day it was a thoughtful position. Today we are critically aware of its limitations.

Our 1980 Position permits us to speak only on :

- **Conservation**
- **Public health and safety**
- **Environmental protection**
- **Renewable sources**
- **Siting of facilities**

- **Tax incentives for conservation and renewables.**

This leaves a **number of areas that we have not studied in sufficient depth to be able to comment.** Before 2001 there was little concern in California about a shortage of generation capacity and of transmission facilities. Then came a *“perfect storm”* which peaked in 2001—drought in the northwest, extreme heat in the southwest, excessive and unregulated prices of natural gas from out of state, bottlenecks in related markets, unexpectedly high business growth in the technology sector, and a flawed attempt at deregulation. Through this experience we gained a new perspective on energy questions. We now see many additional areas calling for an updated Energy Position. We need to be able to address:

- **Integration of energy policy—from production to transmission to delivery**
- **Re-regulation or de-regulation—or something else**
- **State and federal regulatory conflicts**
- **Differing roles of investor-owned utilities (IOUs) and public utilities**
- **Issues of social equity**
- **Role of the public in planning**
- **Direct access for some users**
- **Distributed energy resources (DER)***
- **Emerging sources of energy—solar, wind, fuel cells and more.**

During the coming months we will be producing a series of articles expanding on all of these questions. We hope you will read them thoughtfully and bring **your light** to the League by joining in the Study to Update the LWVC Energy Position.

*Distributed energy resources are small-scale power generation facilities (typically in the range of 3 to 10,000 kW) located close to where electricity is used (e.g., a home or business) to provide an alternative to or an enhancement of the traditional electric power system.

Popovers in Pasadena

Saturday, July 24th

**Women's City Club, Pasadena
160 North Oakland**

Registration: 9:30 am
Meeting 10:00 am
Lunch: \$25.00 (includes lunch and morning coffee)
Workshops: Presidents – Sally Seven
Voter Service – Frances Talbott-White and Daphne Lake
Land Use - Lola Ungar
Universal Pre-school – Joanne Leavitt
Speaker: Dr. Darline Wrobles,
Superintendent of the Los Angeles County
Office of Education

RSVP by July 17th

Send reservation and check (payable to L WVLAC) to:
Gwen Cochran, 427 E. Walnut Ave., Burbank, 91501 (818) 848-8684

Name: _____

League: _____ Position: _____

Check here ___ for vegetarian lunch

July 2004

**League of Women Voters
of Los Angeles County**

Margo Reeg, President
Chris Carson, Editor
carsonlww@earthlink.net

We're on the Web!!
<http://lacilo.ca.lwvnet.org>

Calendar

July 13—LWVLAC Board Meeting

July 24—Popovers in Pasadena, Women's City Club

August 10—LWVLAC Board Meeting

August 29—Superior Court Judges Forum (tent.)

September 1—WPC Meeting

September 10—LWVLA League Day on "The Vanishing Voter"

September 14—LWVLAC Board Meeting

September 22—Delivery of Pros and Cons

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