League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia

100 Years of Marching for Full Rights for DC Citizens
1920–2020:


Making Democracy Work for All.
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1981–85 Sue Panzer
1985–87 Anne Stults
1987–89 Leona Rumsey
1989–91 Sheila Keeny
1991–93 Anna Marsh
1993–96 Grace Malakoff
1996–97 Julia Graves
1997–99 Luci Murphy
1999–01 Elizabeth M. Martin
2001–03 E. Patricia Hallman
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It’s an honor to present to you the following history of the LWVDC. For 100 years we have consistently stood for voting rights. At the same time, we have studied, advocated and lobbied together to influence public policy on a variety of issues affecting all our residents. This is a history and legacy that we can build on as we go forward.

To have supported the work of the League of Women Voters is indeed something to be very proud of.

On the following pages you will find congratulatory messages, a pictorial timeline, and a short written history of our activities over the last century.

What a legacy we all share!

We can all imagine striving for suffrage with endless cups of tea, painstaking penmanship for letter writing, strict guidelines of etiquette for strategy and planning meetings and lobbying efforts, not to mention the efforts for organizing marches and parades. We appreciate the extraordinary strength our foremothers demonstrated during hardship of incarceration in the early 20th century.

Many of us fondly remember telephone trees, neighborhood unit meetings, typing up those reports of year-long studies as DC Leaguers worked for Home Rule and advocated for every eligible citizen to have the desire, the right, the knowledge and the ability to participate fully in our democracy.

Times have changed, but not our mission. So now with endless emails, text messages, social media posts, and website calendars we are still striving to empower voters and defend democracy. Together as we begin our journey toward our bicentennial, we continue to work toward Full Rights for District of Columbia citizens.

Enjoy reading this book and please make sure your efforts with and in support of our DC League of Women Voters are included as a highlight in the next record of our accomplishments. We can do it - We will be the 51st State – We will have record voter turnout.

All of us have a role in Creating a More Perfect Democracy. Let’s get to work!

Kathy P. Chiron
April 22, 2020
The League of Women Voters of the United States congratulates the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia on 100 years of empowering voters and defending democracy in D.C.!

For the past century, you have fought for full democratic representation and self-government. You have led campaigns for the 23rd Amendment, the right to elect a nonvoting delegate to Congress, and the charter providing for an elected mayor and city council. You were instrumental in the creation of the coalition for DC representation in Congress, DC Vote.

Since 1938, the League of Women Voters has supported D.C. self-government because we believe the citizens of the District of Columbia should be afforded the same voting representation in Congress as all other citizens of the United States.

The League of Women Voters of the United States applauds LWV of D.C.’s triumphs and resilience over these past 100 years through your courageous activism and advocacy. And we commit to continuing our support of your efforts for however long it takes until D.C. citizens have full rights of citizenship in this country.

A citizen’s right to vote is the lifeblood of our democracy and voting for congressional representation is a critical feature of our representative government. D.C. citizens know all too well the injustice of taxation without representation, and your relentless pursuit of a democracy for all the people continues to be an inspiration to every person who calls the District of Columbia home.

It’s long past time for the more than 700,000 residents of our nation’s capital to be fully enfranchised. We commend LWV of D.C. for your ceaseless commitment to this fight for 100 years, a fight in which your fellow League members will remain steadfast allies until full representation is achieved.

Virginia Kase
June 8, 2020
League of Women Voters Founded

In the midst of the turmoil of the fight for passage of the 19th Amendment, the LWVDC charter meeting convened in April 1920 at the elegant home of Cornelia Bryce Pinchot. At the first National Convention, the League of Women Voters of DC was formally recognized on May 26, 1921. They referred to themselves as the Voteless League of Women Voters.

1913 Suffrage Procession

LWVDC Celebrates 10th Anniversary of 19th Amendment

Those were the days of the three Presidentially-appointed Commissioners and Congressional District Committees who exercised near dictatorial power over citizens of the Nation’s Capital. LWVDC members immediately launched a campaign for “a voice and a vote” to get representation in Congress and the Electoral College. Members were undaunted, even though they suffered the indignities of disfranchisement at every turn. In the 1930’s they added home rule to their demands for representation in our national government.

Issues worked on...

- Fought for higher women's wages in industry
- Advocated for MPD Women's Bureau
- Insisted on Board of Public Welfare
- Pushed for Child Labor Laws
- Helped establish Juvenile Court

Counting Votes for the 1st Plebiscite in DC

In 1938, LWVDC was instrumental in holding a vote by the people supported by a Citizens Conference made up of 271 organizations. They asked DC citizens if they wanted representation in the halls of Congress and full local control. This was the first time that DC citizens had an opportunity to express their wish for full rights equal to the rest of the country, and the large majority voted Yes!
**Getting Out the Vote**
National Capital Area Leaguers originally joined the DC League until they were able to form their own chapters in the 1930s. They continued to cooperate such as with this GOTV car from the Anne Arundel League.

**Issues:**
- Helped close “Taxi Dance Halls”
- Helped extend Civil Service Act to DC Workers

**1940s**

**Eleanor Roosevelt Was a Good Friend of the DC League.**
- Disapproved of Loyalty Oaths and “blacklists”
- Helped war effort with rationing, day care, etc.
- Conducted major study of DC Public Schools
- Promoted United Nations

**“Segregation Is Discrimination”**
The League was quietly integrated in 1944, and immediately took up the cause of racial equality, working on integrating hospitals, schools, and recreation facilities. In 1946, the League Board declared, “Segregation is discrimination.”

**Issues:**
- Opposed “clearing slums”
- Advocated comprehensive plan for DC
- Pushed for safe and sanitary public housing

**Lack of Representation**
LWVDC never lost sight of the basic problem: Lack of representation in Congress, in the Electoral College and lack of control over local laws and budget. In the 1950s, LWVUS visited President Eisenhower in the White House in the interest of votes for the District and worked on discharge petitions for the Home Rule bill.
23rd Amendment Ratified

The League scored a major victory when, in 1961, the 23rd amendment was ratified, finally empowering DC citizens to vote for President of the United States. In 1964, DC citizens voted for President for the first time since 1801.

White House Reception for Walter Washington, Named as First Mayor in 1967 — League members attended

In another League victory, President Johnson abolished the three-commissioner system, replacing it with an appointed "mayor" and city council. The following year, 1968, a Board of Education was elected. In 1970, Congress authorized the election of a non-voting delegate to represent DC in the House of Representatives.

1963

First African American President Elected by LWVDC — Alice Callis Hunter

1964

1967

No Representative to Welcome to LWVUS Congressional Reception

LWVDC President Connie Fortune (69–71) “crying” for a Representative to welcome members of Congress.

1969–71

Significant Historical Events

Kennedy Assassinated 1963
Civil Rights Act 1964
MLK Jr. Assassinated 1968
Moon Landing 1969
**1970**

**Home Rule Buggy**
Doing double duty, this buggy ride with former LWVDC President Nettie Ottenberg called for Home Rule and voter registration, probably near Dupont Circle in DC.

**LWVDC March for Home Rule**
Many participants in the LWV march for Home Rule carried umbrellas draped with tea bags, remembering the tea dumped into the sea to protest taxation without representation at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. (See cover for the step-off of this march.)

**1972**

**Attending the Home Rule Hearing**
At the Hearing for Home Rule, a Leaguer, Nettie Ottenberg, displays her opinion.

**LWVDC Banner to Protest Lack of Self Government**
Promoting Ratification of the DC Voting Rights Amendment

1983 ad for constitutional amendment.
In 1978, the District of Columbia Voting Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed Congress. The Amendment would have treated DC as if it were a state for the purposes of representation in Congress, but DC would still have been subject to the will of Congress. The entire League worked tirelessly across the country for passage in the state legislatures and placed LWVDC in charge of the entire campaign, which included phone banks and “Ratification Round-ups.” However, the proposed Amendment died on August 23, 1985, when the seven-year time limit expired.

Publication of Know the District of Columbia

1980 marked the culmination of a monumental effort with the publication of the first edition of Know the District of Columbia. This handbook on the history and organization of DC quickly became a standard home and library reference as well as a college textbook.

DC Vote Established

In 1998 the League joined a new organization, The Coalition for DC Representation in Congress, which became DC Vote, to secure full voting representation in Congress and full democracy for DC citizens. Four of the original members of the Coalition board were members of the League.

Issues:
- Warned against mandatory minimum sentencing
- Promoted better health facilities
- Studied voting process
- Issued alarms about District finances
- Advocated for adequate federal payment
- Expressed concerns on government oversight

LEAGUE HISTORY

Did you know that residents of the District of Columbia have no voting representation in Congress? With just one non-voting delegate, we still have taxation without representation.

As a holiday present to us, we’d appreciate it if you would ask your state legislators to ratify the D.C. Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This will give those of us in D.C. the same voice in government that all other Americans have.

Published by
The League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia

Significant Historical Events
- Berlin Wall Falls 1980
- Nelson Mandela Freed 1990
- September 11th Attack 2001
- Indonesian Tsunami 2004

Issues:
- Filed friend of the court briefs on many issues
- Studied charter schools
- Disapproved of school vouchers
- Studied DC public library system
- Educated about HIV/AIDS epidemic
- Recommended Ranked Choice Voting
- Established online voter guides at Vote411.org
**Demonstrations and Civil Disobedience**

LWVDC President Billie Day (on left) with a DC Vote volunteer, part of the "DC 41" who were arrested on April 11, 2011 for protesting Congressional meddling in local issues. Congressional "riders" prevented use of local funds to pay for low-income women's abortions and allowed vouchers to go to private schools, regardless of DC's overwhelming vote NO on vouchers.

**Table at Community Events Ongoing**

Caroline Petri, at yet another table educating about DC statehood.

**DC Vote Hails LWVUS Champion of Democracy for 2019**

The League of Women Voters of the United States and the DC League both appreciate the honor of having received the 2019 Champion of Democracy Award from DC Vote! From left to right: Barbara Helnick (DC Vote), Virginia Rase (LWVUS), Anne Anderson (LWVDC)

**Many Ways to Bring a Message Home**

Efforts at improving civic engagement continued, using many venues and events, like this 2013 bicycle parade with Alex Dickeon and Kathryn Bay.

**Watching Historic Hearing on H.R. 51 in Spirit of Justice Park**

September 2019 we were pleased to attend the first House Committee Hearing on DC statehood in over 25 years, and enjoyed a perfect day viewing Mayor Muriel Bowser on a big screen sponsored by LWVUS with the overflow crowd in the Spirit of Justice Park behind the Rayburn House Office Building
A Brief History of the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia

A slim blue volume found tucked away in the LWVDC’s archives in the Public Library’s Washingtoniana Division, tells the story of the first forty years of our DC League.

The charter meeting convened in April 1920 at the elegant home of Mrs. Gifford (Cornelia Bryce) Pinchot. The gathering was not unlike today’s League functions — the room was filled with competent, engaged members who were not strangers to civic activism. Early organizers came from the National American Suffrage Association, the Women’s ‘Trade Union League and the National Consumers’ League. Residents of Virginia and Maryland were welcomed, as their Leagues were not to be formed until 1935 and 1938. At the first National Convention, the League of Women Voters of DC was formally recognized on May 26, 1921. They referred to themselves as the Voteless League of Women Voters.

Those were the days of the three Presidentially appointed Commissioners and Congressional District Committees who exercised near dictatorial power over citizens of the Nation’s Capital. LWVDC members immediately launched a campaign for “a voice and a vote” to get representation in Congress and the Electoral College. Members were undaunted, even though they suffered the indignities of disenfranchisement at every turn. In the 1930s they added home rule to their demands for representation in our national government. Early members’ struggle, now ours, continues today.

From its earliest days, the League was concerned with improving the lives of the citizens of the District of Columbia. For instance, they pursued legislation affecting the wages and working conditions of women in industry. The fledgling League was instrumental in establishing the Women’s Bureau of the Metropolitan Police Department. Surely their interest was partly due to the cruelty and indignity they personally experienced as suffragists arrested by the District police.

From its inception, the League lobbied tirelessly for a professionally managed Board of Public Welfare. Inadequate facilities, staff training, and lack of programs for the youth were a national disgrace. Child Labor Laws received serious attention. The court system for juveniles was virtually non-existent. The League lobbied, cajoled, begged and pleaded for a modern statute. Finally, in 1938, The Juvenile Court Law was passed.

1938 was also the year that LWVDC was instrumental in holding a plebiscite supported by a Citizens Conference made up of 271 organizations. They asked DC citizens if they wanted representation in the halls of Congress and full local control. This was the first time that DC citizens had an opportunity to express their wish for full rights equal to the rest of the country and the large majority voted Yes!

In the early depression years, the League successfully lobbied to end “taxi dance halls” where young girls were recruited to be “hostesses.” The League and their allies in the Women’s Bureau of MPD agreed that these establishments were “commercialized vice” where young women were grossly exploited.

In the 1930s, the DC League joined with the national League to work toward the establishment of a professional workforce for DC. In 1940, in no small part due to the League’s efforts, the Civil Service Act was extended to District employees. It was the first of many governmental reforms for which the League would advocate.
In the forefront of defending civil liberties, the League firmly opposed loyalty oaths of the 1930s. Members were also quick to deplore the Loyalty-Security Executive Order of 1948 and the ensuing “blacklists.”

For the “war effort,” the DC League worked for rationing, price controls, day care centers and other war measures. Mrs. Roosevelt became a fast friend of the DC League and often lent her support to our issues. In 1942 the League mounted a monumental study of the DC Public Schools. Higher pay for teachers was a significant goal.

The League’s board was not always in step with membership. Washington was racially segregated and so was the League. In the early 40s, the board decided against integration. A dissenting board member took the issue directly to the membership. At neighborhood meetings, she discovered that most favored admitting members of all races. The League was quietly integrated in 1944 and immediately took up the cause of racial equality, working on integrating hospitals, schools and recreation facilities. In 1946, the League Board declared, “Segregation is discrimination.”

Along with Leagues across the United States, LWVDC promoted the idea of the United Nations. League-trained speakers made presentations to over 4,000 citizens in the spring of 1949. In the 21st Century, the DC League continues to support the UN through participation in the United Nations Association.

As early as 1944, the League recognized that the lack of a comprehensive plan was jeopardizing the city’s health. Presciently, the League opined that government emphasis on clearing slums rather than rehabilitation and conservation would have disastrous impact on the urban core. League members foresaw that this misguided policy would lead to new blighted areas as the government displaced families on a large scale with little or no regard to needed social services. Further studies led in 1967 and 1972 to adopting formal positions in favor of a comprehensive plan. In the 1950s and 60s the LWVDC supported endeavors to build safe and sanitary public housing whenever private contractors were unwilling to build housing for low-income families. More recently, the League studied inclusionary zoning as a means for increasing affordable housing. With post-war affluence came the increased use of the automobile. Transportation was the study for 1963. The next year, the League adopted the first in a new series of anti-discrimination positions, culminating with the addition of “age” in 1990.

Even with all the work done on improving the well-being of DC residents, LWVDC never lost sight of the basic problem: Lack of representation in Congress, in the Electoral College and lack of control over local laws and budget. In the 1950s, LWVUS visited
President Eisenhower in the White House in the interest of votes for the District and worked on discharge petitions for the Home Rule bill.

The League scored a major victory when, in 1961, the 23rd amendment was ratified, finally empowering DC citizens to vote for President of the United States. In 1964, DC citizens voted for President for the first time since 1801.

In another League victory, President Johnson abolished the three-commissioner system, replacing it with an appointed “mayor” and city council. The following year, 1968, a Board of Education was elected. In 1970, Congress authorized the election of a non-voting delegate to represent DC in the House of Representatives. The “Home Rule” act passed in 1973, in no small part due to the 1.2 million petition signatures collected by the League in support of home rule for DC. These incremental steps were indeed victories, but DC Leaguers continued to press for full representation.

During the 1970s the League focused on core issues such as education and consumer protection, but added new issues of energy conservation, solid waste management and, in 1975, gun control.

Then in 1978, the District of Columbia Voting Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed Congress. The Amendment would have treated DC as if it were a state for the purposes of representation in Congress, but DC would still have been subject to the will of Congress. The entire League worked tirelessly across the country for passage in the state legislatures and placed LWVDC in charge of the entire campaign, which included phone banks and “Ratification Round-ups.” However, the proposed Amendment died on August 22, 1985, when the seven-year time limit expired.

1980 marked the culmination of a monumental effort with the publication of the first edition of Know the District of Columbia. This handbook on the history and organization of DC quickly became a standard home and library reference as well as a college textbook.

In 1982 League members studied mandatory minimum sentencing and concluded it would result in prisons overflowing with nonviolent inmates. Once again, League members’ consensus proved prescient. Health was again on the agenda, as was the voting process, District finances and the federal payment mandated by Congress to DC. A major study of governmental oversight revealed significant areas in need of improvement. In 1998 the League joined a new coalition organization, DC Vote, to secure full voting representation in Congress and full democracy for DC citizens.

LWVDC has never shied away from the using the courts to further our causes. We file amici curiae and have often been party to suits where our citizen rights are at issue. Most recently, we filed an amicus brief with several other organizations on a lawsuit brought by DC Appleseed on DC Voting Rights.
In the 21st century, the League studied charter schools, concluded school vouchers were not a good idea, researched the DC Public Library system, studied the concept of establishing a community college for DC, educated themselves about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and concluded that Ranked Choice Voting would be a good system for DC’s elections. In 2012, LWVDC created its first online voter guide using the Vote411 software.

Growing increasingly weary of Congressional treading on our liberties and meddling in our finances, the League became active in exploring and learning about statehood as a remedy. A Full Rights committee was created to prepare a “toolkit” of study materials that teams take on the road to educate and encourage sister Leagues to help secure full rights and privileges of citizenship for DC residents. September 2019 we were pleased to attend the first House Committee Hearing on DC statehood in over 25 years, and enjoyed a perfect day viewing the proceedings on a big screen sponsored by LWVUS with the overflow crowd in the Spirit of Justice Park behind the Rayburn House Office Building.

What do Leaguers do when they aren’t studying issues? They prepare voters’ guides, testify, file amicus briefs, register voters at Naturalization Ceremonies, on National Voter Registration Day, at civic events across the city, raise money, and of course, demonstrate. Leaguers have been seen dressed as tea bags, arrayed in “mourning dress” on election day, even ridden around town like “Paula” Revere. In August 2010, a White House demonstration honoring our brave “Silent Sentinels” who were dragged off to prison for their audacious demand for the vote commemorated the 19th Amendment’s 90th Anniversary. In 2011, LWVDC President Billie Day was part of the “DC 41,” city leaders arrested for protesting Congressional action on local DC issues. LWVDC was out in full force at the Women’s March on January 21, 2017.

In 2017 the LWVDC board decided to merge with the LWVDC Education Fund to create a single charitable “501(c)3” organization. The significant effort resulted in a more streamlined organization ready for its second century.

Throughout our first century, we find recurring themes: full voting rights, protection of civil liberties, child welfare, civic education, health, voter services and registration.

The little blue history book recorded a poignant thought from an “early” president that still rings true today: League emphasis has always been on issues, but lasting friendships have and will continue to be formed among loyal, untiring and dedicated members who study, write, calculate, mail, call, email, testify, cajole, laugh and learn together - in League.

— Kathryn Collison Ray, January 14, 2019

— Anne Anderson, updated, January 24, 2020
Acknowledgements

This has been a team effort, led by Anne Anderson, Chair of the LWVDC Committee for Full Rights for DC Citizens. Many thanks to Barbara Yeomans who connected with our elected leaders to commemorate our Centennial. Much appreciation goes to Natalie Howard for her historical photos and organizational memory. Kathryn Ray’s excellent short history guided our development of our timeline. Jane Stein researched names and faces for us and Joanna London kept us grammatically correct. Thanks go to the many members who searched their archives and memories to provide us with images and information. Amanda Frayer, our illustrator and graphic designer, provided guidance, grace and expertise in her craft to create our final product. We hope our efforts to document our history form the foundation for the ongoing activism and dedication required to gain our full rights through statehood.

LWVDC leads off the 1970 DC Home Rule March. Pictured are (left to right) Charlotte Zassenhaus, Connie Fortune and Ruth Nadel. Behind them can be seen the Reverend Jerry A. Moore, Jr., Former Councilmember–At–Large (R). This historical photo served as the basis for our cover illustration.
Empowering Voters, Defending Democracy

1920–2020

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation in government.

We are the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia a state and local chapter of the League of Women Voters of the United States serving the people of Washington, DC, and a member of the League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area.

You can reach us at www.lwvdc.org.