

## **League of Women Voters of Illinois Education Fund Voter Service: Candidate Participation Policy**

The League of Women Voters of Illinois does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. The purpose of candidate forums and debates is to allow voters an opportunity to hear candidates discuss issues face-to-face, to stimulate public interest in the campaign, and to provide the candidates an opportunity to engage with their constituents.

### **For Inclusion in Any League Voter Guide and League Materials**

In determining eligibility under the criteria, the burden of proof is on the candidate. In order to have information in any League voter guide and League materials, a candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Must be a legally qualified candidate for public office.
2. Must have publicly announced an intention to run for office.
3. Must be eligible under the applicable local, state or federal laws to hold the office sought.
4. Must be qualified to be on the ballot.
5. Must be legally qualified by the deadline that has been established for response.

### **For Participation in Candidate Forums/Debates:**

The above criteria will also apply for a candidate invited to a General Election Forum/Debate with these additions:

1. The candidate must win the primary election for his/her respective party for the office which is the subject of the forum/debate or be officially nominated by his/her political party for that office.

2. For a candidate who has obtained ballot status as an independent or third-party candidate, the candidate must show evidence that a formal campaign is being waged. The existence of a public website, campaign office, campaign staff, campaign appearances, position papers, and fundraising are examples. For Statewide and Federal races, see the last section of this policy.

#### Definitions:

**Debate** : The Federal Election Commission(FEC) defines a debate as an event that includes at least two candidates; is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another; and allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face-to-face confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.

**Forum**: A format other than a debate (as defined above) is an event in which ideas and views on issues are exchanged. LWV Candidate Forums traditionally involve questions submitted by the audience, reviewed by question-sorters and read to the candidate(s) by a LWV-trained moderator. The candidates are allowed to respond to the questions, in a predetermined time frame, and do not engage with each other.

**Legal criteria for holding candidate forum/debates are dependent on the type of office a candidate is seeking.**

**Federal Offices** : When one or more candidates for federal office (US Senator, US Representative) is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend LWVIL's forum/debate, then no candidate for that office will be permitted to appear. This is in accordance with Federal Election

Commission (FEC) rules and regulations. Under most circumstances, providing a platform for a federal candidate to address the public or providing information about a candidate is considered to be a contribution of "something of value," and thus subject to the contributions or expenditures limitations and prohibitions of the federal election laws.

Although no candidate forum/debate may be held, LWVIL can nevertheless use publicity efforts to notify the public of a candidate's unwillingness to participate.

In the context of a primary, at least two opposing candidates for the same political party nomination must agree to participate or the forum/debate will not take place.

LWVIL has the sole responsibility to contact statewide and federal candidates to arrange debates. LWVIL has the first opportunity to contact federal candidates to arrange debates. Local leagues are required to contact LWVIL prior to contacting candidates in federal races in order to ascertain if the LWVIL is already coordinating a debate/forum in federal races.

**LWVEF and LWVILEF advise following the same Federal Office requirements for State Legislative, County, Township and Local Office.**

*Candidate Participation Forum/Debate Policy Information When Only One Candidate Agrees to Participate or there is a Non Response*

*LWVIL is a nonpartisan, political nonprofit organization that strives to protect citizens' voting rights and deliver unbiased education to voters.*

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*Our policy is all debates and/or forums, whether State or Local level races, follow Federal requirements and not sponsor, co-sponsor or participate in “Empty Chair” Debates and/or Forums.*

*Though there are voters’ concerns about Leagues not having events or being forced to cancel events due to candidates’ unwillingness to participate, LWV cannot be involved in “Empty Chair” Debates and/or Forums as there would be an appearance of being partisan. We acknowledge this is an unfortunate loss in an opportunity to unbiasedly to educate the voters in a nonpartisan manner.*

*If there are no other nonpartisan debates/forums scheduled prior to the LWV planned debate/forum, then it is encouraged to relay to candidates who are non-responsive or reply they are unwilling to participate that:*

- 1. A non-response is an unwillingness to participate.*
- 2. It will be public knowledge (constituent and media) of a candidate’s unwillingness to participate.*
- 3. If a non-Federal candidate does not choose to participate, while there will not be a forum, his/her/their opponent may be afforded the opportunity of a two-minute statement, only to outline their platform.*

## **Sponsorship of Statewide or Federal Candidate Forums/Debates**

LWVIL reserves the right to contact the candidates for statewide and federal office (US Senator and Illinois Constitutional offices) for the purpose of securing their participation in candidates’ debates and other Voter Service activities. Local Leagues are encouraged to have forums/debates for US Congressional races and to work with neighboring Leagues when districts overlap.

Local Leagues must contact the LWWIL President or LWWIL Vice President/Voter Service Chair for permission to contact any statewide candidate. Permission is determined on a case-by- case basis. The two reasons for this are (1) to avoid competition among local Leagues and (2) to eliminate confusing requests to the candidates.

Local Leagues are reminded that LWWIL takes the initiative for scheduling forums/debates for US Senator and Illinois Constitutional offices (Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, and Comptroller).

For these races, candidates must demonstrate that there is voter interest and support of their candidates as evidenced by receipt of five percent (5%) for a Primary Election or ten percent (10%) for a General Election of support in one or more statewide nonpartisan public opinion polls conducted not more than thirty (30) days prior to the debate.

Acceptable polling procedures:

- Polls must include all candidates who are listed by the Illinois State Board of Elections at the time of the poll for that office.
- Nonpartisan polls using methodology that employs a random statewide sample of adults 18 or over and are representative of the voting public.