

Electoral Reform R US

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The League of Women Voters was born out of an electoral reform movement 87 years ago. But getting the right to vote for women did not end the fight for reform. We have continued to work to assure that every eligible citizen can cast an informed ballot and have that ballot counted honestly and without fear of intimidation.

Two years ago, we proposed ten points for election reform in Ohio. Only a few of our ideas were enacted, but one was the change in law to allow 17-year-olds to serve as pollworkers. This has proved a great success, providing more computer expertise at the polls while providing a real-world civics lesson for young people. Pollworkers love having these enthusiastic high school students on hand and they have been a big help in alleviating the chronic pollworker shortage, especially in urban areas.

Another of our proposals was to make absentee voting more accessible by removing the requirement that the voter must provide a reason from a specified list to show why it was impossible to go to the polls in person. The legislature enacted this reform though they then attached a counterproductive requirement that the voter must provide some kind of identification with the absentee ballot.

This year the state board of LWVO has approved a revised 10-point reform proposal that includes many of the original ideas with some additions and modifications. Because of the problems arising from the election law changes enacted in 2006 in House Bill 3, we have tried to address concerns about a wide range of problems that need to be addressed administratively and in the statutes.

The ten proposals can be grouped into three general categories:

- Access to voting—including registration, absentee voting, and overseas voters;
- Administration—impartiality, ID and provisional ballots, and voting systems and recounts;
- Information—boards of elections, pollworkers, and voters.

Access is critical to an effective voting system. The best election system is useless if voters do not have ready access to it. The administration of the election system must be fair, competent, and transparent or no one will trust it. Information, including training and education, must be well designed and delivered so that all participants in the electoral process know what they are supposed to do and how to do it.

Message

The full text of the 10-point election reform proposal is available on the state League Web site at www.lwvohio.org. Look it up, print it out, distribute it widely. Be prepared to advocate for these key points in election reform.