

President's Message

Anticipating election results

The November election is just a few days away and many of you have already cast your ballot. If you have not done so and have questions about candidates, check illinoisvoterguide.org for information to help you in making your decision.

On a related note, I am looking forward to the end of candidate advertising on television and mail! If only Medicare open enrollment were done, as well.

We should anticipate delayed election results, primarily due to an increase in absentee and vote-by-mail ballots across the United States, as well as the time it will take to count all the ballots.

Candidates on all sides are fighting hard to represent their constituents and win their respective elections. It may take days before we know the outcome for presidential and congressional races and it will require patience from all of us, while we wait for results.

Dr. Debra Turner, LWVUS President has shared her thoughts on this: "... the work of empowering voters and defenders of democracy is rewarding and lights the path to a greater nation." Democracy is worth fighting for!

I hope you will read the message [Democracy is Worth Waiting For](#) to set the expectation that election results will come later than usual this year.

———— Constance Romanus, LWVGP President

Important Dates:

Tuesday, Nov. 3: Election Day. Vote, if you haven't already!

12:30 Mon., Nov. 9: LWVGP Board Meeting, via Zoom.

6 p.m. Wed., Nov. 11: Part 3 Criminal Justice Reform Study, via Zoom.

6 p.m. Wed. Dec. 9: Consensus for Criminal Justice Reform, via Zoom.

Drinks & Dialogue is on hiatus until January.

ADVOCATING FOR GUN SAFETY

The Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) Delegate Assembly will meet November 14. One of the proposed resolutions that will be voted on is Resolution 2, which advocates and supports legislation that strengthens child safe gun storage laws. The League of Women Voters of Illinois supports this legislation.

Resolution 2 proposes that the IASB support and advocate for legislation requiring child safe gun storage if anyone under the age of 18 might have access to the firearm without permission. Current laws apply only when a person under the age of 14 may have access to the firearm. The IASB Resolutions Committee has recommended "do not adopt" stating: "The vast majority of IASB position statements deal directly with issues that happen inside of a school district." We believe that school districts should be concerned with preventing students from bringing guns into schools.

In most school shootings, the person using the gun obtained the gun from family, a friend or relative who left the gun unsecured. A law that raises the minimum age from 14 to 18 could reduce the potential for school age children to access guns.

In the past week, LWVGP has sent letters to several school superintendents and school board presidents in the Tri-County area requesting their support for Resolution 2. As gun violence prevention groups across the state will be working to implement stronger safe gun storage laws during the next legislative session, the support of the IASB is important. Let your local school board president and superintendent know you support Resolution 2 and "work together to reduce the likelihood of access to weapons without permission, for our children under the age of 18."

Urge your school board to instruct its delegate to the November 14 meeting to vote YES on Resolution 2 — to support and advocate for legislation which strengthens child safe gun storage laws. Please refer to the attached [Fact Sheet](#) for the text of Resolution 2 and further details.

The League of Women Voters is non-partisan. It neither supports or opposes candidates for elected office, but does work to influence public policy on specific issues after members study and find consensus.

—— Connie Romanus & Cheryl Budzinski

MEMBERSHIP

Happy Fall! As we continue to deal with COVID-19, the Membership Committee feels so fortunate to have you as a member.

The great news is that we are up eight members — or 5% — over the past year. Thanks to all of you for your hard work. Our total membership total is 124.

Welcome new members from the Mary Segebart household. We're glad to have you aboard.

Continue to invite your friends and neighbors to join the League. It is easy to do — just visit lwvgp.org and join. If people have questions about the work of the League and its positions on issues, that information can be found there, as well.

Remember you joined the League because someone asked you to join. Many of your friends have not joined the League because you have not asked them. So — we repeat — invite one friend or family member to join with you and the League to Make Democracy Work.

Let's make 2020-2021 a year of growth for the League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria. We're all in this together.

If you have questions, contact either Jan or Linda:

Jan Deissler – 635-1872
Jandeissler77@gmail.com

Linda Millen – 645-2542
tchkids2@sbcglobal.net

Stay healthy! Stay tuned! Stay connected!

—— Jan Deissler, Membership co-chair

CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE STUDY LWVIL, Nov. 11

Our Criminal Justice Update Study meeting at 6 p.m. Wed, Nov. 11 will include questions 10 -14. Our Resources — Carla, Jan, Kathie, Ron, Sandy, Connie, and Cheryl — will give background for each of the areas: Courtroom procedures and access; sentencing laws and procedures; Illinois Department of Corrections — incarceration and mandatory supervised release; post-incarceration and sentence completion — from recidivism to successful re-entry; and funding.

Overall there are 14 questions in this study. Questions 1-9 were discussed in September and October. It doesn't matter if you missed those meetings — we hope you will join us on Nov. 11.

The comprehensive report on these questions is available for you to read including the background information for the Pros and Cons included at: <https://www.lwvil.org/criminal-justice-position-update.html>

Video resources including other Leagues' meetings regarding these same questions are available at: https://www.lwvil.org/uploads/1/2/3/7/123745968/video_resources_6-12.pdf

Please take a few minutes to read the text of the questions at the end of the newsletter. Then join us on your computer at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81728445691?pwd=cGRVUZZaS9JT2RUVHluU0tJaEVlQT09>

Meeting ID: 817 2844 5691 Passcode: 056403

—— Cheryl Budzinski, CJ study group co-leader

VOTER SERVICES

Voter Services is already looking forward to the spring municipal elections.
(*Editor's note: The rest of us, not so much.*)

With an open seat for the Mayor of Peoria and at least one of the District Council positions, it is sure to be a lively and competitive race. We are looking at candidate forums for these races and others that are contested. Also, on ballots during this cycle are School Board, Park Board, Community College Trustees, City Clerk and Treasurer and Township positions. The Primary is on Feb. 23 and the General Election is on April 6. Please stay tuned for more information on those races and forums.

Many thanks to all the people who served as Election Judges during both the early voting period and election day. Don't forget, local election officials will need judges for the spring elections so contact them now and sign up to help insure a free and fair election process for ALL elections.

—— Roberta Parks

PEORIA CITY COUNCIL, Oct. 20

A new joint committee of the city and Peoria County on Racial Justice and Equity was slated to kick off Thurs., Oct 29 at Manual High School. At this time, few details are available but they planned to stream the meeting.

There have been many budget items for Peoria Township and City of Peoria as many governmental units do their public hearings. Peoria Township is keeping down their costs but keeping in mind their possible future COVID-19 costs. The city has voted to issue bonds secured by HRA taxes to save the Peoria Civic Center. (See the Civic Center's presentation online at the Oct 20 meeting.) Interesting discussion of fire department changes and settlement. At the end of the Oct 20 meeting after positive comments from councilpersons about the budget process, the mayor said that it is predicated on the state's funding which included passage of the Fair

Tax Amendment. Things will change if that referendum fails.

Items have been delayed multiple times such as the short term rentals within every residential district.

The exchanges between two councilpersons became heated discussing Councilman Kelly's "Urban Decay Tax Abatement Area" idea. Both sides were passionate about pros and cons. So much so, that a watcher sent in a comment at the next meeting that councilpersons are obliged to be civil to each other by their rules. She criticized all councilpersons for not stopping the verbal exchange by injecting, "Point of Order" citing the rules of conduct. An apology was suggested by the writer.

The snow removal PowerPoint is still available online and was a good explanation of how they planned to remove snow from the arterial streets first and then residential, as usual, but there are fewer residential routes so it will take longer to get streets cleared. Sounds like patience will be good. They have fewer staff to do the same miles of roads.

—— Cheryl Budzinski, Observer

PEORIA CITY/COUNTY LANDFILL Committee, Oct. 7

A special meeting of the Peoria City/County Landfill Committee was held on October 7 in the Twin Towers Plaza Room 420, located at 456 Fulton Street across from City Hall.

This room is much bigger than the usual meeting room at City Hall. People attending wore masks and distancing in seating was possible. This was the first in-person meeting for the committee since the March COVID shut-downs. Members of the public could also phone in to the meeting for attending.

A quorum was present and Chair Steve Morris conducted the meeting. There were no public comments.

The Report from Foth Engineering covered pre-approved special wastes: seven approvals were given on a variety of items from asbestos-related wastes to treated wood and contaminated soil and debris. Other reports covered one gas flare shut-down in August but said no gases were released; monitoring well G26S had acetone levels and an alternate source write-up will be done to Illinois EPA since it is an up-gradient well; and the annual dam owner's certification and maintenance inspection was completed with no problems found and the paperwork is ready to be sent to Illinois Department of Natural Resources by the Landfill Committee.

As a continuation of committee discussion in August, Foth presented a short review of CCR/Coal Combustion Residuals background and an update on the permitting and rule-making process along with a draft comment as requested at the last meeting. The Committee voted to approve the short comment letter.

There was brief discussion on coal ash in landfills and the comments from Waste Management and PDC were that it would need to be in a dedicated landfill as it impacts landfill processes and gases and it is not compatible with regular municipal waste. PDC said its Clinton landfill that was designed for chemical wastes has been taking in CCR. A detailed listing of other Foth work since the last meeting was included and they are currently under budget.

About 10,000 gallons of landfill leachate for August and September was transported to the Peoria Sanitary District for treatment. The comment was made that the lower amount is not unusual for the time of year.

Financial reports were in the Landfill Committee packet and showed the cash balance up at the end of August compared to July. The Waste Management report said spot load checks did not find problems. The end of August total tonnages of general municipal wastes and special wastes for the year to date were 111,120 tons and this compares to 113,582 tons in 2019. Waste Management commented that all landfills are seeing a downturn, due to impacts from the pandemic on businesses and other garbage producing entities.

PDC had Hanson Professional Services representatives present a Powerpoint with mapping and illustrations of their proposed work on wetlands construction and lake improvements at the landfill prior to the construction for Landfill #3. This is to replace the project at Vicory Bottoms, which could not proceed due to concerns about frequent flooding and destruction and costs of what had been proposed. PDC must do wetlands mitigation and improvement to compensate for areas that will be destroyed in the construction of the new landfill. That includes: 15.87 acres to be put into a perpetual conservation easement when completed, with 7.93 acres of open water, 1.75 acres of upland prairie, and 6.19 acres of emergent wetlands when the project is completed. A walking trail and viewing platform is planned for the conservation area.

PDC is proceeding with state agency approvals for the project.

—— Joyce Blumenshine, Observer

PEORIA HOUSING AUTHORITY, Oct. 5

The regular meeting of the PHA was held virtually on Oct. 5 with Chairman Carl Cannon presiding. A quorum of Commissioners was present; William Purham and Renee Andrews were absent.

There were no community comments. Two residents completed the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program reaching economic self-sufficiency and home ownership. One of the graduates completed the program in five years and is moving out of the area, the other began the program in 2019 and was in line for a Habitat

for Humanity home but won a house in a recent drawing instead.

Minutes of the Sept. 8 meeting were approved, as well as those of the closed meeting on July 6. Reports were approved by consent agenda.

CEO Jackie Newman reported on recent activity at PHA. Renovations at main office of software and equipment updates will allow residents to do business with PHA staff using kiosks instead of in-person interactions. Work order repairs and inspections of properties continue. Communication with residents of Taft Homes regarding redevelopment project continues. Peoria Area Food Bank is relocating its warehouse, leaving this building adjacent to PHA offices available for PHA storage use.

Report was given on 2021-2025 FY year and FY2021 Annual Agency Plan, which includes one- and five-year capital improvements. Public hearings were held as well as a public comment period. PHA works with city of Peoria on this. Resolution to approve was unanimous. Other resolutions that were approved: update of business signature card at CEFCU for River-West South, replacement for ten roofs at Harrison and nine scattered site homes.

Commissioner Alma Brown related that a meeting of Resident and Safety Committee had been held with positive feedback. Meetings will be held monthly in effort to stay on top of issues.

There was no business for closed session; meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.

—— Connie Romanus, Observer

PEORIA COUNTY BOARD, Oct. 8

The regular second Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. Peoria County Board meeting was held Oct. 8.

Due to the pandemic, the public is encouraged to watch the meeting virtually. Public comments can be sent in by 3 p.m. on the day of the meeting for reading by the County Clerk. Board members attending the meeting were distanced and everyone wore masks. Board members Linda Daley, Brian Elsasser, and Rachel Reliford phoned in to the meeting. Chairman Andrew Rand conducted the meeting.

The first item was a vote to suspend the existing rules and allow board members to vote by phone.

A proclamation to recognize the 70th anniversary of EPIC (formerly PARC) was read and awarded by District 3 representative Betty Duncan.

Chairman Rand began the public comments agenda item by saying due to the voluminous number of comments regarding one agenda item, one representative comment would be read and all the comments would be entered into the meeting

record as 325 comments were received in support of the Hanna City Trail resolution. One comment opposing the trail resolution was also read.

During the Consent Agenda, board member Steve Rieker requested that the item regarding sale of tax delinquent properties be pulled. During the item discussion, he said that the city has requested 30 days more time for review and nearly all the properties are in the city. The board voted to delay this issue to the November meeting. The remaining consent items were approved, including the County Treasurer's Report, County Auditor's Report, and six other items.

County Administrator Scott Sorrel explained the background for the next agenda item regarding approval of an Intergovernmental Agreement between Peoria County, the City of Farmington, and the Village of Hanna City for the formation of the Hanna City Trail Negotiation Commission. He explained that Fulton County was no longer capable of coordinating with the trail commission, however, Hanna City, Farmington, and Peoria County could continue the effort.

Mr. Sorrel explained federal and state grants that could be available. He said these could cover up to 90% of the purchase price of the property from the railroad and detailed the specific amounts involved. Mr. Sorrel said 2,000 individuals had signed petitions earlier this year in support of the trail proceeding. Board member Paul Rosenbohm spoke about a question he had received on the value cited per acre of the railroad property. He had verified that and was pleased to support the trail.

Board member Jimmy Dillon congratulated all the work that went into continuing the project and District 1 representative Sharon William's extensive efforts over the years. The vote was unanimous to approve the resolution.

A Suspension of Rules was needed since a proclamation extending the COVID-19 in Peoria County did not come to the full board from a committee. The suspension and the emergency declaration were approved with correction of date.

There were several comments during miscellaneous announcements, including District 6 representative Eden Blair saying she voted by mail and was pleased to get a text back that her ballot was received by the Election Commission. Chairman Rand said he wanted to commend Sheriff Brian Asbell, who has had his hands full with the COVID situation and trying to protect people at the jail and staff and has given much extra time to the effort. Chairman Rand also said he appreciated the professionalism and the effort by the Sheriff to be sure voting rights are protected at the jail. There was no Executive Session. The meeting lasted 50 minutes approximately.

—— Joyce Blumenshine, Observer

PEORIA COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION, Oct. 13

The Peoria County Election Commission met Tuesday, Oct. 13, with Mark Ketterer absent and Dr. Arun Pinto attending virtually.

Monthly expenses were typical except for the purchase of a fire suppressant system for inside the Vote Drop Box. About 25,000 ballots have been mailed out, but extra envelopes were purchased that can also be used in the spring.

Three different grants were approved by the board. They include the Center for Tech and Civic Life Grant, which can be used for any election expenses for this election. It is for \$109,000, and has been used so far for extra staff. The federal Cares Act Grant is for \$246,000, and has, so far, been used to purchase a \$83,000 ballot return envelope scanner and any Personal Protective Equipment not received from the state of Illinois. The third grant was a postage grant for \$90,000, \$56,000 to 57,000 of which has been used for the application mailing and the first ballot mailing.

As of Oct. 13, 32,000 ballots had been mailed and 15,800 had been returned. Early voting is up over 300% from 2016. Approximately 1,000 ballots have been returned because the voter had changed their mind. One thousand ballots can be processed in 50 minutes. Ballots can be counted through Nov. 17, accounting for mailed ballots postmarked by election day. The official canvas will be on November 18

—— Irene Pritzker, Observer

CRIMINAL JUSTICE QUESTIONS

Courtroom Procedures and Access

Current Position:

The League supports improvement in courtroom procedures that serve to minimize confusion and delay and increase fairness and efficiency. Trials should be prompt, with a limit on the time the accused can be held in jail prior to trial. Sufficient numbers of well-trained judges, assistant state's attorneys, public defenders and other court personnel are essential. Uniform standards should be used for appointing public defenders.

Consensus Question (addition to existing position):

10. Should barriers to and within the courthouse and courtrooms be eliminated when possible?

PRO: Barriers may include physical impediments to people with such disabilities as hearing, vision, or speech. A barrier could be a problem with sound so that not all are able to hear the proceedings. A barrier might be insufficient time to fairly conduct a hearing. Illinois Courtroom Standards includes trial courtrooms.

CON: It is not necessary for everyone to hear the proceedings.

Sentencing Laws and Procedures

Existing Position:

The League believes that judges should retain the discretion to choose between imprisonment and probation for most offenses and opposes the proliferation on non- probational offenses. The League believes that there should be strict penalties and enforcement for all crimes committed with a handgun or an assault weapon.

The League supports reduction in time served as an incentive for good conduct by inmates. Such credits should be incorporated into the sentencing structure and should not be revoked without due process.

The League believes that a body, free from political influence, should make recommendations that promote certainty and fairness in sentencing, develop guidelines that provide greater uniformity and monitor the fiscal impact and effect on prison populations.

Consensus Questions:

11a. Should we delete from existing position regarding strict penalties and enforcement for all crimes committed with a handgun or an assault weapon?

PRO: Sentencing for a crime should be based on the actual crime, circumstances and outcomes, and not be dependent on the type of weapon used whether it is a car, drugs, knife, rope, gun or something else. In the final report of the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform are numerous recommendations to decrease all mandatory sentences including “removing or reducing the automatic enhancement for possessing a firearm during any felony crime”. According to The National Institute of Justice increasing the severity of punishment does little to deter crime. In Evidence-based practices and best practices, it states that the anger and fear that gun violence provokes should not lead to harsher penalties which are politically expedient but not proven to address the underlying causes of the violence.

CON: The League’s current position on Gun Violence Prevention states, “The League advocates restricting access to automatic and semi-automatic assault type weapons. These weapons present a clear and unequivocal danger to public safety.” Therefore, there should be strict penalties for a crime committed with a handgun or assault weapon. There is more certainty of being killed with a gun rather than another weapon.

Should we revise the position based on consensus regarding the following? [# 11b-11g]

11b. Should evidence-based practices and best practices guide sentencing laws and prosecutorial decision-making?

PRO: In the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform Final Report, 10 recommendations deal with sentencing reform and procedures. In general, the CJSR report recommends decreases in all mandatory sentences.

Research has proven many of our practices are not effective or are even harmful, yet change is slow. For example:

Long sentences should be modified because evidence shows that lengthy sentences do not produce desired results

What really deters crime? The National Institute of Justice summarizes a large body of research related to deterrence of crime into five points.

The certainty of being caught is a vastly more powerful deterrent than the punishment.

Sending an individual convicted of a crime to prison isn't an effective crime deterrent.
Police deter crime by increasing the perception that criminals will be caught and punished.
Increasing the severity of punishment does little to deter crime.
There is no proof that the death penalty deters criminals.

In a 2015 column, *What We Learned from German Prisons*, Turner and Travis, describe: "... transformative change in the United States will require us to fundamentally rethink values. How do we move from a system whose core value is retribution to one that prioritizes accountability and rehabilitation? In Germany we saw ...the idea that the aim of incarceration is to prepare prisoners to lead socially responsible lives, free of crime, upon release... While the United States currently incarcerates 2.2 million people, Germany — whose population is one-fourth the size of ours — locks up only about 63,500, which translates to an incarceration rate that is one-tenth of ours. More than 80 percent of those convicted of crimes in Germany receive sentences of "day fines" (based on the offense and the offender's ability to pay). Only 5 percent end up in prison. Of those who do, about 70 percent have sentences of less than two years, with few serving more than 15 years."

CON: Sentences are set by statute to dissuade and punish crimes. The legislature proscribes certain conduct, sets sanctions and rules under which the system operates.

11c. Should sentencing take into consideration the public health issues involved in any crime committed?

PRO: The first recommendation of the Final Report of CJSR acknowledges the need for behavior health and trauma services. "Focusing resources on making these ... services available in these [high-need] areas is the State's best strategy for reducing crime."

CON: Public health is too broad of a term, the issue of sentencing may consider mental health specifically.

11d. Should there be more collaboration between stakeholders so that sentencing outcomes are more just and fair?

PRO: Modifying our adversarial system of justice with the various stakeholders (such as victims, accused, prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, probation services, and community) actually collaborating together has been shown to produce better justice outcomes. The Final Report of CJSR recommends the establishment of Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils. The Brennan Center for Justice offers recommendations for the way prosecutors pursue justice:

#1 Make Diversion the rule.

#2 Charge with restraint and plea bargain fairly.

#9 Promote Restorative Justice.

#11 Change Office Culture and Practice. "You have to train people, re-educate them, and change the culture so that people understand their job is not to obtain convictions. Their job is to seek justice."

13th Judicial Circuit (Tampa,FL) S. A. Andrew Warren

CON: An increase in collaboration may increase the time involved in getting to a sentence. Additional parties may confuse or distract from the issues involved. Our adversarial system guards against collaboration and/or collusion that may not lead to just outcomes.

11e. Should racial impact statements inform any new criminal law or regulation?

PRO: The Sentencing Project in its publication, *Racial Impact Statements: Changing Policies to Address Disparities*, states that "The premise behind racial impact statements is that policies often have

unintended consequences that would be best addressed prior to adoption of new initiatives... similar to fiscal and environmental impact statements...” In 2019, Illinois introduced legislation to require racial impact statements, however, they were not enacted into law.

CON: All laws should treat defendants equally already. A new regulation is not required. Justice should be blind.

11f. Should legislation that reduces penalties for a crime also benefit those previously convicted and sentenced for that crime?

PRO: Sentencing retroactivity refers to allowing individuals sentenced under earlier and harsher laws to benefit from newer sentencing laws. A Post opinion:

“On Aug. 2, 2010, [Eugene] Downs was sentenced to a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years for conspiring to distribute at least 50 grams of crack cocaine. The very next day, President Barack Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, a law that limited mandatory minimum sentences for crack cocaine and the number of cases subject to them. If Downs had been sentenced one day later, he would now be free, because the Fair Sentencing Act reduced the sentence for distribution of 50 grams of crack cocaine to five years. Incidentally, Downs's co-defendants were all sentenced after Aug. 2 and benefited from the lowered penalties.”

In January, 2018, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit ruled that because the Fair Sentencing Act contained no provision for retroactivity, nothing could be done to help Downs.

The First Step Act passed in 2018 made the Fair Sentencing Act retroactive. However, without a positive opinion from the Attorney General, legislation to implement retroactivity in Illinois has stalled.

CON: If someone is convicted of a crime, particularly by a jury, then that person should serve out that sentence even if the law gets changed. You do the crime, you serve the time.

11g. Should the charge of felony murder be abolished?

PRO: The United States is one of the last “major, modern countries” to still enforce felony murder rules. Many states have limited the rule’s application, either by statute or court decision, to prevent unfair and absurd results.

The advocacy organization, Restore Justice explains the felony murder rule: To charge someone with first-degree murder in Illinois, an individual (1) intended to kill or do great bodily harm or knew that their actions would cause death; (2) knew that their actions created a strong probability of death or great bodily harm; or (3) were attempting or committing another felony crime.

A conviction for felony-murder in Illinois carries a penalty of 20 to 60 years imprisonment and, under some circumstances, the maximum penalty can be extended to a term of natural life. This same maximum and minimum sentence is available to juveniles and young adults who are disproportionately impacted by the felony-murder rule, as they are more likely to act in groups (or “co-offend”) and are more susceptible to peer pressure resulting in youthful offenders being sentenced to extreme periods of incarceration, including life without parole.

CON: Felony murder is a charge that can be levied on a defendant to punish that person or their co-defendants involved in a crime that results in someone’s death. If someone is involved in a crime, even if that person was just the driver of the get-away car, that person should have understood the risk and suffer the consequences. Those people often are involved in gangs.

CURRENT POSITION

The League supports correctional services that conform to national professional standards.

The League believes that offenders are entitled to mail, telephone calls, visits from relatives, extended family visits, furloughs, the opportunity to voice grievances, and access to information in their case records. (1)

Education and job training for inmates should be provided in conjunction with the boards of education, private industry and unions. (2)-(6)

The League supports pre-release planning to bridge the gap between prison and community. (7)

The League supports mandatory supervised release and the provision of community services to offenders, particularly when first released. Technical violations of mandatory supervised release need to be carefully defined and uniformly reported. (8)-(10)

Consensus Questions:

12a. Should offenders be entitled to humane treatment and access to healthcare?

PRO Compared to the general public, inmates have significantly greater healthcare problems with higher rates of chronic and infectious disease, addiction and mental illness. IDOC also struggles to treat the growing number of inmates with special needs. For instance over the past decade, Illinois' elderly prison population grew by more than 300% far outstripping increases in other age groups.

In 2014, 45 percent of people screened for substance abuse upon entering prison were determined to be in need of treatment services, but only half of those in need received those services. An estimated 75 percent of people released on parole without drug treatment for their addictions resume drug use within three months of release. If the prison system is not able to meet its healthcare obligations, cities, counties and the general public will inevitably pay a higher price when inmates are released, with increased transmissions of infectious diseases, emergency room visits and higher recidivism rates.

CON The population increase in prisons over the last 40 years (700%) has made it virtually impossible to keep up with and pay for the cost of healthcare for inmates. The elderly population has grown by 300%. IDOC lacks adequate physical space.

12b. Should all programs be evidence-based or based on best practices?

12c. Should all rehabilitative and evidence-based programs be made available to all for whom they are appropriate?

12d. Should programs be tailored according to individual needs.

12e. Should all offenders have access to program credits?

PRO The Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform states: Enhance rehabilitative programming in IDOC; implement or expand evidence-based programming that targets criminogenic need, particularly cognitive behavioral therapy and substance abuse treatment; prioritize access to programming to high risk offenders; evaluate promising programs and eliminate ineffective programs. About 97% of all inmates will someday be released from prison, and society has a compelling interest in encouraging those inmates to address the problems- lack of job skills, substance abuse, poor education- that increase the chances of recidivism after release. Giving inmates an incentive to participate in these programs through sentence credits is one of the best ways to safely reduce prison population, and through supplemental sentence credits, to improve the safety of the prisons themselves. Prison programming and the resulting sentence credit, should be made available based on the individual risk and needs assessment. By allowing offenders to receive sentence credit, their participation in rehabilita-

tive programming would result in higher rates of program completion, and recidivism should be reduced.

CON 12b. It is very expensive to house inmates in prisons. Why should we go ahead and spend MORE money to make their lives easier upon release—for example, offering school and vocational programs while they are incarcerated. Most of us pay for college or training for ourselves or our families. We should not have to pay for those incarcerated.

12c. Inmates are sentenced to do their time. They should not be involved in programming.

12d. Tailoring programs to fit individual needs is expensive. We should not have to foot the bill

12e. Persons serving long sentences should not have access to program credits based on the severity of their offense or if they are repeat offenders. They do not deserve programming.

12f. Is pre-release planning critical for successful reentry into the community?

12g. Are adult transition centers critical in bridging the gap between prison and the community in order to ensure successful reintegration into society

PRO Research and experience have shown that releasing an inmate at the end of his sentence without adequate preparation while in prison and without adequate support outside of prison is a recipe for failure. Adult Transition Centers (ATCs) have proven to be an effective way to help offenders adjust while learning money management and educational and job seeking skills that will help them re-integrate into their community. Inmates in ATCs also can benefit from substance abuse and mental health treatment or referrals.

CON 12f. It should be incumbent upon the releasee to plan for his/her release.

12g. When individuals are released from prison, they should not continue to be housed at taxpayers' expense. When they have completed their sentence of incarceration they should find their own housing. ATCs are ineffective since they have rules but no special areas of confinement if rules are not followed.

12h. Should the length of Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) be determined by completion of goals tailored to the individual rather than a strict length of time?

12i. Should rules attached to MSR be clearly explained to the offender as well as expected consequences if rules are violated?

12j. Should caseloads be manageable so that parole officers are able to play a supportive role with the parolee?

PRO Successful reentry programs support transition from incarceration /detention to the community; reduce recidivism using service during incarceration; and extend to post release (eg. Housing assistance, job placement and support, education support, case management, income support, restorative justice, family support, substance abuse and mental health support, tattoo removal.) At present, the Judge sets MSR (also known as parole) when sentencing; MSR is currently time based.

CON 12h. It should be dealt with the same as a sentence. It takes more time to compile a specific MSR program for an individual and is costly and inappropriate use of staff time.

12i. When an individual is released from prison there are rules they must follow. They should be held accountable.

12j. When an individual is released from prison there are rules they must follow. Shouldn't the assigned parole officer act as a police officer and send them back to prison when they violate the rules? Shouldn't a releasee be held accountable for following the rules of parole/Mandatory Supervised Release? Reducing the caseload is not going to help Parole Officers who are ineffective, enjoy being the "cop" and having "control" over their caseload.

Post Incarceration and Sentence Completion: From recidivism to successful re-entry

Consensus Questions:

13a. Should all unnecessary barriers encountered by people with criminal records which hinder their successful return to society after completion of sentences be removed?

13b. Should people with criminal records have access to the same income- based support opportunities and services that are available to others in society and for which they would otherwise qualify?

PRO: The goal for both society and people returning to society from the criminal justice system should be a successful reentry. The 2018 report The High Cost of Recidivism states 43% of those released from prison each year recidivate within three years of release and 17% will recidivate within one year of release. 35% of those sentenced to probation for felony offenses each year recidivate within three years of sentencing, and 17% will recidivate within one year.

This high rate of recidivism is caused partly because people with criminal records (PWCR) often have little preparation for reentering society and there are significant barriers:

- The burden of being a felon

- Debt barriers

- Housing barriers

- Employment Barriers

- Difficulty in pursuing higher education.

PWCR must disclose that they are felons when seeking housing, employment, or higher education. This disclosure often results in automatic rejection. A helpful remedy is the sealing and/or expungement of records.

Debt - The Illinois court system relies heavily on an excessively complicated court assessment system that disproportionately impacts low/moderate income individuals and minorities. States and municipalities are prohibited from using use fines to raise revenue. Only fines, which are a form of punishment can be imposed and ability to pay must be taken into consideration or an alternative, such as community service be substituted for the fine.

Affordable housing and willing landlords are difficult to find. In Illinois, nearly 5 million adults, are estimated to have an arrest or conviction record. Housing is foundational for employment success, family stability, and overall well-being.

PWCR have had poor educational preparation and therefore limited employment opportunities. PWCR are barred by law from certain areas of employment.

PWCR lack the financial resources and academic background and college applications often includes a box to disclose a felony conviction.

There are solutions:

- enhanced rehabilitative programming in IDOC; and the removal of unnecessary barriers to occupations requiring licenses;

- Restoring Pell Grants

- incentivize employers and landlords to employ and rent to PWCR.

- “Ban the Box” on applications for employment and college;

- Liberalize the requirements for the expungement and sealing of records;

- Taxpayers resume their responsibility for funding the court system;

- Invest in underserved communities

The most important solution is for the public to change its mindset and behavior toward PWCR.

CON: Even though someone has completed their sentence, they still may pose a danger to the community. Those convicted of certain crimes forfeit their rights forever.

Funding EXISTING POSITION

Funding: The League believes that the criminal justice system must be adequately funded in order to carry out its goals.

Funding of specialized programs for offenders, such as mental health services, programs for female offenders and substance abuse treatment, is essential.

The League supports funding to guarantee humane prison conditions and to provide programs and services that offer the opportunity for self improvement.

The League believes that state funds should emphasize community- based sanctions over the construction of more prisons.

Consensus Questions:

14a. Should we delete from the existing position: “The League believes that state funds should emphasize community-based sanctions over the construction of more prisons.”

And instead state:

14b. Should state funding emphasize community-based sanctions and treatment instead of incarceration?

PRO: Whenever possible and appropriate, community-based corrections should be utilized. They provide superior outcomes for the community and the offender.

Adult Redeploy Illinois (ARI)... provides grants to counties, groups of counties, and judicial circuits to increase programming in their areas, in exchange for reducing the number of people they send to the Illinois Department of Corrections. Some programs also offer treatment programs through problem solving courts (PSC). PSC include drug, mental health, veterans and DUI courts for individuals in the criminal justice system who have behavioral health disorders, including mental illness and substance use disorders.

CON: The sense of the position has not been altered. There is no “con.”

14c. Addition: Should all program funding be periodically evaluated for its effectiveness and to ensure that proper offender populations are being served?

PRO: The Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform : “Require all State agencies that provide funding for criminal justice programs to evaluate those programs...(and) eliminate those programs for which there is insufficient evidence of effectiveness and expand those that are proven effective. Ensure that programming appropriately targets and prioritizes offenders with high risk and needs.

CON: Won’t the people directly involved keep the programs that work and eliminate the ones that don’t work? Is this oversight necessary?

——— Cheryl Budzinski, Criminal Justice Study co-chair



League of Women Voters
of Greater Peoria

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ON THE WEB: www.lwvgp.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

IMPORTANT DATES:

Tuesday, Nov. 3: Election Day. Vote, if you haven't already!

12:30 Mon., Nov. 9: LWVGP Board Meeting, via Zoom.

6 p.m. Wed., Nov. 11: Part 3 Criminal Justice Reform Study, via Zoom.

6 p.m. Wed. Dec. 9: Consensus for Criminal Justice Reform, via Zoom.

Drinks & Dialogue is on hiatus until January.

**League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria Board of Directors
2020-2021**

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