



THE WEST VIRGINIA VOTER

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LLAW and the 2025 Session of the WV Legislature

Judy Ball and Julie Archer

Prior to the 2024 election, *Mountain State Spotlight*, one of West Virginia's premier independent journalism enterprises, reported on the concerns of West Virginians from all 55 counties: "Everywhere we went, there were common refrains from voters: *We need more substance abuse treatment and recovery programs. We need clean and reliable water. Our roads need to be fixed or upgraded. Our community needs more jobs, better schools, affordable child care, and a more responsive government.*" ([Nov. 3, 2024](#))

Further, *Spotlight* reported, "We also heard that lawmakers focus too much on issues that can tend to divide West Virginians, and not enough on things that can bring us all together."

The Legislature adjourned its 60-day session at midnight on April 12, 2025. From the perspective of the League's Legislative Action Workgroup (LLAW), *Mountain State Spotlight's* reporting from months prior offered a crystal ball into what happened and didn't happen during the legislative session.

We observed a whole lot of time focused on issues to divide West Virginians and to harm small but vulnerable groups, especially children. Those were the very items *Mountain State Spotlight's* reporting found that West Virginians did not want.

We also saw the Legislature devote little time or successful effort to what the citizens of our state said they wanted or to the policies our League had prioritized.

League priorities, for the most part, are consistent with the priorities expressed by citizens, and our four priorities have been unchanged from 2024:

1. Strengthening democracy
2. Safeguarding equal rights
3. Protecting children and families
4. Creating a sustainable future

What did the 2025 Legislature do?

- 2460 bills introduced (not counting resolutions)
- 88 of those bills were requested by the Governor
- 249 completed bills (152 House, 97 Senate)
- 233 completed bills signed into law by the Governor
- 10 completed bills became law without the Governor's signature
- 6 bills were vetoed by the Governor; plus [29 line-item vetoes in the budget bill](#)

We Made Some Noise

LWVWV makes decisions on whether to oppose or support legislation according to League positions and priorities approved by our Board. Given available time and resources, setting priorities and adhering to them are essential.

Overall, LLAW's *Make Some Noise* action alerts for advocacy focused on 24 bills across our priority areas. Nine passed and became law; fifteen did not. See summary on page 2.

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Bills addressed in 2025 **Make Some Noise** Action Alerts: Summary.

Priority Area	Number of bills		Outcomes		
	LWV Oppose	LWV Support	Did Not Pass (DNP)	Action by Governor	Vetoed by Governor
Strengthening Democracy	5	1	3	2 signed 1 w/o signature	
Safeguarding Equal Rights	7	0	5	2 signed	
Protecting Children & Families	8	0	5	3 signed	29 line-item vetoes
Creating a Sustainable Future	3	0	2	1 signed	
Total	23	1	15	8 signed 1 w/o signature	29 line-item vetoes

Note: To avoid double-counting, similar bills are counted only once. For example, there were five separate bills to prohibit ranked-choice voting but we count them as one, and only one (SB 490) passed and became law.

HB 2447, the only bill we supported with Make Some Noise, would have expanded absentee voting eligibility and streamlined election processes. It was not even considered by a legislative committee. Instead, the focus tended to be on voter suppression and anti-democracy bills.

Mountain State Spotlight published a great [overview](#) of what the Legislature did — and didn't — do to address West Virginia's challenges during the 2025 session.

All was not gloom and doom. SB 460 demonstrated that people power -- the power of the people's voices -- can still influence the Legislature, even one as ideologically unbalanced as West Virginia's. Without a doubt, SB 460 was the most notorious example of a Lazarus" bill, one declared dead before being revived and coming back again and again. The bill's purpose was to relax our state's best-in-the-Nation vaccination standards for school children by permitting religious and philosophical exemptions to opt-out of vaccinations. Coincidentally, SB 460 was considered during a growing

measles outbreak (with associated deaths) in states that had relaxed standards.

[SB 460](#) began its legislative journey by sailing through the Senate (20-12), and appeared to be on its way to quick passage in the House. Next came lengthy debate and opposition from the people, which caused the bill's progress to slow, along with numerous attempts to amend the bill. Ultimately, the bill failed in the House rather dramatically (42-56).

Indeed, the people's voices prevailed on SB 460, and that will save lives. That is, lives will be saved if the Governor's end-run by [Executive Order](#) also fails. Other notable bills, which didn't pass because people spoke up, included:

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LWV US Position on Federal Judiciary

By Nancy Ulrich

In 2024, delegates at the national convention of the League of Women Voters United States (LWVUS), recognizing the federal judiciary as an equal branch of the government that had to be strong and independent to maintain and protect our democracy, overwhelmingly decided that the League needed to have a formal position on the federal judiciary. To date, the League had positions on Congress and the presidency, but not the federal judiciary.

With a growing public concern about the transparency, accountability, and the perception of bias by members of the judiciary, it was decided that a consensus study must be undertaken and with some immediacy.

A consensus is a decision making process that involves all members of a group in the decision making process.

Consensus is a cooperative process, whereby group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of all. Every participant's input is considered and discussed. Consensus decision-making has been shown that when people think and talk together, they can find a solution and move forward together as a group.

Every League throughout the United States was invited to join in and hold a consensus meeting in their districts. Prior to the beginning of the consensus meetings, the Federal Judiciary Study Committee to which Judy Ball of the Morgantown League was appointed, thoroughly researched all the related issues associated with the federal judiciary. They then shared all of their work with Leagues across the nation to better prepare all the League members to be able to make discerning judgments. The committee developed 12 statements with five possible responses for participating Leagues to consider and discuss at their meetings.

The 12 statements were: (1) Transparency is essential to an effective Federal Judiciary. (2) Accountability is essential to an effective Federal Judiciary. (3) Independence is essential to an effective Federal Judiciary. (4) Ethics is essential to an effective Federal Judiciary. (5) There should be binding universal standards of conduct for judges and justices at all levels of the Federal courts. (6) Court hearings, documents filed in the court, and rulings for all federal cases should be open and available to the public. (7) There should be an effective enforcement mechanism for the Federal Judiciary code of ethics at all levels. (8). An enforcement mechanism should include a process to require a judge or justice to recuse him or

herself when a reasonable litigant would believe that the judge or justice has a bias against any party or an issue raised in the case. (9) A judge or justice's decision and rationale to recuse or not recuse, should be publicly discussed in writing. (10). Federal judges and justices should be subject to rigorous financial disclosure requirements, enforcement and penalties for all financial benefits, including, but not limited to, income, gifts, paid speaking engagements, and book deals. (11) Stability of law (stare decisis) is a value that contributes to a strong democracy. (12) Public perception of the Supreme Court's legitimacy contributes to a strong democracy. One agreed to answer by the group to these questions was to be chosen from the following five answers: strong consensus for, moderate consensus for, strong consensus against, moderate consensus against or no consensus.

The conclusions that were reached by each of the participating Leagues across the nation were emailed to the national committee who came up with the questions and answers. The results are to be tallied and provided to each League in June 2025. The West Virginia State Board League, the Huntington League, the Jefferson County League and the Morgantown – Monongalia County League all participated in a consensus meeting. It was a collective agreement that the consensus meeting was a learning experience and very interesting to do. We all are awaiting the final tally.

NEW OFFICERS ELECTED AT LWVWV CONVENTION

Co-Presidents:	Lyn Widmyer and Judy Ball
1st Vice President:	Autumn Summers
2nd Vice President:	Julie Archer
Secretary:	Carline Shaw
Treasurer:	Teresa Koon
Directors:	Shirley Rosenbaum Carrie Clendening

We have 3 vacancies. If you are a member and interested in participating on the LWV Board of Directors, contact Lyn or Judy.

Unite and Rise 8.5: A Campaign to Defend Democracy When It Matters Most

By Autumn Summers

On April 17, LWV CEO Celina Stewart and President Dianna Wynn released a statement declaring that the country is in a constitutional crisis and announcing Unite & Rise 8.5: [LWV Declares United States in a “Constitutional Crisis,” Announces New Initiative to Mobilize Voters.](#)

In moments of constitutional crisis—when the rule of law is under threat, institutions are strained, and public trust is eroding—the role of the voter becomes more vital than ever. While such times may feel chaotic or uncertain, history has repeatedly shown that a resilient, empowered electorate can serve as democracy’s most steadfast defense.

Are We Really in a Constitutional Crisis?

The League defines a Constitutional Crisis as:

When the executive, the legislative, or judiciary branches cannot or will not adequately protect the US Constitution, when there are explicit attempts to dismantle a functional democracy within any of the three branches, or when any level of federal government takes action to destroy democratic institutions in a manner that intentionally or purposefully jeopardizes the US Constitution.

The balance of power that defines and protects our democracy is under direct threat due to sweeping executive overreach. The President has issued a series of Executive Orders and taken actions that exceed the authority granted by Congress, violate constitutional principles, and ignore the safeguards designed to uphold the rule of law.

Examples of Executive Overreach

This administration has pursued actions that undermine foundational democratic institutions and constitutional rights, including:

- **Seizing authority from Congress and the states** to control voter registration rules—undermining federalism and state sovereignty in elections.
- **Attempting to end birthright citizenship** for certain individuals born in the U.S., a direct violation of the 14th Amendment.
- **Pausing distribution of congressionally approved federal funds**, overriding the legislative branch’s power of the purse.
- **Targeting independent federal agencies** like USAID and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) for dismantling, weakening critical safeguards for public welfare and economic fairness.
- **Allowing unelected and unvetted individuals access to sensitive citizen data**, raising serious security and privacy concerns.
- **Reducing the federal workforce without due process**, threatening the integrity of civil service protections and democratic accountability.

Why This Matters

At the heart of the U.S. Constitution lies a system of **checks and balances**—a design intended to prevent any one branch of government from accumulating unchecked power. The legislative makes the laws, the executive enforces them, and the judiciary interprets them. This separation is not a formality; it is a guardrail against authoritarianism.

When the executive branch bypasses Congress, disregards court rulings, or unilaterally rewrites policy, it **violates the rule of law** and endangers the rights and freedoms of every American. These actions erode public trust, weaken institutions, and set dangerous precedents for future abuses of power.

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Unite and Rise

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What is Unite and Rise 8.5?

Unite & Rise 8.5 aims to engage and mobilize 8.5 million voters through advocacy, civic education, and community engagement to unite and rise up against the anti-democratic actions of this administration. This initiative launched on May 1, 2025 and runs until the 2026 midterm elections as a part of our campaign [Women Defend Democracy Campaign](#).

How Can You Make Change?

In the face of such a crisis, **vigilant civic engagement** is essential. Citizens must demand accountability through every available democratic channel:

Raise awareness: Share accurate information about these unconstitutional actions and their consequences.

Protest peacefully: Participate in demonstrations, boycotts, and sit-ins that uphold the Constitution and protect democratic norms.

Contact elected officials: Demand that Congress reassert its authority and take meaningful action to check executive abuse. [Find your elected officials here.](#)

Mobilize and vote: Participate in every election. Use your vote to defend democracy and elect leaders who respect the Constitution. Find election information, candidate profiles and positions, and what's on your ballot here: <https://www.vote411.org/>

Act locally: Join local organizations like your [state or local League](#) to act on the issues that matter in your community.

Contribute financially: Consider making a donation to your state or local League. Every dollar makes a difference. Whether it's \$5 or \$75, you're fueling trusted, grassroots action that protects and expands the right to vote.

This moment calls for courage, clarity, and collective resolve. Democracy is not self-sustaining. It depends on each of us—citizens, advocates, organizers, and voters—to uphold its principles and resist those who seek to erode them.

Our democracy does not need saving by a few, it needs defending by the many. Voter empowerment becomes more than a civic duty; it becomes a moral imperative. It ensures that democracy remains of the people, by the people, and for the people—even when that promise is under siege.

Let the ballot be your shield. Let your voice be your sword. And let your vote be your declaration: Democracy will endure because we, the people, will not let it fail.

WHO IS LOOKING OUT FOR WEST VIRGINIANS?

By Nancy Ulrich

Do West Virginia elected officials ever listen to or care about West Virginians? Is our state going forward or backwards? And our families, our children, what are their futures in West Virginia? Why were certain bills prioritized by the legislature? Who is looking out for the welfare of West Virginians?

The 60 day session of the West Virginia legislature began on February 12, 2025, and ended at midnight on April 12, 2025. During this time, 2,460 bills were Introduced by various legislators with 247 bills eventually being passed and sent to the governor for his signature. There was ample time during the session for the legislature to deal with the *real* and major issues that face West Virginia and need to be solved so that West Virginians can survive and progress.

The first bill to be introduced, provided to the legislature by the governor, was the DEI bill. (Sound familiar?) On the second day of his taking office, the governor issued several executive orders. (Sound familiar?) one being the “ordering cessation of DEI”. DEI was going to be eradicated from every state agency and business. These actions mirror efforts by the Trump administration to ban DEI initiatives in the federal government.

DEI stands for diversity, equity and inclusion. It refers to the policies and measures that organizations use to prevent discrimination, comply with civil rights law, and create environments welcoming to people from marginalized backgrounds.(USA Today). “Talk to any CEO of a major Fortune 500 company, They’ll tell you that their bottom line, dollarwise, does better when there is more diversity in the room.” Maura Healey, Massachusetts Governor, recently told the New York Times. Donald Trump, addressing a joint session of Congress, stated, “We have ended the tyranny of so-called diversity, equity and inclusion policies all across the entire federal government and, indeed, the private sector, and our military.”

Just hours after he took the oath of office, President Trump began signing executive orders to dismantle programs and departments and put pressure on federal contractors to end “illegal DEI discrimination.” Federal agencies were directed to draw up a list of private companies that could be investigated for their DEI

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- HB 3518, the Medicaid ‘trigger’ bill, which would have thrown 166,000 West Virginians off of their health insurance if federal matching funds were reduced (a possibility under the federal budget being considered by Congress).
- HB 2382, the statewide camping ban to criminalize homelessness under the guise of protecting public health. Shortly thereafter, voters failed to repeal Morgantown’s similar camping ban. That repeal initiative had been forced onto the Morgantown municipal election ballot by citizen petition.
- SB 592, the ‘tank bill,’ an attempt by the polluter lobby to exempt even more aboveground storage tanks from the landmark law passed to protect our public drinking water supplies. Many of us remember the water crisis due to the 2014 Freedom Industries chemical leak into the Elk River less than a mile upstream from WV American Water’s Charleston intake.
- SB 579, which would have stripped cities and counties of their ability to protect vulnerable residents by preempting local bans on the discredited practice of ‘conversion therapy’ as well as local LGBTQ non-discrimination protections in housing and employment.

Unfortunately, we also have examples of the people, legislators, and (in some cases) legislative rules being ignored to get some bills to passage:

- [HB 3016](#) will require a photo ID for voting, a new requirement that began with the idea of placing an identifying badge on every photo ID for non-citizens. [LLAW objected](#). A version of the bill eventually passed, after numerous revisions. The Legislature was hellbent on finding a solution to a problem that is virtually nonexistent in West Virginia. Now we will wait to see the adverse impact on voter turnout.
- [SB 299](#) will deny gender-affirming care to West Virginia children, even those already receiving such treatment, as soon as August 1, 2025. [LLAW objected](#) on social justice grounds. Only two years ago, gender-affirming care for minors was saved from full prohibition by a last-ditch compromise in the Senate. A main purpose of the 2023 compromise was to save lives, which will now be at risk.
- [SB 474](#) will eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in government, public schools, and

higher education passed. This divisive bill passed the Senate with minutes to spare on April 12, with procedural irregularities: [questionable application of the Senate rules](#), refusal to consider more than a dozen pending amendments, and cutting off the microphones for Senators who attempted to object. Legal challenges may ensue now that the Governor has signed this bill into law.

What else?

In 2025, LLAW expanded its use of social media to get out time-sensitive action alerts and re-post action alerts from LWVWV partner organizations. Email became too slow to keep up as the Legislature’s deliberations gained speed toward adjournment. Facebook notices could be posted more speedily and would reach more people. By session’s end, LWVWV’s Facebook page had more than 1,000 followers, a gain of approximately 25% since 2024.

LLAW’s preparation of the 2025 Legislative Scorecard has begun. It is coming later than in 2024 because the legislative session comes later in inaugural years. Look for it soon at [LWVWV.org](#)

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policies. Congress passed the DEI bill. Our two West Virginia senators, Shelley Moore Capito and Jim Justice voted for the bill. In West Virginia a similar bill was being argued, starting on the first day of the legislative session and ending two hours before the last day that the session ended. The bill passed, although with an alleged procedural error, and was sent to the governor for his signature.

One can’t help but wonder why this bill was even considered by our legislature. According to the 2024 US Census Bureau, West Virginia is the least diverse state in the United States. The majority of West Virginia’s are white, 92.8%; African-Americans make up 3.8%; Hispanic or Latino make up 1.9 to 2%. and two or more races range from 4.0 to 4.7%. The population of West Virginia continues to dwindle almost every year. The birth rate in West Virginia is declining. The birth rate has consistently been below the national average since 1990. We should be welcoming newcomers to our state. We need our state to grow economically.

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On January 19, 1989, the last day of his presidency, and his last speech, President Ronald Reagan stated, “We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people— our strength— from every country in every corner of the world. And by doing so we continuously renew and enrich our nation. While other countries cling to the stale past, here in America we breathe life into dreams. We create the future, and the world follows us into tomorrow. Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we are a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation. If we ever close the door to new Americans, our leadership in the world will soon be lost.”

So how has the DEI law impacted West Virginians? Badly, very badly. Overnight life has become chaotic, unsure, reaching almost crisis for some. Everything is uncertain. There has been loss of jobs due to no fault of the employee. Not even knowing that their jobs were gone until they went to work and found the door to their employment locked. School teachers now have to be careful not to help a particular student too much, to be very careful in the subject matter being taught; the words they use to teach. Higher education is losing research grants because of a word that is written in the body of the grants that have been there since the time that grants were first written. Who is going to step up to try to cure cancer, heart disease and other diseases affecting us? No one is the answer because it's too expensive. Pharmaceuticals only want to manufacture. Universities were created to expand minds, create thinkers that will lead the world. But now they have to tread so softly in order not to offend particular people's sensitivities. How can certain subjects be taught in schools, in universities? How are disabled people to be helped? Will they be singled out as getting special treatment? What about the veterans who may be singled out? The list goes on and on creating uncertainty and fear.

On April 10, 2025, the House of Representatives adopted a Senate based budget resolution that would provide over \$5 trillion to extend tax cuts, increase funding for immigration enforcement, and other Trump administration priorities, while cutting at least \$1.5 trillion in the federal budget through cuts to other federal programs, including Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs. (SNAP). More than 45% of West Virginia revenue is made up of money provided by the federal government. The only states that receive more aid are Alaska and Kentucky. It is projected that West Virginia could be hit the hardest with decreased federal spending.

Funds for West Virginia's budget include federal dollars which provide for healthcare coverage for children, people with disabilities and the elderly; provides school meals and disability accommodations in public schools; and supports workforce development, public health, and state infrastructure. If the funding is cut as threatened, then West Virginia has to pick up the costs. Other significant sources of federal funding to West Virginia support early childhood care, public assistance programs, economic development, environment and K-12 education. Federal medicaid dollars pay for 82% of the programs in West Virginia. Medicaid provides health coverage for just over 600,000 West Virginians and is the largest source of coverage for births, child health care, substance-abuse treatment, and

long-term care for West Virginians. It is also vital for state hospitals, and providers.

Last year a healthcare survey was completed in all 50 states. West Virginia had the worst healthcare in the nation with the highest mortality rate and diabetic mortality. Despite knowing all of this, U.S. Senators Shelley Moore Capito and Jim Justice, elected to represent the best interest of West Virginians, voted for a budget plan that would require \$880 million in cuts over the next ten years. If the senators had not voted this budget bill would not have passed.

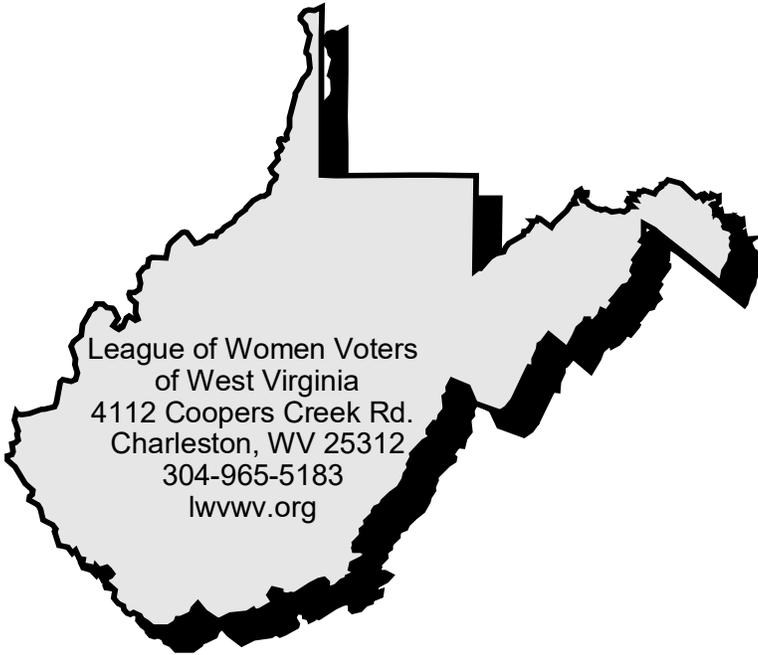
Contrary to everything we were told by former Governor Jim Justice, the first week in office Governor Morrisey projected a \$400 million budget deficit for 2026. A flat budget was eventually passed by the legislature and sent to Governor Morrisey's desk for his signature. Following in the path of the federal administration, Governor Morrisey's solution to the questionable deficit was to downsize state government and cut spending. Thus far he has cut funding for road maintenance, water development, West Virginia hospitals, public transit, libraries, safe school programs, residential treatment centers for drug abuse, nursing homes for veterans, plus much more. Two most striking and concerning cuts are the \$800,000 cut for care of foster children and \$250,000 was cut from Lily's Place, a nonprofit organization that provides support for families dealing with substance abuse disorder. Two major problems that West Virginia has to get a handle on now, not in the future.

A very disheartening cut was the cut of money for foster care children. West Virginia has had a problem with foster care for a minimum of 10 years. As of mid-April 2025, 5,955 children are in states custody. Many of these children are not in foster homes because there's a shortage of foster parents. Many children are sleeping in hotels because there's not enough beds for them. There were bills introduced in the legislature relating to foster care, but only one passed, and that was during the last hours of the 60 day session. That bill was sponsored by Delegate Adam Burkhammer, a foster parent. The bill is intended to create a “Parent Resource Navigator” to help to reunite parent and child. In 2024, the state paid \$70 million to place children in out-of-state facilities. Some of the facilities were known for abuse of children. If the state has \$70 million available, shouldn't there be facilities built in state to provide homes and facilities for these children so that they at least can have contact with relatives or friends? Their treatment and care can be closely monitored. There is still an overwhelming need for child protective services workers. Their employment is now at 84%. Why can't West Virginia solve or at least put a dent in the care of foster children? Is West Virginia losing an entire generation and, as a consequence, a future? Why weren't these bills given a priority for consideration in this legislative session? Why did the renaming of Spruce Knob Mountain to Trump Mountain get more consideration than a solution for our foster care children?

West Virginians need elected officials that care about the now and the future of our people. Just like other people we want good jobs, good education, clean water, decent roads, broadband, etc. We don't need legislators that cater to their own whims and desires. It is time to put our people first.

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Teresa Koon
Editor

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. If you live in Cabell, Jefferson or Monongalia County, you can join a local league. Otherwise, you can join as a member at large of the state league. Go to:

[Join Us - LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS@ OF WEST VIRGINIA](mailto:JoinUs-LEAGUEOFWOMENVOTERS@OFWESTVIRGINIA)



www.lwvww.org

Carrie Clendenning
304-881-4404
ccwv2024@gmail.com

Director

LWV WV Board of Directors

Teresa Koon
304-590-5476
Teresa.m.koon@gmail.com

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304-676-5449
shawcpa1@gmail.com

Secretary

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304-599-2370
shirley.rosenbaum@gmail.com

Director

Lyn Widmyer
304-279-3201
lynwidmyer@gmail.com

Co-President

Judy K. Ball, PhD, MPA
240-997-1222
Balljkk@aol.com

Co-President

Autumn Summers
304-619-8785
asummers3013@gmail.com

1st VP

Julie Archer
304-610-9094
julie@lwvww.org

2nd VP