



PO. Box 29816
Lincoln NE, 68529
(402) 982-1572
lwwnebraska.org

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Dear Senators of the 108th Legislative Session:

For more than 100 years, members of the League of Women Voters of Nebraska have been active in local, state and federal policy making. Older than the Nebraska Unicameral itself, the LWVNE was founded in 1920 as a continuation of the Nebraska Woman's Suffrage Association, whose primary goal was securing women's right to vote.¹ While some thought that the successful passage of the 19th Amendment would be the end of the LWVNE's work, it was actually just the beginning.

Two of the main goals of the LWVNE at its founding were: 1) "training for citizenship" and 2) "encouraging political activity among women."² Decades later – through our statewide members at large and four local Leagues (Greater Omaha, Lincoln-Lancaster County, Hastings and Seward) – the LWVNE's goals are largely the same. Mentions of the League often conjure up images of voter registration, candidate profiles in voter guides, educational events, candidate forums and debates, etc. This is the continued work of the League's first objective of activating and educating voters.

Less well known is the LWVNE's second goal of encouraging political activity. The LWVNE is a nonpartisan group – which means we do not support or oppose political parties, specific politicians or candidates. The LWVNE does, however, support or oppose policy stances and work to mobilize Nebraskans around specific legislation. Our positions – which can be found in the national League's Impact on Issues³ or the LWVNE Program⁴ – are based on extensive research and member consensus.

This work is largely achieved through state-level legislative advocacy. Of the LWVNE's 400 members statewide, around 40 serve on one of our six action teams. Members of these teams – all volunteers -- review policy, analyze proposed legislation, educate and raise awareness about specific bills, and communicate with senators and their staff.

These volunteers are young professionals, stay at home parents, teachers, practicing health care providers, librarians, professors, business leaders, college students, and more. Our stances are not only informed by research but also by the lived experiences of members. The six policy areas we cover continue the work that has been done by the state and local Leagues in Nebraska for decades. To provide a better sense of our history, here are a few, but definitely not all, examples of our work in these areas:

- **Disability and Behavioral Health:** From the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, the LWVNE testified regularly against bills that would defund services for individuals with disabilities and in support of those that would add services, especially in schools⁵ and for the past two decades has advocated for disability, mental and behavioral health issues
- **Education Policy:** One of its first and most consistent topics, the League has studied public school financing since the 1930s with a focus on access, equity and inclusion and in 1975 worked on the Omaha school integration effort.⁶

- Government: Another of the LWVNE's first focuses in the 1920s was efficiency in government. Over the next decades, the LWVNE worked on issues including 1943 legislation that allowed women to serve on juries,⁷ a 1961 extensive study of the legislative branch of the Nebraska state government⁸ and the 1972 changes in how Omaha elected city council members.⁹
- Health Policy: The LWVNE has worked on multiple fronts since the 1930s on such structural public health efforts as establishing a city health department in Omaha and Grade A Milk Sanitation Ordinance¹⁰ to more recent advocacy for expanded access in supporting efforts like the 2013 Medicaid expansion.¹¹
- Natural Resources and Energy: Having worked on water conservations issues in response to the drought during the Great Depression,¹² the LWVNE refocused its efforts on natural resources in the mid-1960s including its 1968 conference on "Water Water Everywhere," which was attended by state, county and municipal officials.¹³
- Social Policy: Part of the LWVNE's "equality of opportunity" campaign of the 1960s, which particularly focused on access to employment and housing in Nebraska, set guidelines for fair housing standards in Omaha and endorsed state legislation in 1969 that prohibited racial discrimination in housing, labor unions, employment and public accommodations.¹⁴

As a statewide, volunteer led, nonpartisan, political, nonprofit advocacy group, the LWVNE can be a resource to you as it has been for Nebraska legislators for more than a century. We thank you for the important work you do and encourage you to thoughtfully consider all perspectives and make data-informed decisions. If we can ever be of help, please reach out to one of our co-presidents, Janelle Stevenson and MaryLee Moulton, or Rachel M. Gibson, action vice president.

In the 1940s the informal motto of the Omaha League was "let the people know, make the people care, help the people act."¹⁵ Our purpose today is the same and will be for the next 100 years.

Sincerely,

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska

¹O'Donnell, D. C. (1996). The League of Women Voters of Greater Omaha, 1920-1995. Master's thesis, University of Nebraska Omaha. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2721&context=studentwork>

²O'Donnell, p. 27.

³Impact on Issues: 2022-2024. (2023, April 5). League of Women Voters of the United States. <https://www.lwv.org/impact-issues>

⁴The League of Women Voters of Nebraska Program 2022-2023. (2022, April). <https://lwvnebraska.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/LWVNE-2022-2023-PROGRAM.pdf>

⁵Committee Statements: Health and Human Services. (1992, February 20). Nebraska Legislature. <https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/92/PDF/CS/LB1078.pdf>
<https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/92/PDF/CS/LB1080.pdf>

⁶O'Donnell, pp. 36, 106-107.

⁷O'Donnell, p. 51.

⁸Donovan, R. G. (1971). The Nebraska League of Women Voters. *Nebraska History* (52), p. 325. https://history.nebraska.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/doc_publications_NH1971Women_Voters.pdf

⁹O'Donnell, pp. 96-100.

¹⁰O'Donnell, p. 44.

¹¹Committee Statement: Health and Human Services. (2013, February 28). Nebraska Legislature. <https://www.nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/103/PDF/CS/LB577.pdf>

¹²O'Donnell, p. 45.

¹³Donovan, p. 325.

¹⁴O'Donnell, pp. 80-82.

¹⁵O'Donnell, p. 53.