Legislative Packet

TO: Local League Presidents/Action Chairs
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As usual, we are providing key information on current legislative issues and asking you all to meet with and lobby your legislators on these issues. Enclosed please find the annual legislative packet to assist with your lobby visits with your state Senators and Assembly Members. Pre-budget legislative lobbying in legislators’ district offices should be scheduled between February 14th and February 21st. This year our legislative packet covers funding for voting and New York’s independent redistricting commission, ethics, and court reform. We expect that some of these items (not directly impacted by the budget) will likely be the primary focus of our post-budget lobbying as well.

Summary of Reforms:

Funding for Voting
Last year, we asked local Leagues to advocate for early voting implementation funding in the 2019 budget. This year, we will continue our efforts to secure funds for early voting and new electronic poll book equipment. The Governor has included in his budget proposal $41,000,000 to cover the costs of new election upgrades and early voting in 2020.

Executive Budget Proposal:
$10,000,000 ……… for early voting for county boards of elections
$15,000,000 ……… for the purchase of electronic poll books
$16,000,000 ……… for the creation of an online voter registration portal

Although this is a significant investment, we are concerned that this funding will not be enough to cover the cost of three periods of early voting in 2020. Last year, counties spent well over $25,000,000 on a single period of early voting. In our legislative packet we have included a document explaining some of the new costs that may be linked to early voting in 2020 and the need for a larger investment in 2020. We have also included our report on early voting in 2019 and a joint letter sent to legislative leaders in December regarding the need for funding. Feel free to leave behind any of these documents at your lobby visit.

Independent Redistricting Commission
Following the completion of the census count, New York State will redraw its legislative district lines using a constitutionally mandated independent redistricting commission. This commission will require funding so that it can hire staff, acquire map making software, hold public hearings, and deliver maps to the legislature by the constitutional deadline of January 1st, 2022.

The legislature is mandated by the constitution to form the commission by February 1st of 2020. The League believes that this commission must be funded sooner rather than later so that the commission can begin hiring staff and making arrangements ahead of the release of the final census count. Included in this packet is a factsheet about the constitutional mandates of the commission, a letter sent to legislative leaders.
regarding the importance of forming the commission in a timely manner, and an estimate of what the commission could cost is executed correctly.

**Ethics**

Although the Public Campaign Financing Commission proposal has become law, there were many critical campaign finance reforms that were not addressed. The League believes that the new law is lacking in several significant aspects and we are continuing to advocate for additional restrictions on contributions to political parties and contributions from those doing business with the state.

The League believes that the current system of ethics enforcement in New York is ineffective and lacks independence. It has completely failed to address the continuing corruption scandals in state government. It should be replaced with a new entity that oversees both the executive and legislative branches.

The legislature and the Governor should move immediately to limit the outside income of legislators in the wake of the court’s overturning a Commission imposed ban.

**Court Reform**

New York State has one of the largest and most complicated trial courts in the country. Many venerable and disadvantaged citizens have found the system to be completely unworkable. Some have even forgone legal action because of the onerous burden of having to navigate many different courts for one problem. Victims of domestic abuse, families dealing with separation, individuals with disabilities, and those living in poverty, have all found the system to be too costly and too complicated to have their needs addressed.

The Governor has proposed an amendment to Article VII of the Constitution that would unify New York State’s trial court system. It would consolidate 11 different kinds of trial courts (excluding the Justice Courts) into the existing Supreme Court and create a new statewide Municipal Court.

The League is supportive of this amendment to establish an integrated, statewide court system consisting of a minimum number of trial courts of broad jurisdiction and believes that it will provide the needed agility and flexibility to assure equal access to justice through our court system. Included in this packet is a one-page document explaining the cons of our current court system and voicing support for the Governor’s proposal.

**Final Thoughts:**

Although we have presented you with several options for discussion with your legislator, you do not need to cover all included topics. This exchange of information benefits the state League in its efforts to develop strategies that promote our advocacy at the Capitol. Our influence in Albany depends on your contact with your state Senator and Assemblyperson(s). They know you elect them! If you haven’t done so already, set up an appointment to see your state Assemblyperson(s) and Senator. Seeing a staff person is fine.

This Packet is available on the state League homepage, [www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org). Please return the attached form to the League office following your meeting, by mail, fax or email with an attachment. You should feel free to rely on the main points in this document and the handouts for your visit, but more background information is available online on our website for your reference. For any questions or concerns please contact Jennifer at [jennifer@lwvny.org](mailto:jennifer@lwvny.org)
Tips for Lobby Visits

PREPARATION

1. **Making the appointment:** Contact the legislator’s district office. Ask for a ½ hour of time, but accept less if necessary, and do not overstay your welcome. Notify the legislator of the number in your group as well as their names, if possible. Send a letter or e-mail confirming the appointment, mentioning the issues you will discuss. **If you cannot meet with the legislator, ask to meet with senior staff.**

Try to arrange for three to five League members to attend. If your League meets with several assembly members or senators, be sure to have a League member who is a constituent present. At least one person should be experienced in League. League members well versed on the issues to be lobbied should be included when possible. A new member can be included in this exciting action if accompanied by experienced League members. When more than one local League is involved, try to have representatives from as many of the constituent Leagues as possible.

2. **Assigning roles:** Each member of the lobby team should be assigned a specific role. The following are possible assignments:
   - Researching the legislator. Someone should be prepared to brief the other members of the lobby team on the legislator’s relationship with the League and his/her voting record (if the legislator is a re-elected incumbent). What are his/her committee assignments and/or leadership positions in the legislature? Is this legislator a member of the League? If this legislator sponsored bills that League supported, you may want to take a moment to express League’s appreciation.
   - Moderator/leader. This person should be certain that each League member introduces himself/herself. The leader must also watch the clock. Knowing ahead how much time the legislator has agreed to spend with you, the leader must allot an appropriate amount of time for each issue. It is the leader’s responsibility to “pace” the visit and tactfully keep everyone (including the legislator) on the subject. **Remember, opinions expressed should be those of the League, not of individuals.**
   - Researching the issue or issues to be discussed. Look to the materials on this subject on the league website.
   - Recording and reporting the legislator’s response. The leader should not be the recorder.

**NOTE: If you anticipate printing any part of the interview in a League bulletin or newspaper, the recorder is obligated to get the legislator’s permission and specific conditions under which you may print.**

Write a follow-up thank you after the visit. This is not only a gesture of politeness, but it also allows you to underscore some points made during the visit, answer any questions you were not sure about, or send a League publication to which you may have referred during the course of the visit.
Lobby Check List

Before Your Visit:

- Do you know what your “ask” is?
- Did you pack extra copies of the Legislative Packet materials?
- Did you bring your contact information for the member/staffer?
- Are you ready to refute opposition arguments?
- Do you have a couple of questions you want to ask?
- Is there an upcoming event where you can invite the lawmaker? Or are you sending a student from their area to Students Inside Albany?

After Your Visit:

- Did you send them a Thank You note?
- Did you send follow up on any questions they had?
- Did you send your Lobby Response Form to the State League office?
- Celebrate your success!

Use this space for any additional notes:
2020 LWVNYS LOBBY REPORT FORM
PRE-BUDGET LOBBY VISITS

Local League:_______________________ League Member Name:_______________________

Senator:__________________________ Assembly Member:__________________________

• What were the legislator’s biggest concerns?

• Where did you see eye to eye?

• Did they ask for additional information?

Please return completed form to LWVNYS, 62 Grand Street, Albany NY 12207 or fax 518-465-0812 or save as a pdf and attach to an email to jennifer@lwvny.org by March 1, 2020.