**Concept Paper**

**Making Democracy Work**

**Case for Support**

The League of Women Voters of [State/Local] encourages informed and active participation in our democracy and influences public policy through advocacy and organizing.

United under our shared mission of empowering voters and defending democracy, the League brings to bear the largest network of supporters around the country that give the people a critical role in shaping the public policies that affect them. We are your friends and neighbors, fighting to protect voting rights, promote voter registration, and ensure fair representation.

We are alarmed by the assaults on our democracy taking place daily on multiple fronts. Our work safeguards the pillars of American democracy, encourages more people to participate in it, and holds those elected to serve it accountable. In service of these goals, we are working to create and promote public policy and government structures that are responsive to the needs of all Americans.

In League of Women Voters of [Name] we work on core state national priorities to engage the New American Majority – a group that includes Americans with limited incomes, communities of color, non-college youth, unmarried women, and new citizens – all groups who are most likely to be underrepresented in our electorate. Currently, the most pressing needs are addressing the structural challenges to democracy including partisan gerrymandering, money in politics, voter registration, restrictive voter ID laws, and voter mobilization. These threats to democracy can limit the number of people who feel engaged in the voting process and confident that their vote will make a difference.

 As a part of this national network, we have contributed to these notable accomplishments:

* Provided more than ten million people in 2018 and 4.5 million in 2016 with updated election information including detailed candidate statements on tens of thousands of federal, state, and local candidates on VOTE411.org. In the 2018 election, [League name] VOTE411.org had [reached # voters]. [League Name] also distributed over 160,000 printed voter guides in communities across [state].
* Registered many voters, xxx # in [State] alone, to vote in the lead-up to the 2016 election, including tens of thousands of new citizens and nearly 15,000 high school and community college students;
* Registered [xxx] people [State] to vote on National Voter Registration Day 2018, maintaining our role as the single largest on-the-ground partner for this event;
* Across the country in 2018, the League protected over 1.9 million voters through varied advocacy litigation, and education efforts, and through the [State] Voter Protection Program volunteers watched xxx polling locations and protected xxx voters;
* Meeting voters where they are at, the League hosted and supported over 15,000 election events, including candidate forums, voting rallies, and panel discussion. LWV of [State] hosted xxx programs to empower voters on Election Day.
* In the past three years, the League participated in 21 different litigation efforts including on redistricting, voter ID laws, voter registration laws, voter purges, and the Pence-Kobach “Election Integrity” Commission. (Add if your state is/was in litigation) In [State, in ***League of Women Voters of [Name] [et al] v. [Name]*** add brief lawsuit information and outcome, if any yet.

**Past, Present, and Future**

The League looks to the future as it creates a truly activist, grass roots-led democracy that addresses the issues that most effect our constituents. With a century of experience in navigating government structures, we are leading the way in helping our network of supporters effect meaningful change at local and state levels. The League fosters civic engagement in [State] for residents to become involved in the political system through education, activism, lobbying, and voting. Providing inroads into civic involvement is at the core of the League’s local agenda. We are activating residents in [State] to address money in politics, state governance, redistricting, and [insert state/local issue] through educating them about influencing policy in their communities.

The League has nearly a hundred-year legacy of focusing on preserving the civic power of each individual voter – this has been at the heart of the organization’s work. Our supporters, numbering more than 350,000 nationwide and XX,XXX in [State] alone, are activated in doing the work of registering, protecting, mobilizing, and educating voters, but there is more to do. In order to create a truly representative, engaged electorate, we need to include the voices of all and create a culture of engagement in which voters feel the license and responsibility to vote.

The League is much more than the sum of its parts. The League network is the strength behind the voting rights movement, engaging the electorate in understanding the importance of the right to vote. In addition to our affiliates all over the country and our skilled volunteers, we partner to build community coalitions with groups like Common Cause, Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, ACLU, NAACP, Rock the Vote, CIRCLE, NALEO, Common Cause, and many others.

**Current Challenges**

The 2016 election was one of the most divisive campaigns in history and elevated our nation’s consciousness to the fact that the American system of government is not a fully representative democracy. The League has identified three core barriers to the vibrant and healthy functioning of our democracy.

First, redistricting practices have disempowered the American people. The process of drawing electoral boundaries was originally designed to ensure the electoral equity of each voter and help communities elect representative officials. However, in practice, redistricting is manipulated by politicians and the partisan consultants attempting to secure their power rather than the people’s equal representation. These practices tend to disproportionately weaken the voting power of New American Majority voters, therefore preventing them from gaining a foothold in our democracy or elevating their community interests or concerns.

Second, Americans’ right to vote is under attack. Across the country, legislators are pushing laws to create obstacles to voting, including cutbacks on early voting, reduced poll hours, voter roll purging, and strict voter identification requirements. These laws strategically disenfranchise people of color, seniors and young people.

Finally, redistricting and voting rights attacks have contributed to an American electorate that does not actively participate in our electoral process. During the 2016 national election, more than 100 million eligible voters did not cast a ballot and millions more are not even registered to vote. There are numerous factors that lead to millions of Americans not participating in the election, including difficultly registering due to discriminatory voting laws; viewing voting as a waste of time when those elected do not accurately represent their districts; and even feeling under-educated about the issues or candidates. Given that these barriers disproportionately impact communities of color and other under-represented communities, it is unsurprising that millennials and African American and Latino communities are the most likely to not vote despite their potential demographic electoral power.

Without fair and representative districts, a non-discriminatory voting system and eligible voters registered and voting, our democracy cannot work.

**The League’s Agenda**

The League’s core programs respond to these threats to our democracy by engaging New American Majority groups in our democracy and in policy issues that affect them.

**Redistricting:** The League is a leading advocate for transparent and accountable redistricting processes. We are working to end the partisan practices that serve incumbent politicians and special interests at the expense of those living in their districts. As we look toward the 2020 Census, we recognize a critical need to reform the redistricting process to ensure that the next major redistricting does not reinforce party lines and instead promotes equitable and effective representation, encourages public participation, and is subject to public scrutiny at all steps of the process.

Across the country, 40 state League affiliates have taken an official stance on redistricting reform and 36 have been actively involved in redistricting reform in their state since the last census in 2010. [Insert information here about what is happening in your state/local League]

It is essential to connect redistricting to people’s lives and help them understand how gerrymandering is a political process, often one that is greatly influenced by racial and economic biases. The League works to educate voters on redistricting practices across [State] and to increase public participation opportunities in redistricting conversations; our activities are carried out strictly in line with IRS regulations for 501(c)3 organizations.

**Voter Protection:** The League is dedicated to ensuring that all eligible voters – particularly those from the New American Majority – have the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote. The League’s Public Advocacy for Voter Protection program ensures that the electoral process facilitates, rather than hinders, underrepresented communities’ participation. Leagues partner with civil rights groups to fight for voters’ rights in communities, in state legislatures, in the courts, and in the public arena, through social and traditional media and advocacy campaigns.

Our multi-pronged approach has secured our success rolling back or defeating restrictive voter ID laws in Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, Florida and Ohio, and protecting early voting laws in Georgia and New Mexico, and same day registration in Wisconsin. Specific examples of our work include:

[Add information about STATE specific activities]

**Voter Registration and Engagement:** The mission of the League is rooted in educating new voters which aims to reach as many eligible voters as possible. For years, League printed voter guides were a signature element of elections across the country, and now, the League has migrated printed voter guides to online resources. Our voter engagement activities are threefold.

First, our website, VOTE411.org, launched in 2006, provides voters with comprehensive election information, including information regarding where candidates stand on the issues, and connects them directly to their state’s online registration platform, or provides them with the forms to register by mail. In 2016, 100% of voters could come to VOTE411 and find a partial ballot and nearly 70% of voters were able to find a complete ballot. Since its launch, 25 million+ people seeking information on eligibility, identification requirements, polling place locations, and detailed candidate information have sourced this information thanks to VOTE411. We are actively seeking new partners to expand this reach.

[Alternate paragraph for those not using VOTE411.org]

First, online voter guides provide voters with comprehensive election information, including information regarding where candidates stand on the issues, and connects them directly to their state’s online registration platform, or provides them with the forms to register by mail. In 2016, 100% of voters could come to the Leagues signature product VOTE411.org and find a partial ballot and nearly 70% of voters were able to find a complete ballot. For over a decade, 25 million+ people seeking information on eligibility, identification requirements, polling place locations, and detailed candidate information have turned to a League sponsored online education tool.

Second, our voter registration campaigns focus on high schools, vocational schools, community colleges and naturalization ceremonies. In particular, we are one of the only groups routinely given access to naturalization ceremonies for voter education and registration activities. Thanks to our skilled and dedicated supporter base, we have been the largest on-the-ground participant in National Voter Registration Day each year since its inception.

Third, throughout the year, the League conducts integrated voter engagement in local communities to empower voters to civically engage in decisions that affect their communities. During the 2016 election cycle, the League reached one in five voters before Election Day.

**Conclusion**

The attacks on our democratic institutions and the civic rights of Americans must be met with a multi-pronged strategic approach targeting and engaging voters, elected officials, and even the courts. The League’s focus on preserving the civic power of each individual is at the heart of everything we do. Further support would allow the League to advance civic equity by registering more voters, expanding access to voter information, and mobilizing more individuals in key civic issues such as redistricting. As a part of the only national, nonpartisan organization with the operational capabilities to engage vast groups of voters around the country, the League is well-positioned to protect our vibrant democracy.