



August 23, 2022

Summit for Democracy Core Team
US Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Summit for Democracy Core Team:

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the US Department of State's Civil Society Consultations around the Summit for Democracy. In hosting these consultations, the State Department demonstrates a commitment to transparency and public involvement in democracy, which are core values of the League of Women Voters of the United States (the League, or LWVUS).

The League is a century-seasoned, nonpartisan, democracy organization committed to protecting every person's freedom to vote. We are a grassroots group comprised of more than 500,000 members and supporters across more than 750 local and state Leagues nationwide. The League focuses on advocacy, education, litigation, and organizing to achieve our mission to empower voters and defend democracy.

In attending the Department of State's consultation meetings, we heard your request that civil society narrow our priorities on each topic to a manageable list of specific actions. In this letter, the League shares our policy positions and priorities on a selection of the proposed topics. We appreciate your consideration of these positions to guide the US Government's goal setting around its diplomatic efforts in its Year of Action.

Election Integrity

Recommendation: As part of the year of action, the US must implement efforts to instill confidence in election systems and administrators at home and abroad. This includes working with US government agencies like the Department of Homeland Security and the Election Assistance Commission to share best practices on the implementation of election procedures.



Background: LWVUS supports the implementation of voting systems and procedures that are secure, accurate, re-countable, accessible, and transparent. LWVUS supports voting systems that are designed to:

- Employ a voter-verifiable paper ballot, or other official paper records of the voter's intent;
- Allow voter verification, either by eye or with the aid of suitable devices for those who have impaired vision, that the paper ballot/record accurately reflects the voter's intent;
- Conduct verification while the voter is in the process of voting;
- Use the paper ballot/record for audits and recounts;
- Allow vote totals to be verified by an independent hand count of the paper ballot/record; and
- Routinely audit the paper ballot/record in randomly selected precincts in every election, as well as the results published by the jurisdiction.

The League has concerns about risks to eligible voters casting a ballot including voter registration problems, erroneous purging, problems with voter identification requirements, difficulties with voting systems, and the failure to count provisional ballots. To ensure election integrity, solutions to these hurdles must be implemented.

It must be stressed that not all action taken in the name of election integrity does, in fact, improve the integrity of our elections. As an example, in 2017-2018 the League actively opposed the creation of the Pence-Kobach Election 'Integrity' Commission. The Commission was created by President Trump to address the so-called voter fraud in the 2016 presidential election. The Commission met twice but was unable to justify the unfounded claims of voter fraud in the election and ultimately disbanded in the spring of 2018. The League opposed moves by the commission to collect voter registration data from all 50 states and create a national database of registered names because of voter data privacy issues.

Climate/ Environment

Recommendation: The US should set aggressive goals and take expedient action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in collaboration with the United Nations and other global coalitions, to address the threat of climate change. Sharing science, statistics, and strategies, and setting collaborative goals for the reduction of greenhouse gasses are necessary to ensure that democracies around the world are able to function.



Background: The League maintains that climate change is a serious threat facing our nation and planet and requires immediate domestic and international action. We support climate goals and policies that are consistent with the best available climate science, and we believe that an interrelated approach to combating climate change—including energy conservation, air pollution controls, building resilience, and promotion of renewable resources—is necessary to protect public health and defend the overall integrity of the global ecosystem.

Racial Justice

Recommendation: The US must institute federal measures to remove and prevent racial discrimination in voting, policing and incarceration, education, employment, and housing. The government should also address barriers to quality health care, which disproportionately burden people of color, and work to implement federal immigration policies that provide an efficient, expeditious system for legal entry of immigrants into the US.

Background: Racial justice is an underlying driver of all of the League’s work on policy issues, especially as the effects of discrimination in voting, climate change, the criminal justice system, health care inadequacies, and immigration fall disproportionately hard on communities of color. In this vein, the League urges efforts to dismantle systemic racism in all of our governmental systems.

Within our voting rights work, outlawing racially discriminatory voting restrictions and racial gerrymandering are high priorities for the League. Since *Shelby County v. Holder* and *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* gutted the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, discriminatory voting procedures have spread across the country at the state level. These laws and practices, which disproportionately affect racially marginalized communities, can take many forms, including restrictive voter ID laws, the closing of polling locations, and voter roll purges. Largely, these laws are able to be proposed and enacted because of a lack of federal preemption protecting voting rights for all.

Racial gerrymandering distorts and undermines representative democracy by allowing officials to select their voters rather than vice versa. Whether done for purposes of racial discrimination, or to ensure the dominance of one political party, or even to ensure the election of a specific legislator, gerrymandering runs counter to equal voting rights for all. We continue to advocate for redistricting reform that protects voters from gerrymandering.



LGBTQIA+ Issues

Recommendation: The US should institute federal efforts to remove and prevent discrimination on the basis of sexuality, gender identity, or sexual variation.

Background: The League supports equal rights for all under state and federal law. We support legislation to equalize the legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to same-gender couples with those available to heterosexual couples, including legislation to permit same-gender couples to marry under civil law.

The League believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment, and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

Gender

Recommendation: The US must take federal action for the achievement and protection of equality for all regardless of sex or gender identity. This includes working with US government agencies like the Department of Justice to overcome barriers to the national enshrinement of sex equity and to fulfill their commitments to protecting access to reproductive health care. This also encompasses leading by example globally, including working in coordination with the United Nations to achieve gender equity domestically.

Background: The League supports equal rights for all regardless of sex. We support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and efforts to bring laws into compliance with the ERA, including eliminating or amending laws that have the effect of discriminating on the basis of sex; promoting laws that support the goals of the ERA; and strengthening the enforcement of such existing laws. We also support the rights of women and those who can become pregnant to self-determination related to bodily autonomy, privacy, and reproductive health care.

On the international stage, the League endorses the full and active participation of the US in the UN system, and UN efforts to achieve the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of civil and political life. This includes supporting the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as its ratification by the US Senate.



As an organization that works to defend democracy, the League of Women Voters of the United States greatly appreciates the opportunity to submit recommendations on strengthening democracy to the US Department of State. We recognize the challenge of responding to what is undoubtedly a wide array of stakeholder priorities, and welcome further discussion about the League's positions, representing a robust network of people nationwide. For questions or additional comments, please feel free to reach out to our staff via Kristen Kern, Federal Policy and Advocacy Manager, at kkern@lww.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Jones Capparell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Jones Capparell
Director of Government Affairs
League of Women Voters of the US