

Engaged Citizen Corner

Voter Protection vs. Voter Suppression

League of Women Voters of Brookline

In our September 7th article *Brookline Voters Missing at the Polls*, we wrote about the Brookline residents who are registered to vote but have not voted, and the almost 12,000 inactive voters. This week we will talk about voter protections and voter suppression.

The issue: In the five years since the Supreme Court gutted anti-discrimination provisions in the Voting Rights Act, states are explicitly disenfranchising certain groups of voters by imposing more discriminatory voter photo ID requirements, placing proof-of-citizenship restrictions on eligible voters, reducing early voting and polling place hours in communities of color and impeding voter registration. Partisan gerrymandering and voter-roll purges have further cemented the power of majority parties. And now recent Supreme Court decisions have made it more difficult for people to vote.

League of Women Voters: The LWV of the US is actively opposing discriminatory voter photo ID laws, fighting against attacks on the voter registration process, holding lawmakers accountable when they institute last-minute Election Day barriers, and continuing its decades' long fight to secure fair legislative maps and transparent redistricting processes. The League is also at the forefront of the most important voting rights cases nationwide.

Examples:

1. In 2018 the Leagues of AZ, VA and NC have engaged in legal cases on voter purging/disenfranchisement, racial gerrymandering and partisan gerrymandering.
2. The Supreme Court upheld Ohio's practice of purging registered voters – thousands in time for the 2016 election – the League's program staff is now working to counter the expected uptick in voter-purging schemes.
3. Leagues in FL, GA, MI, OH, TX and WI are shoring up voter registration systems, promoting online voter registration and distributing voter and election information. This work protects voters in communities of color, low-income individuals and young people.

4. The League promotes online and automatic voter registration at the state level, and supports congressional passage of the Automatic Voter Registration Act. If this act passes, people would be able to register when applying for a driver's license or for public services, enrolling in college or becoming a naturalized citizen, potentially expanding voter rolls by 50 million.

Voter Registration and Voter Education: Local Leagues across the country - including Brookline - are registering thousands of new voters and providing voter services through its VOTE411.org, a "one-stop shop" online voting and election resource website.

Automatic Voter Registration in MA: Governor Baker signed this bill into law on August 9th, in plenty of time for the 2020 election. Massachusetts is the 14th state to enact automatic voter registration..

What about Brookline? Which brings us back to those non-voters. What happens to them? Massachusetts requires municipalities to keep a Street List of Persons 17 Years of Age and Older. If a resident does not respond to the annual mailed census request, the Town Clerk sends a Notice asking for residency confirmation. If no response is received, the name becomes inactive. However, if the resident can provide identification at the polling place and signs an Affirmation of Residency, the resident can vote.

LWVB will continue to focus on voter registration and education as well as strategies to increase civic engagement.

Prepared and submitted by a member of the League of Women Voters of Brookline (LWVB). The League is a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation in government and that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy.