

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GEORGIA STATE POSITIONS 2007-2009

Courts/Criminal Justice

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

We support:

Expanding the availability and use of alternatives to incarceration for both adults and juveniles. For adults, alternative include pretrial release, pretrial diversion, mediation, probation, restitution, community service, diversion centers and transition centers. For juveniles, they include detention homes, day centers, probation, group homes, community treatment centers, status offender programs, purchased services.

COURTS

We support:

1. A unified court system which includes:
 - a) consolidation of courts into a one- or two-tier system.
 - b) uniform jurisdiction throughout the state for the same class of court.
 - c) uniform rules of practice and procedure and uniform administrative regulations for each class of court.
 - d) administrative responsibility centralized with the Supreme Court or the Judicial Council.
 - e) an integrated, statewide court system, financed by means of a judicial budget prepared by a central administrative body.
2. Special training for judges who hear juvenile cases and required training for any judges who do not have law degrees.
3. The merit selection of judges based on the recommendations of a Nominating Commission with some form of subsequent voter review.
4. The discipline of judicial misconduct by the State Supreme Court upon recommendation of the Judicial Qualification Commission.
5. Public education about the judicial process.

D.U.I.

We support:

Amendments to Georgia law providing for the evaluation of DUI offenders for alcohol problems and treatment for those found to be dependent on alcohol. We also support alternative to incarceration for DUI offenders, including but not limited to treatment.

PROBATE COURT

We believe:

1. The laws governing descent and distribution and intestate succession should be drafted in such a manner that the average consumer can understand their import. The League further believes greater consumer awareness can lessen the need for judicial involvement in this area.
2. The laws governing descent and distribution of property at death should operate as efficiently as possible so that the process of inheritance is inexpensive and expeditious.
3. In order to accommodate a population that is highly mobile, some consideration should be given to the trends in other states when changing our Probate laws.

VICTIM-WITNESS ASSISTANCE

We believe:

Victim-Witness assistance programs are an important tool in protecting the rights and interests of victims and witnesses. Victim-Witness assistance programs should be sponsored by the courts. However, if court-sponsorship is not feasible, programs within prosecutor's or other court-related offices are acceptable. Programs should have as their goal support for all victims of crime. But, if priorities must be set, assistance should be given according to the seriousness of the crime. Victim programs should offer at minimum:

witness notification, court escort, information services and referral to related services. Further, there should be action to recommend legislation to further protect and assist victims and witnesses.

Education

The LWVGA supports quality public education in Georgia. We also support equity in state funding of education in Georgia and implementation of the recommendations of the Governor's Education Review Commission.

We support:

1. adequate funding by the Legislature. Funds must be provided to upgrade poor districts without downgrading other districts.
2. establishment of a level of support that provides for the basic educational needs and ensures equal educational opportunity for all students through using a weighted pupil formula for distribution of state money to all systems.
3. efforts to reduce the relationship between school district spending and district wealth.
4. raising standards for schools and insisting that these standards be met in all systems. The State Board of Education should set this as a prime goal.
5. consolidation of systems across county lines and within counties (with particular emphasis on systems under approximately 3,500 FTEs to produce systems of optimum size for better quality and for maximum economy and efficiency. The State Board of Education should more vigorously exercise its statutory power to encourage reorganization and withhold funds from noncooperative systems.
6. election of state and local School Board and Board appointment of state and local Superintendents under the broad principle of electing policy making officials and appointing administrative personnel.

Elections

The LWVGA supports an equitable enforceable election system.

We support:

1. a statewide uniform election code with provisions for strict enforcement by the state.
2. strengthening and strict enforcement of laws governing campaigning at the polls.
3. assigning election officials the responsibility for distributing to the voter factual and impartial information this should include sample ballots.
4. expansion of present methods of voter registration.
5. mandatory training of election personnel.
6. more efficient handling of absentee ballots.
7. a strong, responsible electoral system which accommodates more than one party, including party registration.
8. pledged presidential electors.

Government

We support:

1. a bicameral General Assembly with Senators having longer terms than Representatives.
2. a Special Commission to conduct the required decennial redistricting reapportionment. The Commission should be diverse and include legislators, citizens, minority interest and political party representatives. We support any open process with citizen input and public hearings on any proposed redistricting plan.
3. a provision for the Governor and Lieutenant Governor to run, and be elected, as a team.
4. a provision for a stronger executive, less legislative role for the Lieutenant Governor.
5. election of only policy making officials.
6. giving the governor power to appoint and remove department heads with the consent of the Senate and with provision for show of cause and right to appeal.

7. local government articles which would provide for greater home rule and self-determination for our cities and counties, including constitutional authorization for local government to raise revenue from local sources.

Growth Management

The LWVGA supports comprehensive planning for managing growth in the State of Georgia.

Health Care

INDIGENT CARE

The LWVGA believes that the provision on needed medical care to the indigent is a joint responsibility to be shared reasonably by the federal government, state government, local government and the providers of hospital and medical care. We believe that the State should assume a larger responsibility in funding indigent care and that multiple approaches to funding could be used to address the broad range of needs. Because there is an increasing competition between public and private hospitals for paying patients and the indigent care load is not equitably distributed, the League supports the concept that all hospitals should have some responsibility for contributing to the care of the indigent. League members agree that there is a need for oversight of hospital charges and support some organized structure for supervision of hospital costs.

PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

We support:

1. a change in the current state public health formula. The following factors should be used in the development of a new funding formula: a) general population, b) population in need, and c) some measure of local wealth.
2. modification in the authority given to county Boards of Health, so that Boards are no longer autonomous but are more accountable to the State. A system for state monitoring of county Boards is recommended.
3. changes in composition of the Boards of Health. The Boards should be expanded, with the addition of slots specified for users of public health services, and consumer advocates and deliverers of public health services, in order to create a more diversified and representative local Board.
4. increased input to the county Boards of Health, accomplished by such means as having open, well publicized Board meetings and establishing local advisory boards to monitor and advise the Boards of Health.
5. statewide minimum standards for services and access to service, along with a mechanism for monitoring local health departments.

Supporting statements: standards should not be too stringent so as to disallow local flexibility; all consumers should have equal access to services regardless of place of residence; since the state monitors and evaluates allocation of resources, it could and should set standards for programs and services.

Legal Status of Women

The LWVGA supports:

1. changes in Georgia laws and practices which promote the goals of the Equal Rights Amendment.
2. monitoring changes in the laws and practices that have a particular impact on women.
3. monitoring the implementation of the changes in the laws and practices that deal with the victims of the crime of rape.
4. action to secure ratification of the ERA.

WOMEN, PROPERTY AND THE LAW

We support:

1. Laws which recognize marriage as an economic relationship based on principles of fairness and equality.
2. Laws which acknowledge that each spouse makes a different but equally important contribution to the marriage.
3. The belief that spouses owe each other and their dependent children support according to the ability of each to contribute.
4. The belief that the property of the marriage may be managed and controlled by either spouse but not without the consent of both.

WOMEN, PROPERTY AND THE LAW: DIVORCE

1. The LWVGA believes divorce settlements should be fair and equitable to all parties with regard to property division, maintenance, custody and child support.
2. The League supports the continued option of a jury trial for property division, child support and maintenance.
3. The League supports the use of adequate public funds to enforce child support and maintenance payments.

Liability Insurance

OFFICE OF THE INSURANCE COMMISSIONER –

We support:

Insurance regulation which balances the needs of the consumer and the regulated industry.

1. The regulation must be: a) sufficiently flexible to allow prompt response to changing needs; b) enforceable and c) effectively enforced.

We further support:

1. adequate funding to provide competent staff and data management.
2. provision for oversight and input by an independent consumer representative.
3. consumer education and product information to promote informed evaluation and selection of insurance.

Taxation

The LWVGA supports a broad-based tax system equitable to taxpayers and sufficient to finance the needs of the state. We support progressive rather than regressive taxation but view sales tax as part of a broad-based structure.

SALES TAXATION:

We support:

1. exemption of food from the sales tax base. An increase in the sales tax would be acceptable only if food were exempt.
2. broadening the sales tax base in order to more closely approach a true consumption tax.

We believe: Each local League should determine whether or not it should support, oppose or remain neutral in a county referendum on any local sales and use tax. The League believes that these are local issues which should be decided at the local level judged within the context of a broad-based tax system equitable to taxpayers and sufficient to finance the needs of local government and with consideration and cognizance of state positions.

INCOME TAXATION:

We support:

1. the use of the Georgia Income Tax to promote the State's social and economic policies.
2. a graduated tax rate structure for both personal and corporate incomes.

3. the widening of personal income tax brackets to increase the progressivity of the tax.
4. indexing the income tax structure for inflation.
5. making the Georgia Income Tax Return more compatible with the Federal Income Tax Return.
6. any tax rate increase needed to prevent loss of revenue resulting from League supported changes.

PROPERTY TAXATION:

We support:

1. the use of assessment standards and practices which provide equitable treatment among all property taxpayers.
2. the state's having a supervisory role over property tax assessments.
3. the use of computer technology along with physical reappraisal of property to continually update assessments.
4. the use of assessments-sales ratio studies to judge assessment equity.
5. the refusing of a digest, returning it to the county to be adjusted and equalized, having the state equalize and adjust if the county fails to do so in one year.
6. the combining of assessment administration across county lines of small digest counties.
7. using refundable income tax credits for low income persons as a method for relief of a portion of ad valorem taxes on real property, whether paid as an owner or as a tenant.

OTHER SOURCES OF REVENUE:

We support:

1. the development of user fees and further minor taxes, such as severance taxes on nonrenewable natural resources.
2. greater home rule and self determination for local school systems, including constitutional authorization for local boards of education to raise revenue from local sources.

We oppose:

1. allocation of state taxes for specific purposes.
2. using an increase in the general sales tax rate to provide a mandated reduction in local ad valorem taxes.