

ELECTION LAWS

The League of Women Voters of Virginia believes that democratic government depends on the informed and active participation of its citizens; that voting is a right and responsibility; and that election laws, regulations and administrative procedures should be uniformly designed and applied, and adequately funded to facilitate and increase voter participation throughout Virginia.

Role of the Commonwealth

Funding the cost of maintaining a statewide system of voter registration, and providing equal and easy access for voting throughout Virginia, are responsibilities shared by the Commonwealth and local governments. The Commonwealth should provide additional funding where localities are financially unable to support an accessible and well-managed election system.

The State Board of Elections must be given adequate authority and resources to: enforce election laws and mandatory standards for local election offices; encourage best practices in registration and elections management, especially in training election officers and officials; provide adequate oversight of registration and elections at locality and precinct levels; and oversee implementation of election laws, regulations and policies to ensure their consistent application across the Commonwealth.

Registration

Because the system of voter registration affects voter turnout, and because federal legislation has extended the availability and ease of voter registration in Virginia,

- Voter registration opportunities must be available, by mail and in person, consistently throughout the Commonwealth;
- A uniform system of voter registration is required to facilitate voting and prevent fraud; and
- Additional measures should be adopted to increase the availability of voter registration, especially those that utilize technological advances or provide cost savings, including:
 - * Online voter registration,
 - * Reducing the interval between the registration deadline and Election Day to the smallest number of days consistent with effective elections management, and
 - * Same-day registration at county and city central election offices.

In defining domicile and abode to determine residency for purposes of registration, a statewide policy should be applied and enforced to ensure:

- Uniform interpretation
- Broad construction
- Presumption of intent
- Consistent application

Voter registration by political party should not be adopted in the Commonwealth.

Elections

Election laws must be designed to facilitate voting and encourage participation of a large percentage of citizens in all elections. To this end, laws, policies and procedures affecting the voting process should be applied consistently in all parts of the Commonwealth, both prior to the election and at the polls on Election Day.

Prior to the Election

The LWV-VA supports:

- Legislation to allow all registered voters to vote absentee, without specifying a reason, prior to Election Day. Both choices— voting in person or by mail-- should be offered. (This no-excuse absentee voting is sometimes called “early voting.”)
- The use of satellite voting facilities, in areas where distance or inadequate transportation make it difficult for voters to reach a central election office for in-person absentee voting;
- The provision by all localities of evening and weekend voting hours at central and satellite offices, for several weeks before general elections;
- The use of electronic means for submitting absentee ballots by military and overseas voters if it can be accomplished while maintaining ballot security and integrity; and
- A pilot program of all-mail voting to test its use in some elections.

At the Polls

The following should be required throughout Virginia to ensure an efficient voting process:

- Electronic poll books, with back-up paper copies for emergencies;
- Appropriate precinct sizes and numbers of voting machines to minimize voting delays;
- Well-trained officers of election; and
- Polling places selected to maximize voter participation and near public transportation, wherever possible.

The LWV-VA is concerned that Virginia’s polling hours might not be optimal for all areas of the Commonwealth, especially those close to adjacent states, and also concerned about the effect of long hours on officers of election. Split shifts and poll closing specialists should be used in all localities to ease the burden on officers of election, help in their recruitment, and ensure well-managed elections.

Legislation should be enacted to provide authority to the Courts to extend the polling hours in case of disasters and other emergencies that prevent the voters from getting to the polls, and include the provisions needed to ensure fair access to the polls throughout the Commonwealth. (2011)