

Teleconference Presentation - August 21, 2018
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First, thank you to the Maryland Library for the Blind for inviting us to participate in this teleconference. We greatly appreciate your leadership in encouraging every citizen to vote.

A little background about why the League of Women Voters is so active in encouraging citizens to vote. For many years, women were not allowed to vote in the United States. When the right to vote was granted in 1920, the women who led the suffrage movement realized that the right to vote would be of little value unless women knew about public policy issues the views of candidates on those issues. The League of Women Voters was organized to study issues and encourage informed participation in the political process. As part of its mission, the League today publishes a non-partisan *Voters' Guide* before each election - more about that later.

Why should we vote? Because government at all levels affects our daily life. When we shower in the morning, we are depending on local government to provide a reliable supply of clean water. We send our children to school where the local board of education is responsible for ensuring that they will be taught by skilled teachers and their classrooms will be safe and well-equipped. We elect the local officials who make those decisions. Our state government regulates utilities to ensure that we pay fair rates for those services. State government also determines how actions will be prohibited by criminal law and supports law enforcement and a court system to implement those laws. When we vote for our Governor and General Assembly we are choosing the people who will make those decisions. And from recent news stories we know that the federal government is responsible for trade policies and decisions about war and peace. Our votes for President and Congress determine how those decisions are made.

Citizens have a right to vote, but we need a system to ensure that elections are conducted in an orderly manner. The election officials need to know who will show up to vote, so Maryland has established a voter registration system. Your first step is to ensure that you are registered to vote and, equally important, that you update your address with the Board of Elections any time you move. If your address is not up to date in the voter registration list, you will need to vote by provisional ballot and that will take some time on election day. The Board of Elections staff will provide more information about this.

Once you are registered, you have three options for casting your vote. You may vote by mail (which we sometimes call absentee voting), or during early voting (which runs for a week before election day), or on election day. Every polling place will have a voting machine with adaptive technology for voters who are blind or have limited vision. Again, the Board of Elections staff will provide more detailed information on these options.

You are registered and ready to vote, but as we asked at the beginning, what good is the right to vote if you don't know the candidates' views? That is why the League of Women Voters publishes a *Voters' Guide* that contains information about the candidates. In Maryland, we cover candidates for every office in every county. We ask each candidate to respond to

questions related to the office they are seeking. We do not endorse or rate candidates, but print the answers exactly as the candidates submit them. If you want additional information about candidates or want to ask them questions, our *Voters' Guide* invites candidates to provide their websites, social media and email addresses.

Our *Voters' Guide* is available on our website at lwvmd.org in pdf format that should be accessible by screen readers. We will work with the Library for the Blind to make copies of the *Voters' Guide* for each Maryland county available as soon as they are published.

Again, thank you to the Library for inviting us to participate in this event. We look forward to working with you to ensure that information on voting is conveniently available to every citizen.