

**League of Women Voters of Falls Church City**  
**LWV-VA Consensus Questions: Election Laws Update Study, Part 2**  
**March 2011**

The League of Women Voters of Falls Church (LWVFC) met on March 8, 2011, to consider the consensus questions posed by the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA) regarding its Election Laws Update Study, Part 2. The LWVFC invited and benefited from the participation of David B. Bjerke, General Registrar of the City of Falls Church, and M. Margarete Shovlin, Chairman of the City of Falls Church Electoral Board. In addition to responding to the consensus questions, the Falls Church League respectfully recommends that the report be amended to cite uniformly to the Code of Virginia rather than to the Constitution of Virginia (as an example, please see page 3, under “How” and “Officers of Election,” second paragraph).

**1. a. What measures do you support to facilitate voting at the polls on Election Day? Select all applicable:**

- **Use of electronic poll books:** The LWVFC finds this measure excellent as a means of facilitating voting and important to encourage in local jurisdictions that have yet to adopt electronic poll books.
- **Well trained election officers:** The League considers this training essential and effective, noting that an Election Day is essentially a professional event that employs amateurs on a large scale. This could not be accomplished without the training that takes place, and the LWVFC maintains that the cost of this training (in Falls Church, the time of the Registrar and \$25 per election official trained) is reasonable.
- **Ratio of machines per registered voters that will decrease likelihood of long lines at most times on Election Day:** The League believes it is important to at least maintain the current ratio of machines to voters, and that voting bottlenecks would develop if there were fewer machines available. The LWVFC suggests that if the goal is to reduce wait time, election officers have a key role to play in moving the process along, both at the electronic poll books and at the voting machines.
- **Maximum precinct size that will decrease likelihood of long lines at most times on Election Day:** Because Falls Church elects its City Council and School Board at large, this issue is moot for our jurisdiction. The LWVFC noted that currently, the City has more wards than it needs; there are five wards that technically could be reduced to two.
- **Change or extend hours that the polls are open.** If yes, provide suggested hours and reason for selection: The LWVFC could not come to consensus on this point. Debate centered on the desire for uniformity of voting hours across the state versus the already long day for election officials, and particularly for chiefs and assistant chiefs. At 7:00 pm, Virginia has the earliest closing hours of all the jurisdictions in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area—with Maryland and D.C. having later hours from 7:00 am- 8:00 pm. The League suggests that hours might be more easily extended if there were a concession elsewhere in the election process, such as the availability of no excuse absentee voting.

- **Polling place locations convenient to any public transportation and designed to maximize voting participation:** While public transportation is clearly desirable as a means of facilitating voting and Falls Church benefits from the location of two Metro stations on its borders as well as Metro bus service, the LWVFC acknowledged the long-standing funding pressures on the transportation sector, particularly in Northern Virginia. Accordingly, the League suggests that vote by mail and no excuse absentee voting would reduce the need for public transportation as a factor in enabling participation in elections.
- **Exercising the State-wide authority that allows use of split shifts and closing specialists at the polls:** The League observed that the City of Falls Church has employed split shifts and that this tool and closing specialists are helpful, particularly in years where there are several elections and it may be difficult to attract sufficient numbers of volunteers for the full day. While split shifts can be difficult to administer, they help keep volunteers from becoming too tired. The LWVFC recommends that split shifts be continued, but that no more than three shifts be employed to reduce the administrative burden.

**b. What is the role of the State to ensure consistency with regard to these measures?** The LWVFC believes that the State’s responsibility is to ensure adequate funding for all jurisdictions.

**2. Do you support legislation that would allow the Courts to extend the hours that the polls are open in the case of disasters or other emergencies that prevent voters from getting to the polls?** The LWVFC believes that the Courts have the authority to do this now and suggests that the State League clarify this consensus question.

**3. What types of absentee or early voting do you support for all voters in Virginia, i.e., not just military and overseas voters? Select all applicable. Explain if necessary.**

- **No excuse absentee voting:** by mail—Yes in person—Yes
- **Permanent no excuse absentee voting by mail:** Yes
- **Localities to exercise the State-wide option to use satellite absentee voting facilities for several weeks prior to general elections in areas where distance and inadequate transportation facilities make it difficult for voters to get to a central elections office:** Yes, but paid for by the jurisdiction.
- **Localities to provide weekend and evening hours for voting at central and satellite voting offices for several weeks before general elections:** Yes. Falls Church currently makes two Saturdays available for voting before an election. The City does not presently offer evening hours, but the League favors this addition.
- **All-mail voting for:**
  - **Federal general elections:** Yes
  - **State general elections:** Yes
  - **Local (city, town) elections:** Yes
  - **Special elections:** Yes
  - **Primary elections:** Yes

**If you answered yes to any use of all-mail voting, should it be implemented State-wide or at the option of each local jurisdiction?** The LWVFC believes that all-mail options should be implemented State-wide. The League also notes Oregon’s experience in eliminating polling places as a result of all-mail voting. In addition, while there are ecological issues associated with all-mail—and so paper—voting, this method of voting is helpful in recounts.

**Would you support a pilot program of all-mail voting?** Yes

- 4. Do you believe that increasing turnout and facilitating voting should be equal goals for adopting changes in the way that Virginia conducts elections?** No. The LWVFC contends that facilitating voting is and should be the primary goal. Increasing turnout is a measure of how well voting is facilitated, and facilitating voting will inevitably increase voter turnout.
- 5. Do you support use of fax machines and e-mail attachments (or similar technology) to return voted absentee ballots from:**
  - **Military and Overseas Voters:** Yes and the League would add to this category Foreign Service voters and voters who are missionaries.
  - **All absentee voters?** No, due to issues of voter privacy. If these issues can be addressed and absentee voting for all voters can be made safe and secure, then yes.
- 6. If proven safe and secure by a pilot program or programs, in either Virginia or other states, would you support using the Internet to vote?** Yes, but only if this means of voting is safe and secure.
- 7. Are you satisfied that the current law regarding recounts protects the rights of all/both candidates in close elections? Explain if necessary.** Yes.
- 8. Do you believe that party identification of candidates on the ballot should be extended to all partisan elections (those, such as constitutional officers and county boards of supervisors, in which candidates are chosen by political parties in Virginia)? Explain if necessary.** No.