

ACTION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL LEAGUES

The strength and integrity of all League action is based on the decisions of informed members. When a position is reached, the League speaks with one voice, the voice of a substantial majority, and the minority abides by that decision. Leagues may, of course, decline to take action at any governmental level and maintain a public silence. But a League may not take action in opposition to official League positions. Members may act as individuals in support of or opposition to League positions, but they must make it clear that they are acting on their own behalf and not on behalf of the League unless authorized by the appropriate board to represent the League.

The most effective action occurs when Leagues act at whatever level of government is most appropriate. For example, on a statewide issue, the most effective action occurs when local Leagues, acting in concert, lobby their own state legislators. Because legislators are most responsive to their own constituents, it is rarely effective for a local League to lobby a legislator representing a different area. For this reason, one of the most important criterions in adopting a study is whether the issue can best be addressed at the level of League that would undertake the study.

To ensure agreement on the interpretation of positions, to coordinate activities of the different levels of the League, and to enhance the effectiveness of League action campaigns, local Leagues are encouraged to consult with the state board about their action plans. As discussed below, **consultation is required whenever (a) the intended action would affect the jurisdiction of other Leagues and/or (b) a local League wishes to act at the state or national level on an issue which has not been the subject of a state or national call to action.**

ACTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: THE DECISION TO TAKE ACTION WHICH WILL AFFECT ONLY YOUR COMMUNITY RESTS WITH YOUR LOCAL LEAGUE BOARD.

LOCAL POSITION

In deciding to take action based on a local position, the board will want to consider:

- whether the contemplated action falls within the relevant position
- whether your members understand and support the action
- whether the action would be effective in your community

STATE, ILO OR NATIONAL POSITION

Local Leagues are encouraged to take action in their communities based directly on positions from other levels of League. Consultation with a board member from that League level may be helpful in planning action strategy.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE ABSENCE OF A LEAGUE POSITION

Issues can arise quickly in a community where League input would be helpful but a lengthy study process leading to a local position is not feasible and there is no applicable position at another level of League. There are a number of ways that local Leagues can help resolve such issues and play a dynamic, visible role in the community. For example, they may:

- bring diverse constituencies together to define the problem and facilitate a common solution
- sponsor public hearings
- provide objective research and education on the community issue
- sponsor educational forums

When the League is involved in a community issue without the basis of a formal position, it is critical that the League representatives remain objective and neutral. The League's role is to help the community reach consensus or air differing viewpoints in a calm, objective atmosphere.

ACTION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL: ACTION THAT WOULD AFFECT THE JURISDICTION OF MORE THAN ONE LEAGUE REQUIRES CONSULTATION WITH THE BOARDS OF THE OTHER LEAGUES IN THE AREA INVOLVED.

The procedure to be followed will depend on the complexity of the issue and the number of Leagues involved. If only two or three Leagues are affected, all should agree (or have no objection) to the plan of action. If more than three Leagues are involved, there should be consensus on the contemplated action. You may contact a member of the state or ILO board for guidance.

ACTION AT THE STATE LEVEL: ACTION THAT WOULD INVOLVE CONTACT WITH STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REQUIRES APPROVAL BY THE STATE BOARD.

If your League is contemplating state-level action that has not been requested by the LWVIL board, please contact the LWVIL Issues and Action Vice President.

LEGISLATION AFFECTING ONLY THE JURISDICTION(S) OF THE LEAGUE WISHING TO ACT

The contemplated action may be based on positions from any League level and, as a general rule, will be given clearance by the state board. Consultation is needed, however, not only to keep the state board informed about all state-level advocacy but also to ensure that there is no conflict with other LWVIL action and to ensure that the action proposed is based on complete and current information. For example, in the course of a day a bill may be amended one or more times, and the League position may change accordingly. If action is approved, the local League may contact only its own legislators unless it has requested and received permission from other Leagues to lobby their legislators. Such was the case in 1993, when the DuPage County ILO successfully sought approval to lobby all state legislators on legislation relating to the DuPage County Airport Authority.

LEGISLATION AFFECTING JURISDICTIONS BEYOND THOSE OF THE LEAGUE WISHING TO ACT

If the basis for the contemplated action is a state or national position, the state board will evaluate the proposed action in the context of its legislative priorities. Clearance will be given if there is no conflict with other LWVIL action.

If the basis for the contemplated action is a local position, the state board will exercise extreme care in determining whether to approve such action. While using a local position as the basis for state-level action does not provide the most effective method for action and should not circumvent the state program planning process (through which changes to current state positions or new study items may be proposed), there are occasional circumstances when a local League may wish to pursue such action.

In such cases, the local League will be asked to prepare a request for permission to act to be distributed to all affected Leagues. The request should include a description of the type, goals, impact and time frame of the contemplated action, including which legislators the League proposes to lobby, and to the greatest extent possible, the general effect of the proposed action on other local Leagues. The LWVIL Issues and Action Vice President will review the request prior to distribution. The state board will evaluate the responses of the local Leagues and determine whether to grant permission to act. Points the board will consider include:

- Is the legislation permissive or binding?
- What are the geographic impact, level and visibility of the contemplated action?
- Is the issue divisive at any level?
- Is there conflict with any local, ILO, or state League position?
- Do any local Leagues object to the proposed action and why?

ACTION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: ACTION THAT WOULD INVOLVE CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL REQUIRES APPROVAL BY THE NATIONAL LEAGUE.

If your League is contemplating action at the federal level that has not been requested by the national board, you must clear your plans with LWVUS. You may call the LWVUS office directly. If you have questions, you may contact the appropriate state legislative/issue specialist or the LWVIL Issues and Action Vice President for guidance.