Jan Kay: Issue Specialist

LWVIL and LWVUS have strong positions in place regarding social policies for positive actions to be taken to aid individuals and families in need. Given, according to Chicago based freelance writer, Robert Loerzel in the January 2014 “Illinois Issues”, that one of every three people in IL is poor, the LWVIL must be advocating for better resources to meet those needs.

Our positions include employment, transportation, child care and housing. Not only are these issues important for the large cities, but recent information has pointed to the rise of poverty level individuals and families in the outlying suburbs and downstate Illinois. Furthermore, research has shown women make up one-half the workforce and yet make only seventy seven cents for every dollar men earn.

Employment is a basic priority for meeting the food, child care, transportation and housing needs. Congress has yet to pass the reauthorization of WIA [Workforce Investment Act] which provides employment and training services and was originally authorized in 1998. Access to employment with private and public transportation remains a large issue to those seeking to keep employment not only in the cities but also in downstate towns. Each of the following issues remain as unfinished business in Congress: increasing the minimum wage, Emergency Unemployment Compensation and the Farm Bill which includes food stamps.

LWVIL continues to support an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit which returns dollars to low income workers, helping to meet the financial needs of families. With the increasing lack of State funding as forecast in the Governor’s three year forecast, we must monitor programs in Early Learning, Teen Reach and Early Intervention as well as the Early Childhood Block Grant which funds preschool programs and developmental services for families with infants and toddlers. Shortfall predictions are: FY2015 $1.9B, FY2016 $4.1B, FY 2017 $4.5B. according to the Governor’s Office of Management and Budget. Not only does the lack of funding for programs in agencies affect the well being in families but reduced funding also has a large impact on the local town budgets.

Affordable housing had been impacted by the negative economy as well. We have continued to advocate for funding for supportive housing, homeless youth services, homeless prevention and renter protections re their application fees. SB56 passed which protects renters living in foreclosed homes. We also are monitoring issues related to housing of ex-offenders in their search for affordable homes and employment as well.

In this past year it is easy to note the fiscal problems of our State and Federal governments have had the major impact on our advocacy efforts. This means we must be aggressive in our advocacy for the League’s work for a graduated income tax in Illinois. We are working alongside A Better Coalition and others on this priority for the State.