

# FROM AD HOC TO THE COUNTY AND BEYOND: How the League of Women Voters of Marquette County, Developed and Promoted a Pro-Voting Resolution

## 1) The germ of an idea

Following the 2020 elections, multiple voter suppression bills and citizen initiatives restricting voting started circulating in Michigan. The League of Women Voters of Michigan (LWVMI) alerted local Leagues about these and proposed various actions to counter them, among them directly advocating against the Secure MI Vote petition, educating the public on all the suppressive bills, and resolutions against voter suppression.

Since it was unlikely that the Secure MI Vote petition would circulate in the Upper Peninsula and Covid was still limiting public gatherings, the Board of the League of Women Voters of Marquette County(LWVMC) decided to go the route of developing a Pro-Voting Resolution. Working with cities and townships would also advance our goal of increasing our presence in the more rural areas of the County. This was a new process for our League and an Ad Hoc Committee was formed with the following initial charge:

- A) Develop an anti-voter suppression resolution that can be used to encourage our local governmental bodies to adopt similar resolutions
- B) Explore strategies that would be customized for the various boards and commissions at the county, city and township levels most likely to result in success in convincing the entities to adopt a resolution
- C) Explore the benefits of a League representative making a public comment at local board/commission meetings regarding the importance of resolutions in opposition to anti-voter legislation, petitions and other actions
- D) Consider any potential partnerships in this action with “All Voting is Local” and Voters Not Politicians or similar organizations

## 2) Starting resources

We looked at examples of resolutions from the Oakland County Commission, Wayne County Commission, Voters Not Politicians (VNP) and All Voting is Local (AVIL).

We found an excellent general approach written by the American Friends Society: [How to Get Your City or Town Council to Pass a Resolution](#)

We also used the Michigan Secretary of State's (SOS) legislative agenda: [Secretary of State's \(SOS\) legislative agenda](#)

Our Vice President of Voter Services wrote a draft resolution after considering all of these examples.

### 3) A change of tone

All the example resolutions we reviewed made a point of mentioning and detailing the Secure MI Vote petition. Their thrust was to be “anti-voter-suppression”. Our VP’s draft took many good ideas and phrases from these examples but did **not** mention the petition by name, and took a “pro-voting rights” stance. The Committee immediately liked this approach, feeling that a) mentioning the petition with its details gave life to it, b) that a more positive tone would be more acceptable to our local governmental entities, and c) we wanted to promote some of the Secretary of State’s (SOS) legislative agenda to improve administration of Michigan elections.

We also added an action paragraph asking the governmental entity to forward copies of their adopted Resolution to the Governor, the Upper Peninsula Legislative Delegates, and the Secretary of State. We underwent an iterative email process of editing and re-phrasing the resolution until we all agreed we liked it.

### 4) Finding our Champions

We consulted with the clerks in the City of Marquette about the SOS agenda items to select high priority measures that would be most beneficial and feasible to implement locally.

One of our League members is also a Marquette City Commissioner and indicated her interest in supporting the resolution. A meeting between her and two committee members led to some wording changes and some clarification of a strategy to approach the Commission. She especially endorsed our decision to stay positive, saying that some other oppositional resolutions that had been considered had raised concerns for the Commission.

Unexpectedly, the Mayor of Ishpeming invited the LWVMC to submit its resolution to the City Council, after they had received a VNP resolution. They were seeking a voting resolution that was action-oriented, not just symbolic. After quickly getting our League Board’s approval of the resolution, the LWVMC President and the Coordinator of the Ad Hoc Resolution Committee spoke during the public comment period about the need for the resolution. The Ishpeming City Council was the first municipality to adopt the LWVMC resolution. This

experience strengthened our intent to emphasize positive election reforms and to enable a municipality to take action. One Councilor detailed these reforms on Facebook, praising LWVMC.

Since we had a City Commissioner as champion, we decided that the Marquette City Commission would be the next municipality to approach. We then learned that the VNP might be submitting their resolution at the December Marquette City Commission meeting. Comments heard at the November Commission meeting by our Observer Corps sounded as though the Commission felt the VNP resolution was too partisan, and that a resolution from the League would have a positive reception. Therefore, with the League Board's approval, we sent our resolution to the Marquette City Commission for their December meeting and they put it on the agenda.

#### **5) Preparing for the City Commission meeting**

- A) Members were sent email notice of this action, with a copy of the resolution. We asked them to email their Commissioners in advance of the meeting, supplying them with the email addresses;
- B) Members, who were able, were asked to join us at the meeting, wearing their League shirts;
- C) On the Commissioner's advice, we decided to have only two designated speakers during the Public Comment period. Our President prepared a statement of the general principles behind the resolution and our VP of Voter Services prepared notes about the SOS agenda items that we included in the resolution;
- D) We held a Zoom meeting with interested League members before the Commission meeting to go over the resolution and our plan for the evening. Their role would be to show support with their League shirts and to stand in support at the end of our Public Comment remarks;
- E) We were concerned that the Press might ask our members their opinion about the Secure MI Vote petition. We asked the members to refer any such questions to the League officers present. The officers were prepared to refer to the LWVMI statement about the petition;
- F) Members were also urged to email, write, or phone thank you's to the Commissioners if they adopted the resolution

#### **6) Showing the shirts**

The City Commission meeting couldn't have gone better. Our President and VP of Voter Services spoke and at least ten League members stood in support. The Clerk read the resolution as the City staff had modified it; they had removed the SOS agenda items. Each Commissioner spoke quite strongly in favor of voting rights and the dangers to them right now. The resolution passed unanimously.

## **7) Strategy disrupted**

We were so pleased with how consulting with the Clerks and one of the Commissioners had worked, that we decided to approach the County Board of Commissioners next. We started arranging a meeting with the County Clerk. However, our step-wise plans were suddenly interrupted when the Negaunee and Sands Townships' Boards received copies of the Marquette City Commission's Resolution from a VNP representative. The Negaunee Township Board adopted the resolution without the League having the opportunity to confer and develop our relationship with the Township Clerk and Board.

The Resolution Committee quickly sent a copy of our Resolution to Sands Township clearly labeling it as from LWVMC. Starting with this submission we labeled all our proposed resolutions with the footer: "Text as Released to the Sands Township Board on Nov 18, 2021 by the League of Women Voters Marquette County". Two League officers were able to speak at the Board meeting, as well as two League residents of the Township. The earnest eloquence of the township residents was most persuasive. Sands Township adopted the resolution, only excluding the specific election reforms.

## **8) A stumble but not a fall**

As we were setting up a meeting with the Marquette County Clerk, we learned that a parallel resolution had been sent to the County Commissioners by VNP. We felt it was prudent to send the County our revised resolution despite not being able to meet first with the Clerk.

Both resolutions ended up on the agenda Jan 4. We heard from the Clerk who was surprised and unhappy that this happened before our opportunity to meet with her, and from a Commissioner who was confused by having two nearly identical resolutions. In order to have time to address these concerns, we got in touch with the County Board and asked that the resolution be tabled for this meeting. Members of the Resolution Committee attended the meeting to be sure this was done, and were able to explain the situation to the Clerk and the Commissioners personally.

Our Committee Chair and the VP of Voter Services subsequently had a productive and friendly meeting with the Clerk which resulted in some stronger language and some changes in the SOS agenda items, and a strengthened relationship with the Clerk. When the resolution was put on the agenda for the January 18th meeting, and the President and VP of Voter Services spoke, it was adopted unanimously. At the suggestion of one of our members who spoke in public comment, the Commissioners decided to send copies to all the counties in

Michigan and to our federal legislators and senators. As a result, at least one other county in the Upper Peninsula is considering the resolution.

## **9) On to the Townships**

Marquette County has 19 Townships. We decided the most efficient way to reach them all was to ask to attend and speak about the resolution at the next Marquette County Townships Association meeting. The President of the Association was agreeable, and offered the mailing list so that we could send a copy of the resolution to each of the supervisors and clerks prior to the meeting. We made a template resolution with blanks for the Township name, date, and percentage of voters in that township/city approving Proposition 3 in 2018.

The Coordinator of the Ad Hoc Resolution Committee and the Executive VP spoke about the resolution at the meeting. We had several supervisors approach us with interest afterwards. The Committee decided to split up the list of townships and call the respective clerks to make sure they had received the resolution template, ask if they had questions, make sure they knew their township could revise the template as they wished, and that we were available to speak and support the resolution.

## **10) Most recently**

Four more Townships have adopted the resolution during their February meetings. And the third city in the county just unanimously adopted the resolution in March. We had speakers at four of the meetings, and additional League supporters at two. Two townships have had some opposition to the resolution and may make some changes and bring them up again. Two townships have indicated “no interest”. Many of the smaller townships have clerks away for the winter or working out of their homes and are harder to contact.

However, having the resolution adopted by the three cities, by the County, and by six townships so far has felt like a victory.

## **11) What we've learned**

We feel our success with this resolution is partly due to its timeliness, but also to our attention to detail, ability to respond rapidly to changes in situation, and our focus on the various municipal clerks as the center of our attention. These are lessons we learned and that would be applicable to any resolution we work on in the future:

- A) Positivity in wording is more attractive and an easier sell than negativity
- B) Include an action item in the resolution; then the resolution is not just symbolic
- C) Clerks are key players and should be cultivated with respect. Even if the resolution does not deal with voting, clerks are intimately involved in anything that comes before a municipal board.
- D) Identifying and consulting an interested Commissioner/Councilor can lead to them being your Champion, and can begin a good working relationship for other issues.
- E) Many Commissioners expressed confidence in the worth and quality of the resolution because it came from the League. Uphold and use the League's reputation.
- F) The more local the speakers and supporters, the better the reception. Although there were statewide organizations we could have partnered with, we chose to keep the focus local and avoid the perception of "outsiders" attempting to influence local government
- G) Follow-up is important; your emails and attachments are not always read, or read in detail
- H) Commissioners respond to emails and calls from constituents, and really like a thank you from constituents.
- I) Be aware that if the topic is important to the community, other groups with similar principles but different focus and timelines may also be taking similar action. Being nimble and diplomatic can help you respond effectively and stay on track but don't be rushed. If you have a well thought out plan, take the time to follow it.
- J) Cultivating good relationships with city and township clerks and supervisors is essential to getting resolutions adopted and will enhance future efforts.
- K) Clearly label any document sent to a municipality as coming from the local League
- L) Appearing in municipal meetings with the resolution presentation and/or public comment speakers is a good way to get publicity: we have had a televised interview, a supportive newspaper editorial and two front page articles with pictures.

## Text of the final template form of the LWVMC Pro-Voting Resolution

**RESOLUTION** supporting the cause of protecting democracy, promoting policies that protect access to the ballot for voters and building on the progress of the 2020 elections.

**WHEREAS**, access to voting and participation in free, fair and secure elections is fundamental to our system of governance; and

**WHEREAS**, Michigan's election security protocols are among the strongest in the nation. Robust voter- ID laws prevent or intercept fraudulent attempts to impersonate voters. Multiple security checks bolster our absentee voting process. And gold-standard paper balloting ensures all our election outcomes can be verified; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2018, Michigan voters overwhelmingly supported amending the constitution to expand voting rights, make it easier to register and easier to vote, by the following percentages of votes cast on Proposition 3: \_\_\_% support among \_\_\_\_\_ Township voters, 68% in Marquette County, and 67% Statewide; and

**WHEREAS**, restricting voting rights and undermining the fair, nonpartisan administration of elections is harmful to all communities, but disproportionately impacts (already marginalized) voters of color, lower-income communities, the elderly, as well as disabled voters; and

**WHEREAS**, in recent months, state legislatures, including Michigan's, have introduced dozens of bills that essentially restrict access to voting, make election administration and oversight less equitable and efficient, and undermine existing laws that maintain election security and ensure nonpartisan counting and certification of votes; and

**WHEREAS**, elections in Michigan have been conducted safely and securely and without any significant fraud, up to and including the 2020 election, as the Senate Oversight Committee Report concluded; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2021, the Secretary of State unveiled a legislative agenda that would improve access to voting whether early, absentee, or in-person; expedite absentee ballot processing; and make voting more convenient, demanding that every valid vote is counted and accurate election outcomes upheld;

**Now, therefore, be it RESOLVED** that the \_\_\_\_\_ Township Board on this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2022 strongly supports policies that **expand and protect equitable access to voting and that strengthen and sustain a robust election infrastructure**, including both material and human resources:

- Make Election Day a state holiday to facilitate voting and make it easier for citizens to serve as election workers;
- Allow overseas service members and spouses to return their ballots electronically;

- Earmark sufficient funding for elections to recruit, train and retain needed election workers, to

add sufficient election equipment such as secure drop boxes and tabulators, and to support voters

with disabilities;

- Allow the processing of Absentee Ballots and establish Early In-Person voting the weekend prior

to Election Day;

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- Any rule governing the mailing of absentee ballot applications to registered voters by state or local election administrators should apply equally to all other organizations, including nonpartisan voter engagement groups and political parties;
- Mandate the same training standards for election workers and election challengers.

The Board urges the Michigan House, Senate and Governor Whitmer to take immediate and long-term action to support the goal of preserving democracy, ensuring access to voting, and continuing to promote the integrity, security, and fairness of all elections throughout the State of Michigan; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that the \_\_\_\_\_ Township Board strongly opposes all legislation or other efforts that would restrict access to the ballot, undermine the nonpartisan, fair and efficient administration of elections; and restrict voting rights; and be it further

**RESOLVED**, that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Office of the Secretary of State, the Governor's Offices in Lansing and Northern Michigan, and the members of the Upper Peninsula delegation to the Michigan State Legislature.

\_\_\_\_\_, **Supervisor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Township Board**

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