



## **League of Women Voters of Monmouth County**

### ***A League of Women Voters for the 21st Century***

The three local Leagues in Monmouth County, NJ (*LWV Greater Red Bank Area, LWV Southern Monmouth County; LWV Western Monmouth*) have worked collaboratively through the Monmouth County Inter League Organization or ILO<sup>1</sup> for several years. In the fall of 2021, the Monmouth County ILO established a committee to study the benefits of a formal merger of the three Leagues.

That group, the Merger Exploration Team,<sup>2</sup> recommended consolidating into one entity, tentatively to be called the League of Women Voters of Monmouth County, based on input from the boards and members of the three Leagues. The merger would also eliminate the Inter League Organization or ILO.

Members of the three Leagues met by individual League in February 2022 to reach consensus on the question of merging. The following statement represents the consensus reached by the three Leagues:

*The LWVGRBA, LWVSMC and LWVWM support the merger of the four Monmouth County League entities into a single League equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century tools to achieve our mission to Empower Voters and Defend Democracy. The new League will be structured to preserve the social relationship building, grassroots approach, and local action and advocacy that have been essential to the success of our local Leagues and to revitalize the focus on county government and county advocacy that has been pursued by our ILO.*

With this document, the Monmouth County Leagues are seeking approval of the merger plan from the board of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey. If that approval is given, an application for approval of the merger will then be filed with the League of Women Voters of the United States. (*Please see page 7 for a detailed timeline and description of the process.*)

### ***Background***

Over the past few years, events both national and local have awakened a keen interest in the central mission of the League of Women Voters: Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> The ILO is another level of League made up of the membership of the three local Monmouth County Leagues. It has its own board, budget, program, and bylaws. Historically, it has monitored county government, taken action on county-level issues, and provided a structure to coordinate and leverage local League efforts.

<sup>2</sup> The Merger Exploration Team includes Barbara Chaudhery and Anne Torre, LWVGRBA; Evelyn Murphy, Peggy Dellinger and Susan Sferas, LWVSMC; Sharon Steinhorn and Janis Iwanyk, LWVWM.

Never in recent history has our brand been stronger or more relevant, as evidenced by the dramatic growth and heightened activity of the three local Monmouth County Leagues. Over half of our members have joined since 2016, attracted by our reputation for nonpartisan, effective civic action and the potential for making a difference in the critical area of voting rights.

To strengthen our ability to deliver on these expectations, the three local Leagues have built on the collaborative foundation of the Monmouth County ILO to expand our reach and impact. We've pooled resources to educate and register voters and get out the vote throughout the county. We've expanded our footprint to hold more candidate forums in more communities. We've migrated to a virtual platform to deliver programs and forums, sharing the expense and technical expertise across the three Leagues. We've collaborated to broaden our audience and present "Hot Topics," public discussions on issues critical to our democracy. Two successful initiatives (Energizing Young Voters and Reenter-Register-Vote) have grown from their local League beginnings to include members from across the county and across the state.

The numbers tell the story. In the 2021 General Election, the three Monmouth County Leagues collaborated to hold a dozen virtual candidate forums seen by over 2,000 voters. League volunteers reached out to candidates in 94 competitive races across the county (including races not covered in the current League footprints) to populate the League's online voter guide, VOTE411. A cross-county League team developed and delivered nine voter education sessions on 2021 election changes. We worked closely and developed strong working relationships with the County Board of Elections and County Clerk to support the rollout of early voting and new voting machines.

### ***Why merge?***

The Monmouth County Leagues see merger as the strategic next step to build on and expand this successful collaboration. Consolidating the three local Leagues and eliminating the ILO has multiple benefits. It codifies and improves the *effectiveness* of what we do, as well as the *efficiency* with which we do it.

### **Effectiveness**

#### *Expanded coverage*

Currently, Monmouth County is served by four League entities: three local Leagues and an ILO. We have members in 80 percent of Monmouth County towns, plus several members in Ocean County. Our reach is large, which is good, but sometimes messy. The distinctions among the municipalities served by the local Leagues are often unclear. In several cases, a single town has members belonging to different Leagues. Mapping local Leagues to municipalities is problematic and can exclude communities that fall outside the current footprint of any local League. Consolidation eliminates the confusion and expands our coverage to the whole county. (See page 8 for a chart of Monmouth County League members by municipality.)

### *Strengthened brand*

Consolidation simplifies and strengthens the League “brand” to the public, as the levels and purviews of League entities can seem complex even to members. It allows us to speak with a unified, clearly identifiable voice to government officials, the media, and the public. It potentially extends League services and support to all communities in the county, while inviting us to create innovative structures to ensure local relevance and action. And a re-named, more inclusive Monmouth County League can better attract and engage a growing membership in generating voting and citizen engagement, both locally and nationally.

### *Professional quality digital/media presence*

A unified Monmouth County League “voice” would speak for more than 200 members. It would speak through a single, more professional website (made affordable by consolidation) and social media (monitored and updated regularly). Relationships with traditional media would be simplified and the need to manage the overlap of media audiences with multiple local Leagues would be eliminated.

### *Innovative approach to local action*

Other Leagues have led the way in ensuring the continued ability to monitor local government and take action. One League has instituted a “Town Team” structure. This innovative approach would allow members from a given municipality to organize within the Monmouth County League as a team to study local government, activate a local Observer Corps, formulate positions, advocate, run local voter registration and education events, and more.

## **Efficiency**

### *Reduce bureaucracy*

Currently, each of the three local Leagues and, in most cases, the ILO must draft, pass, and manage a board and officer slate, budget, bylaws, and nonpartisan policy. Each must maintain separate bank accounts, submit per-member-payments to state and national League, file papers with the state and IRS to maintain legal status, and more. These responsibilities drain time without contributing directly to our mission-critical work. Consolidation would cut the time and energy spent on these and other bureaucratic requirements by 75 percent.

### *Eliminate redundancy*

At present, the Monmouth County League leadership is engaged in duplicative efforts to maintain our current structure. All work—recordkeeping and reporting, legal requirements, website and social media presence, member recruitment and engagement; member communications, community outreach—is done four times, if it is done at all. And, as the level of collaboration and teamwork increases across the three local Leagues, so does redundancy of administration. Many of the items on the local and ILO board agendas are covering the same plans and goals, with little gained by the duplication.

Merging the four organizations will streamline administrative functions and allow the leadership to redirect energy toward mission work.

#### *Develop new leaders*

Developing the next generation of leadership is a critical area for League focus. Merger will expand our talent and leadership pool, allowing us to identify the best people who are able and willing to take on important roles within the organization.

Even in light of our increased membership, it is a challenge to fill board and leadership positions on four different boards. Members need support and mentoring to take on new roles and carry out the League mission. Merger would reduce the number of officers and directors required to operate and allow us to focus on defining and supporting less-daunting roles as team leaders, where members can take on and be trained in manageable jobs matching their interests and talents. We can tap opportunities to enroll members in state-level policy committees, Lobby Corps, a revitalized Observer Corps at both the county and local levels, and more.

#### *Use money and talent wisely*

Certain initiatives are costly in terms of volunteer commitment and leadership—and sometimes in actual expense—to undertake as four separate entities. These include:

- Taking advantage of technology (the Club Express platform, for instance) to better manage volunteers and communicate with members.
- Strengthening our digital presence on the web and in social media to educate and connect with the public.
- Engaging our members in state initiatives, including policy committees, Lobby Corps, and activist training.
- Using tools developed at the state and national League levels, such as Outreach Circle and Slack.
- Reworking our dues structure to attract and retain members.
- Protecting our volunteers and leadership against liability.

#### ***What additional factors will contribute to a successful merger?***

##### *21<sup>st</sup> Century technology*

Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms have changed the landscape for League work and for a potential merger of the Monmouth County Leagues. Virtual meetings have removed a significant impediment to merging, specifically, member inability or reluctance to travel to meetings. Virtual meetings have expanded our public reach, creating much larger audiences for candidate forums and educational programs and making programs accessible regardless of geographic distance, mobility issues or caregiving responsibilities. The virtual platforms have made it easy to record meetings and events, dramatically expanding access and viewership.

### *Our track record*

We have experience working as a unified organization; in many ways, we have been operating as a single unit for several years. As our collaboration has increased, so have our effectiveness and our membership. We have gotten to know and respect one other. We've found ways to share our talents and to execute plans in ways that prompted one candidate in a virtual forum to comment, "This is not your grandmother's League of Women Voters!"

### ***What are concerns about merging?***

The main concerns raised by League members are loss of local focus, loss of county focus, and loss of membership. We acknowledge the critical importance of these three areas.

**Loss of local focus:** One of the great strengths of the League of Women Voters is our grassroots presence and the focus on the importance of local government in people's lives. At present, the Monmouth County Leagues offer our members opportunities to get involved in their local town through VOTE411 and candidate forums. As we have looked at merging, we have identified local member clusters, some spanning more than one local League. These are ripe for developing into Town Teams to take a closer look at local government and issues, and we have members who are interested in becoming official League Observers in their towns. A unified volunteer management approach will facilitate the training and mentoring required for an active Observer Corps that conforms with League guidelines.

**Loss of county focus:** Several members see the county ILO as separate from local Leagues in focus and mission. In this view, local election-related work is the purview of local Leagues, freeing the ILO to focus on county government and regional issues. In the Monmouth County Leagues, county-level work has diminished in recent years, with the exception of county election efforts. We believe we can use a unified county League to amplify our county presence with our members, by encouraging them to get involved as observers of and participants in county boards, elected and appointed. We will also simplify and strengthen our relations with county entities by speaking with one League voice on behalf of over 200 members.

**Loss of membership:** In some past instances, membership losses have followed League mergers or dissolutions. We would note that, historically, many changes in local League structure came about when a local League was failing. The four Monmouth County League entities are all thriving, with the potential for improved member recruitment and retention with a streamlined, unified structure. Evidence suggests that members who have joined in the last five years have been attracted to the League brand; a number joined through LWV NJ or LWV US and were directed after the fact to the appropriate local League. For at least two decades, municipal or county advocacy on local issues has not been a driver of increased membership. Nonetheless, with innovative approaches to local action,

we can safeguard that local action will continue and can be an attraction to potential new members.

***How will a merger affect DEI policies and efforts?***

Another concern that often arises when Leagues propose to merge is the effect on member recruitment in communities we struggle to reach and serve. This is a concern we share and will not ignore. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are essential to the League mission and will continue to be a focus of membership engagement and leadership development within the unified League.

Monmouth County, largely suburban and partly rural, is majority White in the aggregate, but the county includes demographic pockets with larger communities of color. There are several towns (Asbury Park, Long Branch, Freehold Borough and Red Bank) that function like cities, with active business districts and denser housing, despite small populations. Long Branch is the largest of these, with a population of 30,000; the other three municipalities have 15,000 or fewer residents. These municipalities and a few others (Neptune, for example) contain sizeable communities of color, primarily Black and Hispanic. There are other areas of diversity in the county, including a significant LBGTQ population in Asbury Park.

None of these communities has or is pursuing a path to develop its own city-based League. None is likely to feel disenfranchised by the consolidation. In fact, as a unified organization, the consolidated League will be in a position of greater strength to reach out to and serve these communities. The more inclusive name (LWV of Monmouth County) is more welcoming to residents in these and other towns. The larger talent pool offers more opportunities to network with organizations and groups we have historically struggled to reach.

*Merger process and timeline continues on next page.*

***How has the merger proceeded to date and what are the next steps?***

November 2021	The Monmouth County ILO board voted to explore a potential merger and formed a Merger Exploration Team (MET) with representatives from the three Leagues.
November-January 2021-22	The MET shared information and sought input from the three League boards and members.
January 2022	Representatives from the MET met with LWVNJ representatives ( <i>Jesse Burns, Jennifer Howard, Debbie McComber and Iveth Mosquera</i> ) for guidance.
February 2022	Members of the three Leagues met ( <i>LWVWM, 2/9; LWVSMC, 2/10; LWVGRBA, 2/15</i> ) and each reached consensus to proceed with the merger, based on the recommendation of the MET.
March 2022	An application to the LWVNJ Board for merger approval is hereby filed ( <i>3/19 deadline for the 4/2 board meeting</i> ).
March-April 2022	The MET has scheduled a brainstorming session for March 15, open to the members of the three local Leagues, to explore ideas for the design of a new merged organization that will meet the objectives outlined in the consensus statement.
April 2022	Approval of the merger by the LWVNJ Board will be sought at the April 2 meeting. If that approval is received, an application will be submitted to the LWVUS Board for approval at their next board meeting. ( <i>Dates and timeline may change.</i> )
May 2022	With approval from LWVNJ and pending approval from LWVUS, an expanded Merger Steering Team will draft a proposed board and officer slate, budget, program, and bylaws for the new LWV of Monmouth County.
June 2022	Once LWVUS approval has been received, members of the three Leagues will convene separately to formally accept the merger. The members of the new merged League will then convene as one body to approve the proposed board, officers, budget, program and bylaws.
July 2022	A Certificate of Merger will be filed with the State of New Jersey to dissolve the merging local Leagues and ILO, and applications will be submitted to the IRS and the State of New Jersey to formally adopt a new name for the resulting consolidated League.

*Timeline subject to revision.*

**APPENDIX: Monmouth County LWV Membership by Municipality**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>LWVSMC</b>	<b>LWVGRBA</b>	<b>LWVWM</b>	<b>Total</b>
Asbury Park	8			8
Atlantic Highlands		5		5
Avon by the Sea	1			1
Belford		1		1
Belmar	5			5
Bradley Beach	4			4
Brick ( <i>Ocean County</i> )	2			2
Brielle	3			3
Colts Neck		1	3	4
Deal	1			1
Eatontown	3	3		6
Fair Haven		6		6
Freehold		1	6	7
Hazlet			2	2
Highlands		1		1
Holmdel		2	5	7
Howell	2		2	4
Interlaken	3			2
Keyport		1		1
Leonardo		2		2
Lincroft		2		2
Little Silver		4		4
Locust		1		1
Long Branch	6	1		7
Manalapan			4	4
Manasquan	4			4
Manchester ( <i>Ocean County</i> )	1			1
Marlboro			8	8
Matawan		1	3	4
Middletown	1	12		13
Monmouth Beach	2	1		3
Morganville			1	1
Neptune ( <i>including Ocean Grove</i> )	17			17
Ocean ( <i>including Oakhurst</i> )	27	1		28
Point Pleasant ( <i>Ocean County</i> )	1			
Red Bank		7		7
Roseland ( <i>Essex County</i> )		1		1
Rumson		2		2
Sea Girt	1			1
Shrewsbury		11	1	12
Spring Lake	3			3
Tinton Falls	3	5		8
Toms River ( <i>Ocean County</i> )	1			1
Union Beach		1		1
Wall	2			2
West Allenhurst	1			1
West Long Branch	2			2
Out of State	2			2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>214</b>