



## A LETTER FROM ANNA

Executive Director,  
League of Women  
Voters of Maine

The events of the last few months have reignited a global conversation about systemic racism and economic disparity in many areas of our society - including in our democracy.

We like to brag that Maine leads the nation in voter turnout, but that story changes once you look below the surface. In the richest and whitest Maine communities, 2016 voter turnout reached up to 86%. In the poorest and most racially-diverse districts, it barely reached 50%.

The pandemic has changed how we hold elections, and created particular challenges for already, marginalized communities. According to CDC figures, black Mainers are twenty-five times more likely to get COVID than white Mainers - the worst racial disparity in the country. Nationally, voter suppression in communities of color is on the rise during this crisis, and we must not let that be the case in Maine. No one should have to choose between their health and their right to vote. We are encouraging everyone who can to vote by mail, while ensuring polling places stay open for voters who need to go in person. We're partnering with community leaders to get essential election information to the voters most at risk of being left out.

It's not enough, though, for people to have the ability to participate - they have to believe that their vote matters to the people in charge. Our current system is not only broken - it wasn't designed to give meaningful power to all Americans in the first place. We must change the power structures which have privileged the white and wealthy at the expense of everyone else. That's why we advocate for reforms like National Popular Vote and a ban on corporate contributions to candidates. And that's why we are supporting the Maine Permanent Commission on Racial and Ethnic Populations' call for a Truth and Reconciliation process "to find a way forward that no longer perpetuates the racism and discrimination that is inherent in our systems."

We take on this work knowing that our organization, like America, has racist roots. In our 100 year history, the League too often prioritized the issues of white women, and said that black and indigenous Americans should wait their turn. Whatever mistakes we may make moving forward, let them come from our imperfect work toward justice - not from repeating our own past. We must stand with the Mainers who are claiming long-overdue justice and power.

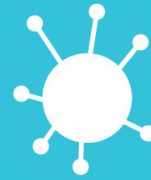
Black lives matter. Black votes matter.

Anna Kellar

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## COVID AND ELECTIONS

By Ann Luther

We're in the middle of a global pandemic, and we face uncertain times ahead. But one thing we know for sure: elections are essential. Through war and natural disaster, pandemic and dislocation, America has always practiced democracy.

The League of Women Voters has an important and historic role to play, ensuring that the 2020 elections are administered in a way that protects access to voting for every eligible American.

Our LWVME Executive Director, Anna Kellar, took the lead in Maine and convened a coalition of 11 nonprofit organizations to coordinate our advocacy on the 2020 elections, seeking measures that would support both high voter participation and low rates of COVID transmission.

Maine already has same-day registration and no-excuse absentee voting. And Maine voters can already use an absentee ballot to vote in the presence of the clerk in the weeks leading up to the election.

For the July and November elections, we wanted to make sure that voters will have an option to vote in-person, even as we encourage people to vote absentee. For some people with disabilities or without a fixed address, and for those needing to use same-day registration, in-person voting is essential. We are pleased that both the Governor and the Secretary of State are committed to preserving in-person voting.

We did hope for some changes that have been granted by the Governor and the Secretary of State.

- For the July election, the 3-day closed period for obtaining a no-excuse absentee ballot was lifted.
- The 3-week deadline for submitting a voter registration application by mail was reduced to 1 week.

- Towns have been provided with guidance and financial support for procuring ballot-specific, secure drop boxes, as well as protective equipment and supplies to protect voters and election officials from COVID.
- Towns will be provided with guidance about curing errors on absentee ballots due to missing signatures or signature mismatches.

There are still some things we hope to see adjusted that won't be in place for July but that can be accomplished for November.

- Providing flexibility for electronic submission of voter registration applications by email or other means.
- Mailing absentee ballot requests to all registered voters.
- Providing paid postage for the absentee ballot applications and the absentee ballots.

In this high-stakes election year, it's not enough for Maine to be a leader if other states are still failing their elections and their voters. The national outcome in Congress and the Presidency affects us all. It is vitally important that all states put measures in place that allow for high confidence in the outcome and that provide simultaneously for high voter participation and low risk of COVID transmission.

State and federal leaders across the country must urgently invest in elections so that all Americans have equal access to the ballot box and no American has to choose between their safety and their vote.

As we wait for the U.S. Senate to take up debate on the next coronavirus response package, we ask Senator Collins to join Senator King and pressure the Senate to adopt the election protection reforms and funding included in the House-passed HEROES Act to uphold our nation's elections and democracy.

## COLOR OF INJUSTICES

By Lado Lodoka

What do I, a Sudanese immigrant, make of senseless state sanctioned killing of Black people in this country? The difference between the United States and where I came from is that here, innocent people are killed in daylight while the world is watching, and yet the facts are viewed through a racial prism. People here frame narratives regardless of facts to make themselves feel comfortable. That norm has polarized/racialized issues of moral importance and delayed substantial policy change compounding the pain of racial minorities. As this debate rages, I would like to share how slavery affected my family/community.

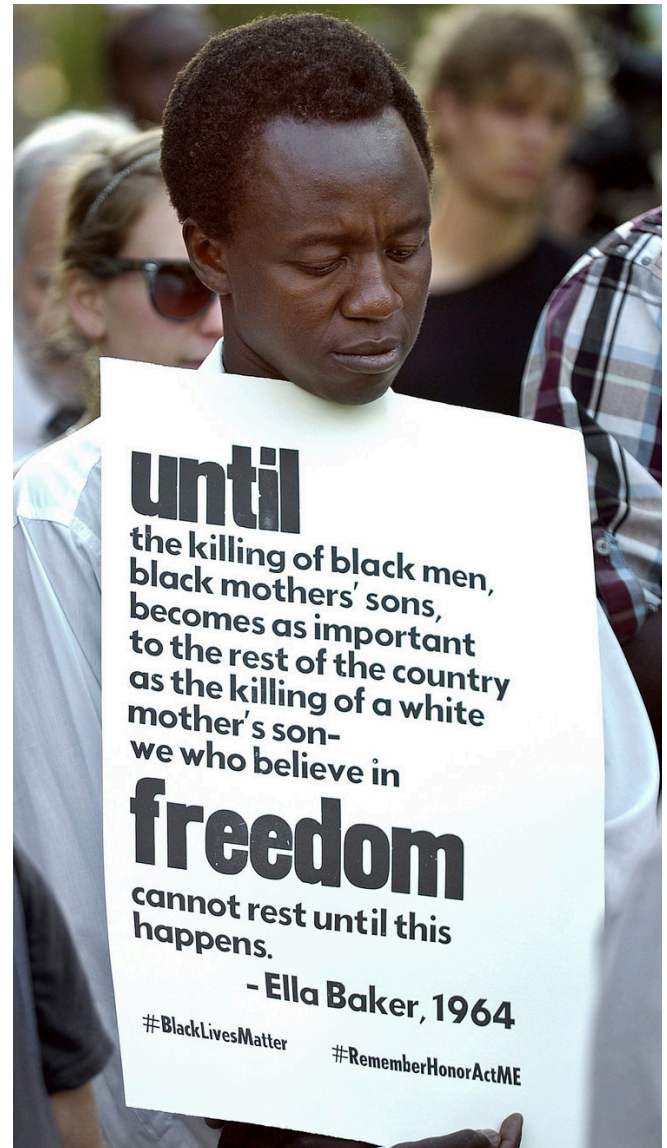
Growing up in Yei, South Sudan, as a child I learned about neighboring Congolese people called Kuleya Batu ("Eating People.") Children learned they roamed at night, and if they captured you, they ate you. Many Congolese lived in Yei. So, we avoided going out at night. In 2011, when I visited South Sudan, my cousin Major Gen. Samosona Logeleng Lomeri Nyama, told me a story from a business trip to Congo.

One day, Gen. Nyama's bike got a flat. He asked a villager, who had taken a keen interest in Sudan, for help in repairing his bike. Gen. Nyama introduced himself as from the Pojulu ethnic group, Muresuk clan in Bereka.

The Congolese villager expressed surprise, as he too was from Muresuk. As my cousin related his story, we had a realization: the story about Kuleya Batu snatching people at night came from the slave trade. We had family members who disappeared from the Bereka village, and were taken across the Congolese border, never to return.

Sudanese were captured and not heard from again. The logical explanation to the villagers was that they were assumed to be eaten. These stories were passed down over generations. It is believed some of the kidnapped Muresuk rebelled and killed their captors, then settled in Congo. To keep the memories of their ancestors alive, they maintain the names of their kinship back in South Sudan.

This Sudanese immigrant chose the United States, but I am not sure if the United States is interested in embracing me?



Lado Lodoka at a rally for Trayvon Martin in Monument Square back in 2013. At the time, Black Lives Matter started to gain momentum as a national movement for police reform.

Photo/Gabe Souza

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

By Alison Smith

When it comes to effective advocacy, Democracy Maine's secret weapon is...you!

Nothing is more important than citizens raising their voices when and where they are needed. As we work to protect and improve our election and campaign finance laws, the presence of our staff and experts in the State House is important, but not sufficient. It takes concerted effort by Mainers when it comes to keeping our democracy strong.

In the coming legislative session, our top two reform priorities are a corporate contribution ban and the National Popular Vote.

How can you help today? Engage the candidates who seek to represent you in the Maine House and Senate, and see where they stand.

### Corporate Contribution Ban

Many states bar candidates from accepting campaign contributions from corporations, and often unions, too. Federal candidates have a similar ban. In Maine, these contributions are legal, but we believe the outsize influence of incorporated entities in Maine's political system argues for the adoption of this common-sense reform.

### National Popular Vote

The Electoral College is an archaic limitation of direct democracy. The League of Women Voters has argued for its abolishment for fifty years. Today, reformers and all those who believe in the foundational idea of "one person, one vote," support a work-around: The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact.

Member states agree to cast all of their electoral votes for the winner of the national popular vote, whether or not that vote reflects the vote in their state. The compact goes into effect when the total number of electoral votes in member states totals 270. That way, American voters can be certain that their vote counts in the presidential election. In true-blue Massachusetts or deep-red Wyoming, your vote counts for your chosen candidate. That's fair, it's right, and it's appropriate for the single race in which every American voter can participate.

Today, member states total 196 electoral votes, so there are 74 to go.

Democracy Maine has many resources available to help you learn more. Check out our fact sheets, webinars and other materials, and don't hesitate to get in touch if you need more information.



Check out our new advocacy volunteer group on Facebook! You can find it by going to the League of Women Voters of Maine Facebook page and click on "Groups" in the menu on the lefthand side.



## YES ON QUESTION 1

By Nadine Bangerter and Penelope Hamblin

Election Day, July 14th, 2020 is more than a primary. On the ballot for all voters, regardless of party affiliation, is referendum Question 1: **“Do you favor a \$15,000,000 bond issue to invest in high-speed internet infrastructure for unserved and underserved areas, to be used to match up to \$30,000,000 in federal, private, local or other funds?”** It is a question that speaks to equality and opportunity in Maine.

According to the ConnectMaine Authority and The Maine Broadband Coalition, 180,000 Mainers have no or low-speed access to the internet. Nationally, Maine is ranked 43rd for access to affordable high-speed internet service. This reality existed even before the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the disparities for households without broadband access. In addition, civic engagement relies more and more on E-democracy; that is, the use of internet technology in political and government processes. Voter services have been moving online, giving citizens more resources

and choices. Communities where broadband is unavailable or unreliable — in many rural areas or where service gaps exist in urban centers — are unable to fully participate in our democracy.

In light of these inequities, the Board of the League of Women Voters of Maine on May 16 voted to endorse the following position on internet access and support the “Yes on 1” campaign:

Efficient, high speed access to the Internet for all Maine residents regardless of geographic location or demographics is a necessity for assuring equal access to local and state government, for maintaining openness and transparency in government activities; for communicating with legislative leaders; for engaging in political discourse; for competing in the global marketplace; for providing full and equal access to education, commerce, and civic life; and for assuring that voters receive the information they need to participate in our democracy.

## JULY PRIMARY FAQ

By Will Hayward

### Is there still time to vote absentee?

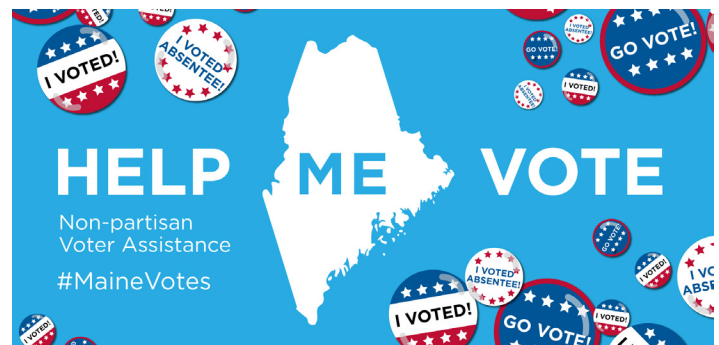
Yes, but be mindful of how much time it will take for your ballot to be received. While phone and online requests are allowed until July 9th, all absentee ballots must be received by the town clerk (not postmarked) by 8 PM on Election Day. If you are mailing your ballot allow plenty of time for it to be received by your town office. You can also bring your ballot to your town office during business hours and return it in person, and some towns have secure drop boxes that allow voters to return their ballots without face-to-face contact.

### How else can I vote if it's too late for me to receive and send a mailed ballot?

You can also vote early in person at your town office during business hours, or vote in person on Election Day at a polling place. Some towns have changed the locations or number of polling places so confirm where your polling place will be before you go vote.

### Is voting in person safe?

There are numerous safety measures being taken to ensure that voting in person is as safe as possible. These include social distancing procedures, personal protective equipment for election workers, sanitizing voting booths and materials, and other measures. To keep yourself and other voters safe, we strongly encourage you to wear a facemask if you vote in person. Lines on Election Day may be longer than normal due to staffing shortages and safety procedures, so allow for plenty of time to vote, or, even better, vote absentee!



Have more questions? Email [info@lwvme.org](mailto:info@lwvme.org) or check out the **Help ME Vote** facebook group

## FLASHBACK!

Before COVID, the last time we could be together was probably on February 13th during our Advocacy Day in Augusta. It feels like a lifetime ago! Here are some pictures from that day:



## TURNING TEENS INTO VOTERS

By Evan Tess Murray

If your first election feels important, even vital, you're much more likely to become a lifelong voter. For years, we've sent League volunteers into schools around the state to register students to vote. This year, COVID has meant we couldn't get into schools. The League's new High School Engagement Project grew out of our desire to engage more deeply with students, and the need for different strategies when face-to-face interactions are limited. This team, under the volunteer leadership of Kari Suva, has already been working to encourage student voters in July, as well as making plans for the fall.

Volunteers with the High School Engagement Project have been contacting high schools around the state to ask them to print envelopes for students who will be eligible to vote in July. Our volunteers are working with town and city clerks to have them accept the printed envelope as proof of address, and sending each student voter registration materials and an absentee ballot request. For this July's primary, this project was able to get voter registration kits to Portland and Freeport high

school students, in addition to 700 students at Southern Maine Community College.

For students who want to do more, the team is also piloting a youth-focused Friend to Friend workshop, which teaches students to use their personal networks strategically as empowered civic engagement leaders. Cohorts of student volunteers will take on the responsibility of connecting with friends and family about the importance of voting in July. The first cohort is made up of 12 students from several different towns around the state.

Moving forward, the team will be working with the League's local chapters to get every eligible high school student in Maine registered to vote. In addition, they'll be reinforcing the importance of voter engagement by working with youth groups across the state, high school teachers and officials, and directly with student leaders. They'll build a network of engaged student leaders, and support them in promoting civic engagement among their peers. The team can be reached at [hsep@lwvme.org](mailto:hsep@lwvme.org) and would welcome new members.



## VOTER ENGAGEMENT

By Anna Kellar

What does voter engagement mean during COVID?

- Fifty phone and text outreach volunteers are calling voters to help them navigate election changes and request their absentee ballots.
- Through social media, we will reach 100,000 Mainers with absentee ballot requests, voter registration and our digital voter guide, Vote411. For November, our absentee ballot webpage will include Spanish, Arabic, Somali and French translations.
- We've shared absentee voting messages on Maine Public, and with the AARP of Maine, we have placed the official absentee ballot request form and information in weekly newspapers statewide, and expect to reach 100,000 readers.
- With state and national partners, we hosted virtual town halls with Senator Angus King and Secretary of State Matt Dunlap, and more than 10 webinars covering different election-related topics.

Have an idea for us? Join our Voter Engagement team!



### MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: CHRIS

When Chris first worked to register voters in 2004, he knew he wanted to get more involved. He learned Maine's unique history and how the state has paved the way for voter enfranchisement. He's proud of his state for making democracy accessible to people with same-day registration and prisoner voting. Eventually, Chris became a board member for both Maine Citizens for Clean Elections and the League of Women Voters of Maine.

His mission is to help make democracy function well, especially for everyday citizens. Some states have different voting policies that are regressive and make it difficult to vote, if not impossible, for certain groups of people. Chris wants to educate Mainers that we are a leader in the nation with Clean Elections and Ranked Choice Voting.

Voters from higher socio-economic backgrounds are typically well represented. Chris wants to build equity and better voter representation from all communities. By going directly to marginalized groups, we are working to level the playing field and take away power from Big Money in politics.



Read Meg's story at  
[100years.lwvme.org/Meg](https://100years.lwvme.org/Meg)



Read Micky's story at  
[100years.lwvme.org/Micky](https://100years.lwvme.org/Micky)



Read Anne's story at  
[100years.lwvme.org/Anne](https://100years.lwvme.org/Anne)

**Learn more about our centennial at: [100years.lwvme.org](https://100years.lwvme.org)**

# ELECTIONS 2020



## ELECTION DAY — TUESDAY, JULY 14

As we grapple and survive through the coronavirus pandemic, we are inspired by the way many Mainers have pulled together to protect workers, voters, and the most vulnerable members of our communities.

And even during a pandemic, our elections matter. YOU matter. **We hope that you have requested an Absentee Ballot or have a plan in place for voting in person.**

Here are some links to help prepare you for the upcoming election on Tuesday, July 14th:

### **Vote411.org**

Election and candidate information

### **lwvme.org/Absentee**

A guide to completing your absentee ballot

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