



POST-ELECTION ANNUAL REPORT

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS'
OF MAINE

In November 2023, Maine conducted a successful state election. Next, we must prepare for the challenges of 2024.

As a supporter of the League, you know that democracy isn't a spectator sport. 2024 could be the most important election in our nation's history. With our democracy hanging in the balance, and disinformation and "deep fakes" on the rise, the League has an essential role to play as a trusted, nonpartisan resource for voters. And you do, too.

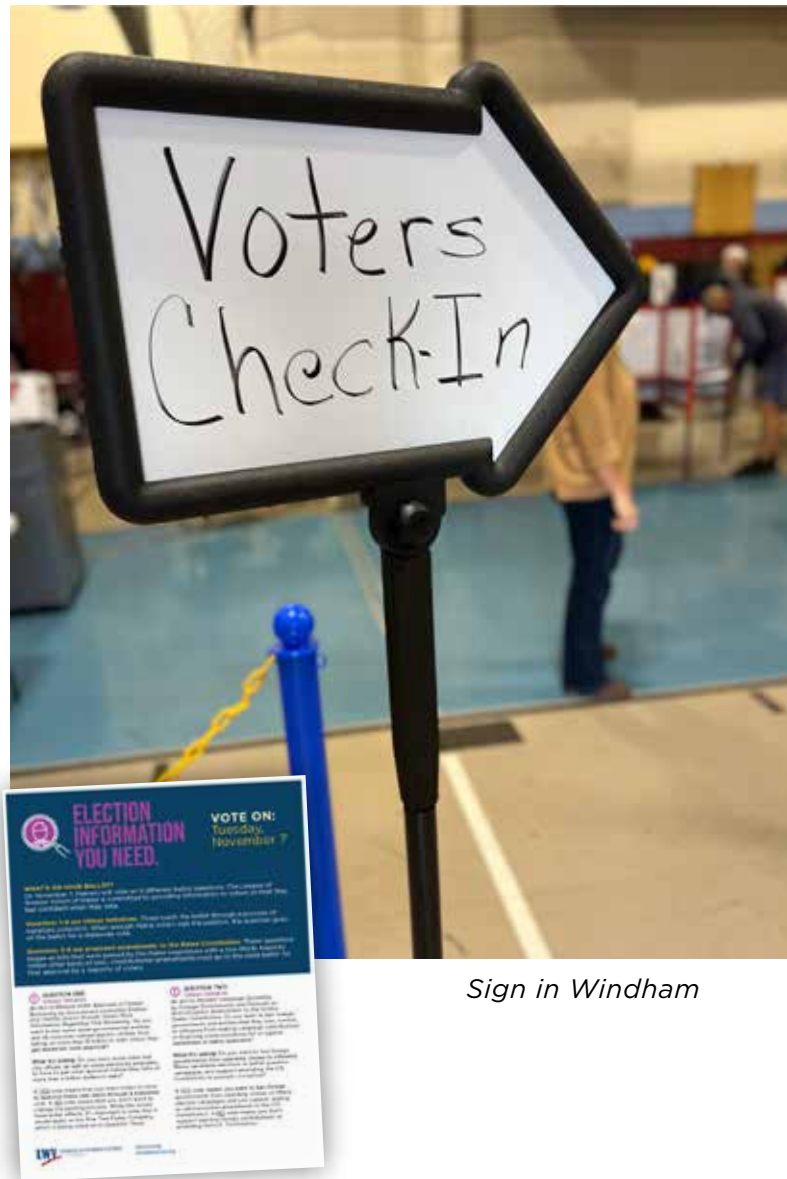
2024 will be a year of big changes for Maine voters: independents can vote in primaries for the first time, and online voter registration and ongoing absentee voting status will roll out. We'll also fight mis- and disinformation, in the context of a presidential election that will challenge all our democratic norms.

We've got big plans, but we need you. Preparing for elections and informing voters never stops, and we need your help to scale up our programs to reach more voters.

Here's a report of how we did in 2023.



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Sign in Windham

PRE-ELECTION WORK

Informing Voters Ahead of the Election



Neighbor to Neighbor participants

Neighbor to Neighbor

Our Neighbor to Neighbor canvass is designed to connect with people in low-income housing, including people who are new to the U.S., around voting and civic engagement. Over the fall, League staff and volunteers worked in partnership with Avesta Housing and the Immigrant Welcome Center to go door-to-door on Avesta properties in Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook.

We trained 13 new canvassers and brought 17 total, ranging in age from 8 to 78. Canvassers came from a variety of backgrounds — people from immigrant families, long-time League members, and our youth council.

We knocked on roughly **500 doors** in Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook, having around 200 conversations about voting at the door.

Most of the constituents were already registered or not eligible to register to vote. However, we registered nine new voters, helped request absentee ballots, shared general voting information, and gave out a ballot question explainer in multiple languages.

Extra copies of the translated Ballot Explainer were distributed to the Lewiston Mosque & Trinity Jubilee Center.

Our partners are excited to expand in 2024, reaching more Avesta properties and adding other housing providers to the planning team, while also branching into Lewiston and Bangor.



Informing Voters Ahead of the Election

Vote411.org

Vote411.org is our online voter database. Users learn how to register and vote, see what will be on their ballot, and read candidate questionnaires and nonpartisan descriptions of ballot initiatives. We cover federal, state and local elections for every town in Maine, making Vote411.org a unique resource.

Eight volunteers gathered information on races in 50 Maine town and cities, plus helped with messaging around the statewide ballot questions. Overall, we **covered 230 races** — that expands to 210 candidate races, with 413 total candidates. We contacted every single one of these candidates, and ended up with a 33% response rate.

These efforts boosted Vote411.org usage. About **17,000 voters** accessed the database in 2023, compared to ~12,500 in 2021, a similar low-salience election.

We're proud that more Mainers are finding, using, and sharing Vote411.org as a resource. With steady and regular promotion, we expect that Vote411.org could reach record numbers in 2024.



Registering student voters at University of Southern Maine

Tabling and Speaking Events

The League and Local League chapters held voter education tabling events in their local communities. We shared information about the ballot questions at the Common Ground Fair and smaller events, like the Ellsworth Farmers Market.

We were invited to speak at organizational communities, including Better Biddeford, Freeport Housing Trust, The Cedars, Patagonia, and University of Southern Maine.

Voter Hotline

The League's voter hotline provided real-time help to voters around the state from September through Election Day. Staff and volunteers handled **20 calls** that ran the gamut from straightforward factual questions to requests for help with specific voting obstacles or dilemmas. Most questions fell into these general categories:

- What's on the ballot
- Eligibility to vote
- Polling place hours & locations

Informing Voters Ahead of the Election



Local Election Candidate Forums

Candidate forums are a great way to meet the local candidates and hear what they have to say on the issues specific to their town. Issue forums provide in-depth information about the ballot questions so that voters can make informed decisions on Election Day.

Forums are an essential service to voters.

Local Leagues held candidate forums in South Portland, Bangor, and Augusta for city council and school board elections. These forums were all hybrid.

The Bangor League partnered with Husson University to host the forum on campus and had Bangor Daily News co-sponsor the event; other community groups were also involved in organizing these local candidate forums.

More than twenty-three Local League members and volunteers helped to organize the candidate and ballot question forums.

The recordings of these forums were uploaded to YouTube and Facebook, while some were provided through Vimeo and VOD. **These garnered 6,304 views.**

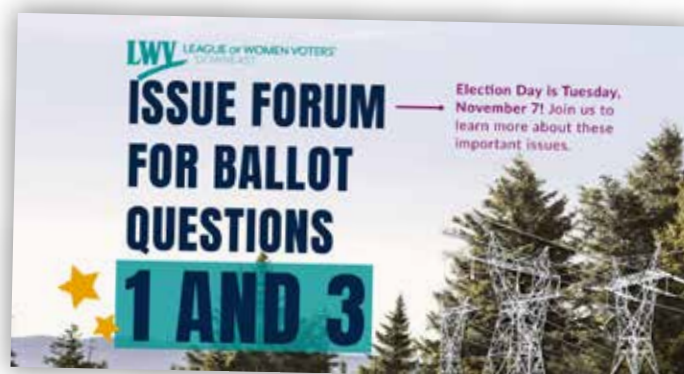
Statewide Ballot Issue Forums

The Bangor League, Downeast League, and Capital Area League all held forums on Question 3, the Pine Tree Power utility ballot question, while also addressing the related Question 1, the debt-approval ballot question. They included proponents and opponents, with the Public Advocate present at some of the forums to answer questions.

The Bangor League also hosted a forum on the other ballot questions. This forum, which was jointly sponsored by the Bangor Daily News, included a proponent and opponent of Question 4, the right to repair question, and speakers on the other questions.

The Downeast League held a hybrid event where Donna Loring, an elder and former council member of the Penobscot Indian Nation, spoke about the historical context behind Question 6, the invisible ink ballot question — a question that the League of Women Voters of Maine endorsed.

We adapted our short handout on the eight ballot questions into short videos, and uploaded to YouTube and Facebook. **These garnered 20,312 views.**



Informing Voters Ahead of the Election

Absentee Ballot Drop box Scavenger Hunt

Most of Maine’s municipalities have opted into the absentee ballot drop box system, but the type of those boxes can vary widely. Adding or improving a ballot drop box is an easy way for towns and cities to support absentee voters. In order to get a better sense of how different towns and cities are implementing their boxes, we ran a scavenger hunt to collect photos of ballot drop boxes across the state.

The 34 unique submissions, not counting duplicates, helped us get a better sense of how each municipality in Maine has implemented its absentee ballot drop box. **Most towns are in good shape.**

This scavenger hunt also helped us keep our interactive map of drop box locations up to date. The photos we received will now be visible when you pull up that entry on the map. We’ll keep updating the map as new towns add drop boxes.



Website Visits

We tracked data using Google Analytics across 32 election-related web pages on www.lwvme.org.

There were **41,859 views** on these pages, with 25,324 users and 120,532 events. Events in Google Analytics measure specific interactions on your website or app, such as page loads or link clicks



Candidates at the youth-led forum in Lewiston

MAINE STUDENTS VOTE

Maine Students Vote is a network of student and civic leaders that are focused on increasing democratic engagement on college campuses and high schools in Maine.

Maine Students Vote worked with two fellows from University of Southern Maine and Southern Maine Community College. Fellows work closely with their campuses and communities to engage young people in voting and elections.

Our **fellows registered 200 students** and participated in 15 tabling events during the fall, including “Walk to the Polls” on USM’s Gorham and Portland campuses.

We had **eight high school interns** in this fall’s cohort, on-boarding students from Morse, Deering, Scarborough, Waynflete, Yarmouth, and Hermon high schools. These students explored democracy issues and worked to support the elections in their communities.

A group of young people from Community Organizing Alliance, Maine Students Vote, LWVME, and Bates College organized and ran a **candidate forum** for Lewiston. This event was hugely successful with students writing the questions and moderating the event. Over 75 people attended in-person.

In October, 45 students from across Maine came together to network and build their civic leadership skills at the second annual **Youth Voting Summit**. It was a great day kicked off by keynote speakers Secretary of State Shenna Bellow and Representative Nathan Carlow (R-Buxton). Speakers shared their stories about public service and encouraged students to get involved. The workshops covered these topics:

- How to write testimony
- How to talk to your legislators
- Engaging youth in election work
- Relational organizing

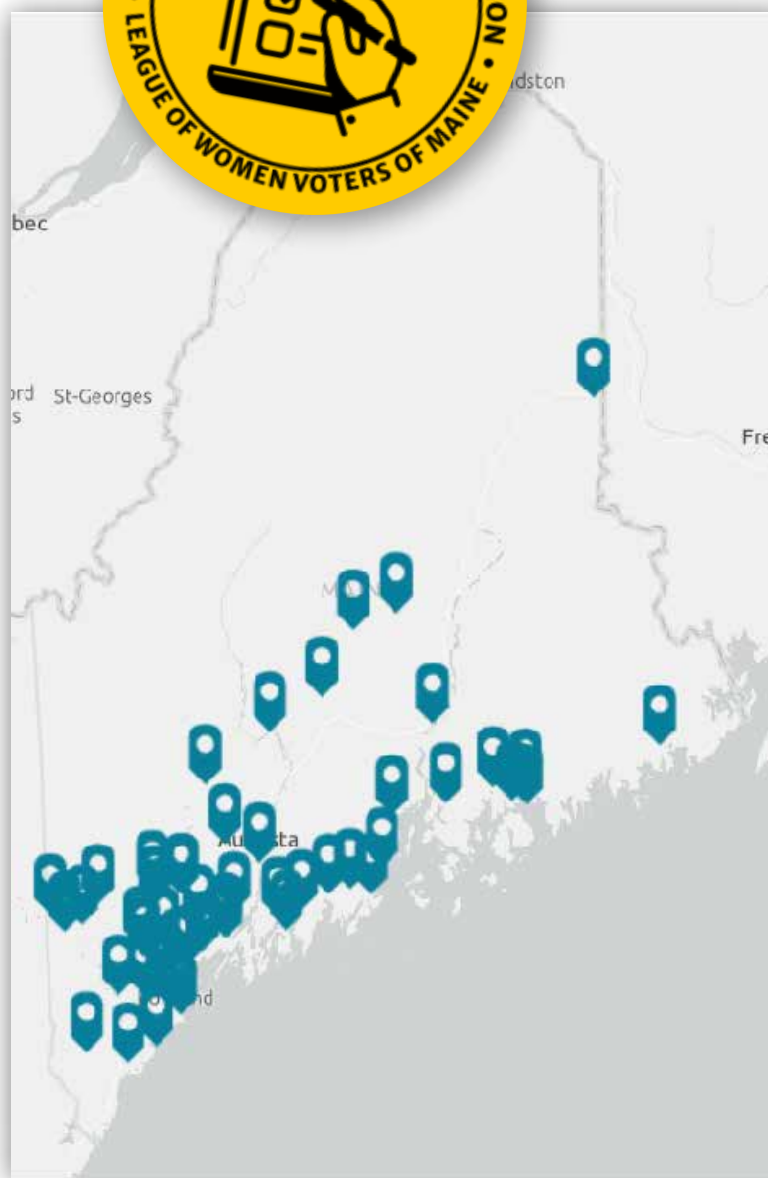
ELECTION DAY

Nonpartisan Election Observation

In order to help ensure a successful election, the League conducted several forms of election observation and voter assistance prior to and on Election Day. The cornerstone of our work was our nonpartisan Election Observation program: volunteers and staff deployed in all 16 Maine counties conducted a total of **79 detailed** polling place observations.

This was the third year of our observation program. We once again trained and placed over **60 volunteer observers** in polling places around the state. We also placed volunteers and staff in regional leader positions, each taking responsibility for a small team of observers. This made volunteer communication and support much easier and is key to scaling up our program in advance of 2024.

Ultimately, we had observers in 55 towns around the state, representing **over 45% of Maine's voters**. 59 observers filed 79 reports – several towns had more than one polling location or multiple observers at different times.



Map of towns we observed



Voters in Rockland.

Election Day

Voter Experience

The November 2023 election in Maine was smooth and successful. Observers reported steady turnout, comparable with other off-year elections like 2021. Concerns about voter confusion around the ballot questions largely did not materialize; while voters took more time to study and complete their ballots, this did not significantly disrupt the voting process. Voters and observers reported positive experiences when voting absentee by mail or drop box, voting in person prior to Election Day, and voting on Election Day.

Voters faced few obstacles or disruptions to voting at the polling place. Broadly speaking, the few issues reported were isolated in nature and did not lead to large numbers of voters unable to complete their ballots.

We were in contact with the Secretary of State's office and Disability Rights Maine when we saw issues that needed addressing. Very few lines were reported throughout the day; fewer than 10 polling places reported wait times over 10 minutes, with many of these waits happening right as polls opened. While turnout was steady throughout the day, lines rarely resulted.

Observers reported some voters leaving without voting; this typically occurred in municipalities with multiple polling places where a voter had gone to the wrong polling place. Observers were informed that it was fairly common in some towns. Same-day registration helped backstop many cases where a voter was not yet registered, and voters were able to cast challenged ballots when appropriate.

Election Day

Accessibility

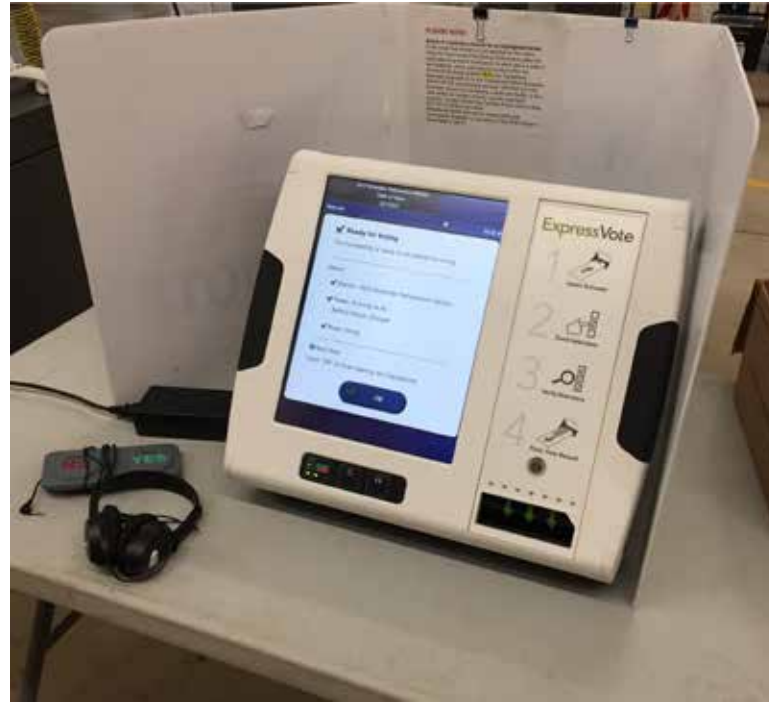
This year, in partnership with Disability Rights Maine, we expanded our knowledge of polling place accessibility. Disability Rights Maine staff offered training to our volunteers, and we contributed to their survey of polling places.

We noted several barriers or issues on Election Day. In particular, accessible voting systems (AVS) were not always set up to protect the privacy of the voter. We also looked for problems with accessible parking, ramps, and doors. The most common concern was a need for better signage and button-operated doors.

Our observers frequently witnessed election staff accommodating voters with disabilities. In one case, an observer reported to us that they were requested on the spot to serve as a witness for someone voting from their car — and were happy to help. While some polling places could improve in terms of accessibility, we didn't see anyone who was prevented from casting their ballot.

In terms of **language accessibility**, one of our observers noted a volunteer interpreter in one polling place, and while the observer didn't see a voter use this service during their shift, language access can be crucial in multilingual communities.

In a separate polling place, we observed several people interpreting for multiple family members. An election worker asked our observer if he happened to be an interpreter in case he could assist with translating. For people who had a family member assisting them, it took a long time to go through the entire ballot.



ExpressVote System setup in Camden

ExpressVote is for people who may have difficulty reading a ballot. It's a device with a video display screen and built-in ballot printer that can be used to help you read or hear your ballot and fill it out. The ballot can be seen in large print and can be read to you through headphones that are provided.

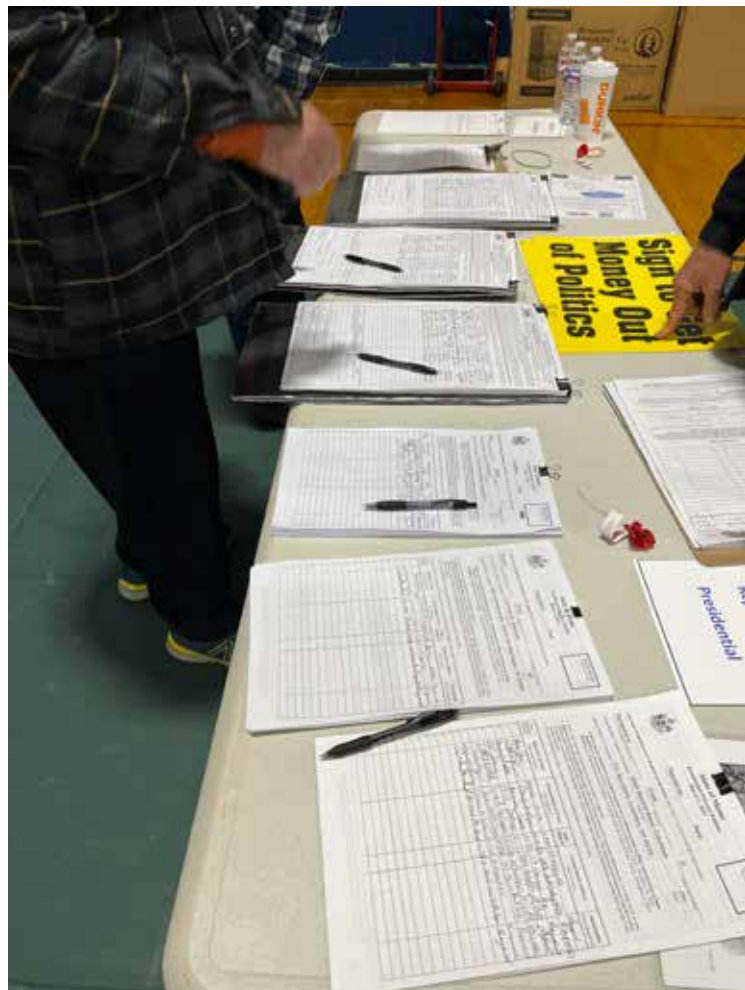
Election Day

Signature Gatherers

Most election observers noted the presence of signature gatherers at polling places: a statewide petition seeking to limit contributions to PACs, as well as petitions for both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. Additionally, petitioners collected signatures for banning flavored tobacco, local ballot questions, and nonpolitical community organizations.

Petitioners have to station their tables at the exit of a polling place. While some polling places were set up so that voters had to walk past the signature gatherers on their way in, our observers found that the signature gatherers themselves were careful not to talk to voters until they had cast their ballot and were exiting the building.

Many of the petitioners were simultaneously collecting signatures for both presidential candidates and the statewide ballot question, which is unusual in Maine. It suggests a high number of paid signature gatherers were deployed in this election.



Petitions in Raymond

Law Enforcement

About a third of the polling places we observed had uniformed law enforcement officers present, which isn't unusual based on previous years. Some towns have them occasionally check-in on the polling place, and others have officers present throughout the day.

However, this year was different in Lewiston. Although Lewiston always has

law enforcement present, in light of recent tragic events, officers actively worked to reassure voters and make sure that they felt safe. In practice, this meant officers greeted voters, opened doors for people, and put on a friendly face. Voters responded well.

Media Coverage

In the run-up to the election, media coverage focused on overall voter turnout, discussion around the eight statewide ballot questions, and voting concerns after the Lewiston mass shooting.

Portland Press Herald
POLITICS > Posted October 29 | Updated October 29

Lewiston mass shootings quiet Maine political campaigns just days before Election Day

Candidates and ballot question activists have fallen silent as the state grapples with the tragedy. With about a week left before Election Day, no one knows if or when politicking will resume.

BY STEPHEN SINGER STAFF WRITER



Being No. 1 in voter turnout is the best kind of participation trophy

BDN by The BDN Editorial Board
October 11, 2023



centralmaine.com

League launches nonpartisan voter guide

The League of Women Voters of Maine has launched its online voter database Vote411.org. The tool allows users to bring up personalized voter information, including everything that will appear on their local ballot.



Stateline

Incarcerated people partner with state officials to encourage voter turnout in Maine prisons

BY: EVAN POPP - SEPTEMBER 26, 2023 10:25 AM





Poll workers in Windham

CONCLUSION

Although it was a lower-turnout election than 2022, we saw steady turnout around the state and found election workers, voters, and clerks in good spirits. Most of our observers were well-received by the wardens, and often wardens and clerks told our observers their perceptions of how things were going. We saw very few lines after the polls opened, and the longest amount of time voters spent at the polling place was going over the lengthy ballot itself. Our observers were able to see many examples of voters asking for and receiving assistance. While only a few incidents were handled inadequately, most voters across Maine cast their ballots without incident.

Mainers should be proud of how smoothly and professionally the November 2023 election was run. Election administrators, poll workers, and voters worked hard, and

worked together, to make this election a success. In this time of heightened scrutiny and pressure on electoral systems, this election provides reassurance that Maine's election laws and administration are effective in ensuring voters are able to cast ballots and have their votes counted.

The bedrock of our democracy is voter confidence in free and fair elections. In Maine, there are many laws and protocols in place to ensure voters are free from intimidation, that our elections are secure, and that the results are accurate. The League runs several programs to ensure that Mainers can vote safely, votes are counted securely, and that the integrity of our elections is protected.



Preparing for elections and informing voters is a year-round process.

We're already gearing up for what's to come in 2024, and you can support our year-round efforts by becoming a monthly donor. No season is a quiet season here at the League. If we're going to break records and become the state with the highest voter turnout in 2024, it doesn't happen overnight.

Throughout the year we're engaged in a fight for voter rights. We advocate for election protections and voter accessibility in the Legislature, we register students and new citizens to vote, we canvass and connect with people in low-income housing, we publish Vote411.org and print

voter guides, and aim to share voter information in multiple mediums (think flyers, social media, and YouTube). We're using whatever tools are at our disposal, but your ongoing support is one of the most meaningful impacts on our work.

All these puzzle pieces come together so that we can help ensure Maine runs a successful election with high voter participation. Become a donor and support our work year-round.

Thank you!



Donate online:
[LWVME.ORG/DONATE](https://lwwme.org/donate)