

**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM
LOCAL PROGRAMS, SUPPORT POSITIONS**

2009 - 2010

Re-Adopted April 30, 2009

I. Government

A. Urban Government - Recognizing the interdependence of the city and the suburb, and the importance of area-wide services, and supporting a strong, vital city responsive and sensitive to the needs of its citizens, the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports:

1. The cooperation of city and county governments;
2. The assumption of a more active role by the suburban cities in the search for:
 - a. Area solutions to issues which transcend jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. water quality, land use);
 - b. Equitable solutions of the funding issues specifically related to persons without money (e.g. transit, housing, health);
 - c. Creative solutions to the problems of the metropolitan area which are related to the urban crises;
3. Provision by the state government to local governments of the tools they require to solve their own problems;
4. A broad representative base of citizen participation on independent boards and agencies and effective methods of communication between citizens and the independent boards and agencies.

B. Jefferson County Government - The LWVGB believes that the government of Jefferson County must fulfill certain minimum criteria, including equitable representation of the population of the county; separation of legislative and executive powers; administrative accountability to the total electorate; and efficient and cost-effective operation. To meet these criteria, the League supports;

1. Separation of the legislative and administrative functions of county government;
2. Consolidation of administrative responsibility in a single office responsible to the total electorate by adopting a county manager form of government;
3. Election of the legislative body by district to 4-year staggered terms on a part-time basis. Commissioners should reside in their districts for at least one year before election and remain residents throughout their terms. Vacancies should be filled by special election.
The role of the legislative body is to enact laws, establish policies, appropriate funds, and appoint a professional county manager by a two-thirds vote to carry out its policies and administer county operations under its direction.
4. Appointment of a qualified, professional county manager trained in public administration or possessing equivalent managerial credentials. The manager should be exempt from civil service and should serve at the pleasure of the commission.

History Note: *The present commission form, [reference is to 1985] in combining the legislative and executive functions in one body and dividing specific administrative responsibilities among individual commissioners, lacks both efficiency and the American safeguard of checks and balances between the traditional branches of expanding governments. The consent decree of 1985 changing the commission to five members elected*

by district, has, in fulfilling the criterion of equitable representation, severely limited administrative accountability to the electorate, as well as decreased operating efficiency by further fragmenting the administrative function. Thus, restructuring of the county government is now imperative. Administrative responsibility must be lodged in a single office accountable to the total electorate, either by at-large election of a county executive or by appointment of a professional manager responsible to the entire county through the commission. While both of these forms are widely used by counties throughout the nation, the inclusion of another elected office appears to exceed the federally approved judicial parameters in effect at this time.

- II. Transportation** - Adequate public transportation is a vital element in the well being of any urban area, impacting on land use, economic development, air quality, employment opportunities, and mobility for all citizens. As such, it should be considered a public service whose operation is subsidized along with other public services.
- A. To adequately serve the needs of the area, public transportation should be organized and funded at least on a countywide level, preferably encompassing the entire metropolitan area.
 - B. An area wide public transportation service should be planned on the basis of needs and efficiency, taking into account such factors as traffic congestion mitigation, air-quality requirements, environmental quality and preferable land use. In order to accomplish this end funding must be area-wide and based on stable and equitable sources so that service will not depend on the willingness of individual municipalities to purchase service for their communities. LWVGB supports the LWV of Alabama position that calls for a dedicated portion of the state gasoline tax to fund public transportation. Another funding option is a fairly applied occupation tax. LWVGB believes the least preferable source of funding for public transit is the regressive sales tax.
 - C. Representation on the Transit Authority* must be area wide and equitable. A group representative of all suburbs must make the selection of those who represent the municipalities.

*** Note:** *The current representation on the Transit Authority– 5 Birmingham/1 Jefferson County/ 3 representing the 3 municipalities purchasing the most service – clearly does not meet the standard in item C. above. Returning to the original concept of the enabling legislation with a 3 county/ 3 city/ 3 suburb division appears to be the most equitable.*

III. Education - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports effective public education *in the various school districts of* Greater Birmingham including adequate financing of total needs, extension of public education prior to the first grade, encouraging public involvement in local schools, and encouraging efforts to accredit local schools.

IV. Administration of Justice - The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports diversion from the criminal justice system of those who could be treated in specific programs; use of community-base facilities leading to better rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders into the community; more uniform sentencing; and greater use of pretrial release, and the protection of basic human and civil rights of prisoners.

V. Natural Resources

- A. The League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham recognizes that it is the responsibility of the local government to help assure health and safety of citizens and their environment through adequate funding to enforce local, state and federal regulations and strong regulations that are at least as comprehensive as federal

regulations, and LWVGB supports regulations and enforcement of legislation in the following areas that promote environmental quality with provision of reasonable incentives and adequate financing at the local level for

Air quality

Water quality

Parks and Recreation

Land and water related to Surface Mining

Transportation corridors with nuclear waste or other hazardous waste transport

- B. For the areas listed above the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham supports
- zoning and subdivision regulation designed to protect flood plains and prevent flooding; and assessment of urban runoff to determine water quality problems resulting from urban and industrial runoff.
 - forfeiture of bond and denial of subsequent permits to owner-operators not complying with appropriate reclamation in surface mining.
 - availability of specialized equipment and trained personnel to handle local accidents involving hazardous shipments and reductions in shipments of hazardous materials through methods that reduce the generation of waste shipments.
 - efforts to focus public awareness on the dangers inherent in any serious accident involving shipments of high level, large quantity nuclear fuel and spent fuel wastes, and the inability of emergency procedures to prevent radioactive contamination.
 - tight control of transport of nuclear materials and waste, including pre-notification and other regulations that would enhance control.
 - the power of local government to regulate nuclear transport in the absence of adequate regulation at the federal and state levels. This regulation might include, if necessary, controlling or banning shipments of high-level, large quantity fuel and spent fuel wastes.