



BULLETIN
lwva.com

January 2021

Calendar

1/5	Tuesday 7 p.m.	LWVA Board Meeting via Zoom audioconference. The meeting URL will be sent to attendees; email one of the Co-Presidents if you would like to attend.
	Monday 1/18	Save the date for the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday Observance, which will be virtual. For details, please wait for an email from us and for notice from the Town.

Carolyn Parsons and Angela Olszewski: Co-Presidents
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Ann FitzGerald: Membership AnnFitz@rcn.com

Kim Haase: Bulletin Editor c.haase@comcast.net
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Co-President's Message

To quote my cousin in his holiday greeting, this has been a "most unfortunate year".

Zoom has allowed us to have a Virtual Special Town Meeting, a holiday party with Police Chief Flaherty – minus the party part, LWVA board meetings, and the ability to attend the meetings of a number of town boards. It is not the same as being there in person. When Town Meeting is held at Town Hall, there may be a bit of a buzz in the air or a collective sigh. The logistics of conducting the meeting are known and mostly adhered to. On Zoom it was especially painful the first night. I panicked when it escaped me as to how to get from Zoom, to the Portal to vote, and back to Zoom again. By the second evening the delays in being able to vote or being kicked out entirely were easily resolved. On a political note, the composition of the Election Modernization Committee was amended to include a League member. Thanks to Patti Muldoon for pursuing this matter.

Usually at this time of year, I encourage you and your families to attend the MLK Birthday Observance Celebration. The LWVA has contributed to this celebration for many years. We'll let you know as soon as we can how this event will be conducted. I shall miss meeting someone new and powerful voices raised up in song.

The LWVA is planning on publishing an article on local media based on the report generated from the study of the Arlington Housing Authority. Our support positions, endorsed by our Annual Meeting, will also be included. Just what should be written is bubbling around in my brain. Do most residents of Arlington even know that the AHA exists?

I wish you a more fortunate and happy new year.

Carolyn Parsons

LWVA LEADERSHIP 2020–2021

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Police Chief Speaks at Virtual Holiday Party

By Kim Haase

A good-sized gathering of League members and their families and friends met on December 3, via Zoom, to honor the holiday season. For the first time in my memory, we had no potluck, and our usual gracious hosts, Joan and Jim Robbio, attended virtually. But we had an inspiring speaker.

Police Chief Juliann Flaherty, whose appointment became official in February after she'd served as acting chief for a year and a half, is an Arlingtonian through and through. After attending Arlington public schools and Salem State, she became an Arlington police officer, rising through the ranks for over 26 years. Now she's the only female chief in Middlesex County, and the first chief in over 30 years to live in Arlington.

Almost as soon as she was appointed, Chief Flaherty and her department faced the COVID-19 pandemic. They were able to avoid closing the police station, because there's a window barrier between the public and the officers in the building. They could use phones and an online reporting system, allot one masked officer to each car, and meet the public outdoors. All staff have daily temperature checks, and only a few are in the building at any time. So far there has been only one positive test (no symptoms) and a couple of known exposures.

The department is budgeted for 68 officers, but has only 61 at present. There are 5 in the pipeline, expected to start the police academy in January. Chief Flaherty would like to remove the department from civil service to foster greater diversity of candidates. (This would have to be done by Town Meeting.)

The department has three divisions, each headed by a captain: the patrol division, which staffs 3 shifts per 24-hour day; investigation and accreditation, which oversees investigations of crimes, including domestic violence and scams, as well as all police reports; and support services, which oversees training, firearms licensing, the vehicle fleet, and building facilities. The department has completed its third accreditation (the first was in 2008), indicating its compliance with policies such as use of force.

Chief Flaherty is proud of the Arlington department's initiatives, many of them begun under her predecessor, Chief Fred Ryan:

- Arlington started the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (PAARI), whose goal is to get addicted persons into treatment rather than into the criminal justice system through detox services, recovery houses, and the like. She and Chief Ryan have helped departments elsewhere start similar programs, traveling as far away as Washington state. Arlington was the first police department in the state to give NARCAN to families.
- In a related program, Arlington's was one of the first departments in the country to start a jail diversion program, headed by social worker Rebecca Wolf, which for 10 years has responded to mental health or substance abuse crises by getting people the help they need rather than sending them to jail.

(Continued on page 7)



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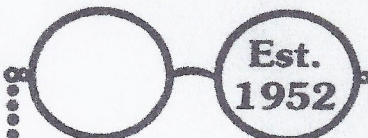


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Police Chief Addresses Holiday Party (Cont.)

- Since 2018 Arlington has had a Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), partnering with groups in Cambridge and Somerville to provide services for those dwelling in the Mugar Woods and elsewhere. They reach out to offer skills training, Social Security cards, and housing where possible. With the aid of a grant, they have housed 7 people so far.
- Chief Flaherty is also proud of her service as project manager for the renovation of the Community Safety Building in the past decade, working with the Permanent Town Building Committee and others on planning and construction. The renovation was completed in 2016.

Chief Flaherty then answered questions from attendees.

- Arlington has 5 women police officers currently -- at one time there were 10. Three of the 13 people who took the civil service test were women.
- Police officers have to live within 15 miles of Arlington.
- The number of violent incidents in Arlington varies; often a mental health crisis is the cause. Guns and knives have been found among the Mugar Woods dwellers.
- Chief Flaherty supports police reform moves, including certification requirements. Our department has added a Duty to Intervene policy, requiring other officers to intervene to stop officers from committing violence against civilians.
- The department has revised its training in response to the Lt. Pedrini incident, where an officer expressed racist views in a publication of a police group. Lt. Pedrini was suspended without pay, then reassigned to the traffic unit at a reduced salary, and has taken part in a restorative justice program. Any attempt to fire him would almost certainly be overturned.
- Police work with the Council on Aging and visit the senior housing buildings when there are safety issues, and they have done drug takebacks there. They have community policing at Menotomy Manor.
- There are 5-7 officers assigned to each police shift. They park and walk in the business districts, patrol in cars, and have 3 mountain bikes for the bike path. They recently purchased a small utility vehicle called a Gator for visiting the Mugar Woods and the bike path.
- A family services officer works with the First Step program on domestic violence to help people develop a plan to escape dangerous situations.

Members thanked Chief Flaherty for informing us about so many great programs, many of which aren't visible to most of us.

After the November 3 election, Nancy Gray wrote the following letter to the editor on behalf of the LWVA, and it was published in the *Arlington Advocate*.

The League of Women Voters of Arlington wishes to congratulate the town clerk's office in Arlington for a well-orchestrated performance managing voting for the 2020 presidential election. The weeks of recruiting new workers and training, the planning and printing, and new logistics were unprecedented. The town clerk's office handled it all smoothly. Post Office style ballot boxes were placed so all residents could reach one easily. Precincts were open on November 3 and convenient for all residents who value the privilege of voting - in person. Thank you for your long hours and for understanding the organization all this required of you. Thank you for opening the mountain of early ballots and another mountain on November 3. Remember, readers, these are not your flimsy #10 envelopes!

Nancy Gray, Member
League of Women Voters of Arlington



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LWVMA Holds Virtual 100th Anniversary Event

By Colleen Kirby

On December 13, 2020 the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts celebrated its Cheers to 100 Years anniversary celebration in a Zoom meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was moderated by Smayra Million, Director of the Diana International Research Institute (DIRI) and Director of the Butler Institute for Free Enterprise through Entrepreneurship (BIFETE), at Babson College.

The featured speaker was Danielle Allen, James Bryant Conant University Professor at Harvard University, and Director of Harvard's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics. Prof. Allen was part of the Commission for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences that produced the report [Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century](https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report) (<https://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose/report>) to improve democratic citizenship. In that report they came up with 6 strategies: to achieve equality of voice and representation, to empower voters, to ensure the responsiveness of political institutions, to dramatically expand civic bridging capacity, to build civic information architecture that supports common purpose, and to inspire a culture of commitment to American constitutional democracy and one another. This came out of a two-year bipartisan effort with listening sessions conducted across the country.

Allen said that we had the highest proportion of Americans ever vote in the November 2020 election and it was the most diverse turnout ever, including high levels of women, non-college educated voters, youth, and people of color. This is in part because voting was made more accessible thanks to early voting, absentee/mail-in voting, setting up voting centers. And thanks to having automatic voter registration in Massachusetts. (Thank you advocates!)

Going forward we need to make mail-in voting permanent. (Personally, I enjoyed being able to look candidates and ballot initiatives up online at my leisure.) And we need to keep pushing for election day voter registration. We should consider making voting mandatory, like jury duty, as they do in Australia. She also thought the League could partner with the NAACP to expand the pool of people working on ranked choice voting, as we saw from the initiative failure that it did well in wealthier communities but not in poorer areas. The bright note is that several municipalities passed ranked choice voting, and familiarity with it is likely to increase its adoption elsewhere. Ranked choice voting is especially warranted for primaries. It makes sense that a candidate should win a majority of voters rather than allowing a plurality candidate take the lead.

The League of Women Voters coined the term "informed voter," and this is still one of the League's strengths. The passage of the civics course curriculum in Massachusetts with two hands-on civics projects is a positive step. In fact, Sheriff Koutoujian is running a civics project based on [Project Citizen](http://civiceducator.org/what-is-project-citizen-civics-education/) (<http://civiceducator.org/what-is-project-citizen-civics-education/>), where young adults will develop ideas for what they think they will need to be able to successfully reenter their communities. (See page 11 for more information.)

One idea that came out of Our Common Purpose is a less onerous way to address the skewed power of the electoral college by expanding its size. We could increase the number of Representatives in the House and this would diminish the importance of the Senate votes in the electoral college. The electoral college has not been increased since 1920s, yet Germany has a larger representative body.

(Continued on next page)



LWVMA 100th Anniversary (Continued)

Allen also thought that having 18 year term limits for Supreme Court justices makes sense to take the politics out of the discussion. But she is not in favor of other term limits because they can wipe out political knowledge and expertise.

If there is interest in Danielle Allen's many books, she would recommend *Our Declaration*, which is a close reading of the Declaration of Independence.

After Allen's speech, it was gratifying to be able to honor Pam Wilmot, director of Common Cause of Massachusetts for 20 years, with the first ever Lucy Stone Lifetime Achievement Award for all the work she has done, much in collaboration with the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, most recently in leading the Election Modernization Coalition that helped pass automatic voter registration, and pandemic voting reforms.

Finally, it is worth checking out the local League honorees at <https://lwvma.org/100th-anniversary-local-league-honorees/>.

Updates on Criminal Justice Issues

By Colleen Kirby

Sheriff Koutoujian has started a Project Citizen hands-on civics course for his emerging adult group at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction. "Over the course of 12 weeks, participants will interact with outside professionals with expertise in public policy and other related areas. Participants will also identify a public policy issue, develop a strategy to address it, and present their approach to community stakeholders as a class project." See <https://www.middlesexsheriff.org/home/news/civic-education-class-underway-middlesex-jail-house-correction>

Sen. Cindy Friedman and Sheriff Koutoujian are both working hard on a commission to develop a pilot Restoration Center in Middlesex County. They had a meeting on December 17 to develop a crisis public health model for diversion for situations where either police or emergency health personnel would be involved. They are moving ahead into the 3rd year to address the needs of people with mental health and substance use issues in a pilot program in Middlesex. They did get \$250K to continue their planning work next year. See <https://www.middlesexsheriff.org/public-information/pages/middlesex-county-restoration-center-commission>

At the December 17 meeting I also learned that the Sheriff and Scott Taberner, Special Advisor for Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, are working with MaryLou Sudders, Secretary of HHS, to get a comprehensive exclusion to MIEP (Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy). Unfortunately people behind bars are not able to access Medicaid/MassHealth, and they hope they can get health coverage for people upon intake and during their time incarcerated and after release, or any portion they can get, especially if they are being held pre-trial. Unfortunately this would not be cheap. But there is hope that under Biden, this exclusion policy will be overturned, especially as it is also a racial equity issue. They will be hiring a consultant to work on this.

There was some concern about who would be providing the medical services, and a desire to provide care up to the standards of MassHealth and the Department of Health and Human Services, especially in the Department of Corrections, which houses people for long periods of time. And to make sure care is transparent for those in custody and their families. The Sheriff and Scott say there are many regulations that will need to be untangled to be able to deliver care, as there are mandates for those in custody; for example, mandated health screening within 24 hours of admission, treatment plan by 14 days, and others.

They were happy that Sec. 117 made it into the Police Reform bill. This provision forms an advisory council to bring people together to communicate and write a report by 2022 on response to people in crisis and create a roadmap for community based diversion and use of MassHealth to fund community services, which sounds like the Restoration Center approach they are currently planning for.

We welcome new members at all times.

Thank you!

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FOLLOW ISSUES, KEEP LEAGUE AND COMMUNITY INFORMED

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Women's Issues
Zoning/Community Development/Land Use

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January 2021

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