

## FOREWORD

In May 2003, the LWVAL Convention authorized a study with the aim of updating the League's information about legislative procedures and practices. The League study process begins with research, after which members engage in discussion and debate on the issues. Ultimately, the goal of any League study is to share the objective information from the League study with the public to promote the informed and active participation of citizens in government. In conducting the study and in preparing this *Facts and Issues*, the study committee adhered to LWV standards for accuracy, objectivity, balance, and a fair representation of all major points of view.

In stage one of the study, the committee read scholarly research and papers by national organizations on the functioning of state legislatures in general and documents published by or about the Alabama Legislature. The most useful of these resources are listed in *Selected References* at the end of the text. The background reading and consultation with scholars and those knowledgeable about the legislature led to the selection of eight topics for detailed examination.

In stage two of the study, the committee investigated these topics through interviews in 2004-2005 and a written survey sent to all legislators in 2005. Interviews included questions on such topics as the following: explanations of current practices, evaluations of what works well and what does not in a particular procedure, and analysis of the impact of changes in legislative practice in recent years. Both the interviews and the surveys included some open-ended questions to solicit individual opinions about strengths and weaknesses of legislative functioning. Those interviewed and those responding to the survey were promised that their views would not be attributed to them.

- The interviews covered a cross-section of legislators, including Democrats and Republicans, urban and non-urban, women and men, blacks and whites, those in and out of leadership positions, freshmen and veterans. Also interviewed were legislative support staffs, lobbyists, and a range of knowledgeable observers, including former legislators.
- The anonymous mail survey was sent to all legislators to give every legislator the opportunity to express an opinion and as a means of validating the information obtained from the interviews. The survey achieved a 55% response rate. The results of the survey appear in *Appendix A* in four sections: *one tabulation for the legislature as a whole, one for each house separately, and a listing by categories of responses to the open-ended question.*

Responses from both the interviews and the survey agreed substantially on the strengths and weaknesses of the existing legislative system. Disagreements appeared in the causes assigned for problems or in remedies proposed. The areas of agreement and disagreement about improvements needed have been carefully reported. The eight sections of this *Facts and Issues* summarize the findings of the LWVAL Study Committee on the topics investigated.

The League of Women Voters offers this publication in the belief that the information has the potential to increase understanding of the legislature among League members and the public. The

League's goal is *to promote the active and informed participation of citizens in government*. Both legislators and citizens testify to their need for better communication with each other. Better understanding of the legislature is one tool for building the trust and participation necessary to raise the levels of expectation and accomplishment in Alabama.

**LWV of Alabama Legislative Study Committee**

Virginia Bennett	Auburn	Anne W. Shumaker	Centre
Anne Permaloff	Montgomery	Carolyn Tamblyn	Auburn
Yvonne Kozlowski	Auburn	Jeanette VanderMeer	Tuscaloosa
Martha Rogers	Tuscaloosa	Ruth L. Wright	Auburn

For further information, contact Ruth L. Wright, Chair  
125 Cary Drive  
Auburn, Alabama 36830  
334-821-8617  
[ruthwright@mindspring.com](mailto:ruthwright@mindspring.com)

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[admin@lwval.org](mailto:admin@lwval.org)

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