



2021 Issue Paper: Criminal Justice

Position Statement

The League of Women Voters of Washington recognizes the need to ensure that our courts are “fair, efficient, and accessible” to all. The sentencing system should provide “accountability, equity, and uniformity” among courts and jurisdictions. And, “funding for alternatives to incarceration should be a Legislative priority.”

In addition, the Urgent Resolution on Racial Justice for Black People and All People of Color passed at the LWVUS 2020 National Convention resolves that the “League advocates against systemic racism in the justice system and, at a minimum, for preventing excessive force and brutality by law enforcement.”

Summary of Issues for 2021 Legislative Session

The legislature has identified criminal justice reform as a top priority for the upcoming legislative session. The protests following the murder of George Floyd have brought renewed attention to this issue, and the LWVWA believes that action is needed at the state level to ensure that all Washington residents are treated fairly.

In the area of police accountability, we expect legislation to be introduced that will:

- Strengthen the decertification process in order to ensure that officers who engage in serious misconduct will be barred from service.
- Remove the issue of accountability from the collective bargaining process.
- Create a statewide, publicly accessible database on the use of force by the police.
- Enact a statewide use of force policy that will, among other things, prohibit choke holds, require de-escalation, and compel officers to intervene and report use of excessive force by other officers.
- Mandate independent investigations of police use of force.

While police reform is front and center right now, we will also be advocating for alternatives to mass incarceration, including legislation recognizing the need to take a public health approach to substance abuse.

And we will continue our efforts to protect the right to vote for those with felony convictions by making the restoration of this right automatic following release from prison, even for individuals who are still on community custody (parole). The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy, and we need to ensure that this right is guaranteed to all.

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