



League of Women Voters of Missouri  
Early Voting and/or No Excuse Voting Study  
September, 2009

Thank you for participating in this State study. We hope you enjoy the study and consensus process, especially the discussion during the consensus meeting: voting is in the League's DNA.

We believe this notebook has just about everything a League member needs to conduct a successful consensus meeting covering early voting and no excuse absentee voting.

Both of these practices are in place in many states in the U.S., yet Missouri has failed to pass early voting legislation under both then Secretary of State Matt Blunt and current Secretary of State Robin Carnahan, who used the same language as Mr. Blunt.

The focus of this study is to determine if current practices create barriers to voting by not allowing Early Voting and/or No excuse Absentee Voting, discussing the pros and cons of each.

**Leader's Guide** (notebook)

The Leader's Guide includes a timeline for those interested in how we got to where we are today and probably more interesting, current election law studies underway in other states; a history of the League's work on election law and numerous articles and summaries in the Resource Section.

**Educational Panel Oct. 10 – Kansas City**

Please see page 8, we do hope you can join us for the panel discussion.

**Discussion Guide** (notebook)

The Discussion Guide has tips for each consensus question pulled from **resource materials** in the back of the notebook. For those who would like the source or more information, it's in the notebook and on the listserv set up for the Early Voting Study. (Google, Google groups, lvvmo early voting study There is a link, but I cannot make it work consistently on all computers, so bear with us, we want this to be painless for League members.) Feel free to download any or all of that material and print for your meetings or to copy items in this notebook.

**Consensus questions**

The consensus questions are included in the discussion guide and as a separate item to be completed and returned to the state office.

**Consensus process – time is of the essence**

We hope you can reach member agreement through discussion and do not have to resort to a vote; the discussion process is the ideal way for the League to reach consensus. A description of the consensus process is in the Consensus Form.

Once you hold your League's consensus meeting(s), please complete the consensus form and send to the State office. We hope to have all local League information in by Feb. 15, 2010, Susan B. Anthony's birthday. We'll be compiling a report for the State Board and that report will be sent as part of the information they receive for the March Board meeting.

Thanks again for your participation, please e-mail if you have questions.

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## Early Voting and/or No Excuse Study

# Leader's Guide

## League of Women Voters of Missouri

September, 2009

The Leader's Guide answers frequently asked questions to assist the local League leader in conducting the state study. Ideally Leagues will reach consensus on the topic, however that may not be possible and it is not a League study requirement. The discussion leader simply must move the discussion along, and not direct members to any specific decisions.

This Leader's Guide includes information about the timeline, study materials, study background and study and discussion tips and where to find additional materials in the Research Section.

Please read the separate Consensus Form document for instructions on how to complete and submit it. If you need help, please contact either or both of the co-chairs, Donna Hoch ([thehochs@hotmail.com](mailto:thehochs@hotmail.com)) or Cheryl Barnes ([cbarnes7223@yahoo.com](mailto:cbarnes7223@yahoo.com)).

### Study Timing

February, 2009 Kansas City/Jackson/Clay/Platte League of Women Voters Board approved the study.

May, 2009 Missouri State League of Women Voters - state delegates approved the study.

May - September State Study Committee

- reviewed materials
- contacted other Leagues about their work on early voting to ascertain whether or not another League had conducted a study to determine if early voting and/or no excuse absentee voting has merit

- conducted a survey of Missouri county clerks to learn about current practices and their thoughts on early voting / no excuse absentee ballots.
- developed consensus questions to present to the State League Board.

September - send out State LWV Board-approved consensus questions to State Leagues.

**October 10 - Educational Panel - 9:30 to noon**  
**Early Voting / No Excuse Absentee Voting**  
**Campus Center, Room 503**  
**Penn Valley Community College**  
**3201 Southwest Blvd., Kansas City, MO**  
**All League members and guests are invited to attend**  
**Organized lunch afterwards (on your own)**

**February 15, 2010 or earlier** - Consensus responses due in at the LWV-Missouri state office. The committee will produce a report for distribution to the Board for the March meeting. *Leagues are encouraged to send in their consensus response forms in early February if possible:* LWV-MO, 8706 Manchester Road, Ste 104, St. Louis, Mo., 63144-2724 or fax to 314-961-8393. The consensus forms are on the listserv and can be e-mailed to those who wish to work electronically. Electronic consensus forms may be sent to [league@lwvmissouri.org](mailto:league@lwvmissouri.org)

March 12 - State Board announces results of consensus.

## Where do Leagues obtain background materials and consensus forms?

All study materials are available on the Google listserv, developed for LWV state study use. Please visit Google, Google groups, [lwvmo early voting study](#)

All local League chairs have these materials in the Early Voting and/or No Excuse Voting notebook. Plus there's a wealth of information on the Internet, should anyone be interested in delving further into the topic. The materials in the Research Section are fairly comprehensive and provide information related to the consensus questions.

## What kinds of study materials are available?

Leagues may download all of the materials listed below, which are on the League's Google listserv, Google, Google Groups, lwvmo early voting study

The Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting chair also has copies of most of this material, which may be copied and distributed at the unit or consensus meeting, and is in this notebook.

**Leader's Guide:** timeline, background and tips on study and consensus process

### **Consensus Form**

With instructions for completing and submitting form to the **LWV State Office, 8706 Manchester Road, Ste 104, St. Louis, MO 63144-2724 by Feb. 15, 2010 or earlier if at all possible. The local League study results will be reported and distributed to the Board for review. Electronic consensus forms may be sent to [league@lwvmissouri.org](mailto:league@lwvmissouri.org)**

### **Facts and Issues**

Early Voting

No Excuse Absentee Voting

### **Summaries and articles (may be used as handouts)**

Absentee and Early Voting – Trends, Promises and Perils

Absentee Ballot application and envelope

Alternative Voting Methods

Missouri County Clerks Survey – summary to date, updated on listserv

Map showing the Election Officials / County Clerks who responded

Responses from Other Leagues About Early Voting Study

Proposed Legislation to Allow Early Voting / No Excuse Absentee Ballot

Current LWV-Missouri Position on Election Laws and Voting Rights

(Please note: representative list, more on the Google listserv and in the Resource Guide, in the back of the Leader's Guide notebook. The County Clerk survey will be updated as we get additional responses.)

### **Additional resources**

Missouri Election Code, Title 15, Code of State Regulations, which can be found on the Secretary of State's website (address below)

[www.sos.state.mo.us](http://www.sos.state.mo.us)

## Why are the Missouri Leagues studying Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting?

Founded in 1919 on the principle that women should be allowed to vote, the League of Women Voters continues the struggle that began at the 1848 women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., with the resolution, "the duty of the women of this country is to secure for themselves the sacred right to the elective franchise."

The purpose of this study is to determine if the League is in support of early voting and in improving the absentee voting process as a means to reduce or eliminate barriers to voting.

Many families find it difficult to juggle careers, children and other demands on their time. Standing in a line to vote simply may not fit in that schedule, especially for women who tend to be the "glue" in a family. Many in the medical profession work 12-hour shifts; firefighters work 24-hour shifts.

This study is driven by the LWVUS Principle that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote.

Further, the Missouri League has a long history of working to broaden voting rights.

In **1966** the League of Women Voters of Missouri re-studied election procedures, concluding that Missouri needed more uniformity in state election laws. In **1970**, that position was updated. Other League positions have been enacted: the **1969** election law requiring counting absentee ballots on the day of election; a **1971** provision permitting local choice of voting devices.

In **1973**, a state-wide voter registration law passed -- ***after 21 years of League effort***. In **1974**, an election law passed forbidding identifying numbers on paper ballots and reducing to 30 days the length of state residence required to vote. The Comprehensive Election Act of **1977**, another League goal, simplified, clarified and harmonized Missouri laws governing elections.

There has been League support for Early Voting in Missouri in the past. The League supported legislation to improve voter access by allowing mail-in registration and having more voter registration forms available. The **2001** election law change improved voter accessibility to polling

places, allowed early voting. A provision in the bill tied it to funding, and as a result, early voting never came into practice.

Since 2000, both Secretaries of State have proposed legislation to allow Early Voting; each year the opposite major party has blocked passage.

In 2008, LWV of Missouri opposed a constitutional amendment requiring photo I.D., noting it would prevent more than 240,000 citizens from voting and in effect disenfranchise those who must work the hardest to vote.

The 2009 change in election laws proposed annually by Secretary of State Robin Carnahan is the same text proposed annually by former Secretary of State Matt Blunt during his term in office:

**“Allow early voting in Missouri to increase convenience for voters, lessen the burden on poll workers and reduce polling place lines on Election Day.”**

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## Board of Directors – LWV-Missouri

The Board of Directors has the responsibility to determine when a position can be applied to bring about governmental change. To make such decisions, the Board must judge whether there is member understanding and agreement to support the intended action.

The goal of this study is to decide whether there is League consensus for early voting and /or no excuse absentee voting. Both, in use in other states, would make it easier to vote; both require safeguards, considered by some to be problematic.

## What is the study scope and focus?

Based on the 2009 Convention proposal, last May the delegates approved the focus and scope for a study of Missouri's voting practices.

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**Focus:** Review Missouri's current election laws and determine if the current practices create barriers to voting by not allowing Early Voting and / or No Excuse Absentee Voting.

**Scope:** This study will broadly review the pros and cons and seek answers to these questions:

- Do the single-day voting and our current absentee ballot process create barriers to voting?
- Would adopting early voting and/or no excuse absentee voting reduce barriers and increase access to the polls?
- What are the pros and cons?

Through our research and the course of the committee work, we learned about these current activities from other Leagues:

The **North Carolina** League of Women Voters supported Early Voting as a move to more open and accessible elections. The general feeling is that early voting increased voter turnout in the 2008 election.

**Ohio** League of Women Voters participated in an Election Summit with all stakeholders involved in reviewing their electoral process. The group recommended enhancements for the statewide voter registration database; continued improvement in voter registration processes; streamlining Ohio's voter ID law; enhancing poll worker recruitment measures; increasing voting opportunities for military and civilian personnel overseas, to include additional electronic and mail delivery options for both absentee ballot requests and voted absentee ballots; to look for cost-saving measures, such as moving special elections to primary or general election days saving, in Ohio, \$2.7-\$5.4 million a year; vote-by-mail for vacancy in office special elections; annual vote by mail ballot requests for issue-only elections; same-day voter registration; and in general, to bring Ohio in line with many other states' voter-friendly election laws and practices.

**South Carolina** didn't undertake a study on early voting; that League has supported Early Voting legislation for several sessions based on their position in support of government procedures that ensure citizen participation in democratic processes, including voting.

Based on 2008 voter turnout there was a groundswell of support to implement Early Voting. However, legislators added a voter photo ID provision, so the legislation failed. An Early Voting Bill will be re-introduced in January, 2010 with a coalition of nonpartisan groups, including the LWV-South Carolina, opposing photo I.D. provision.

**LWV-Texas** studied five voting topics to broaden their position: Vote by Mail; Election Day Registration; Election Day Centralized Voting; Instant Runoff and Internet Voting via a concurrence process; the result of their study is on the LWV-Texas website. Texas has had some form of early voting since the '80s.

**Wisconsin** has a state Government Accountability Board (GAB) studying Early Voting in Wisconsin. As part of that Board's activity, LWV-Wisconsin was asked to comment on their objectives:

Increase voter satisfaction by reducing lines, maintain integrity of the vote-counting process, relieve the workload of local elections officials and control costs. The Janesville League reviewed "best practices" which included beginning to vote about 20 days prior to the election and ending at least three days prior, include some Saturday and some Sunday hours and developing a pilot project for the April 2010 election to pre-test the concept.

## How is Missouri's study being conducted?

Representatives from Missouri's eight Leagues are part of the state committee. Because of time, distance, resources and generally accepted understanding of the electoral process, the committee worked via the Internet.

The committee established a Google group (search)– Google, groups, LWVMO Early Voting Study

The committee posted articles, summaries, facts, comments and other items of interest.

The League also surveyed Missouri county clerks and the adjacent states' Secretaries of State using Survey Monkey. To date almost 30 Missouri county clerks have responded; we continue to follow up with both groups.

The committee has a review of the adjacent states' practices from the Early Voting Information Center and the Secretary of States' web pages; the survey asked for best practices and any changes they would like to make.

## What are the considerations for developing the consensus questions?

The consensus questions cover basic issues associated with barriers to voting -- Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting.

At the May, 2009 convention, the LWV-Missouri delegates agreed to ask local Leagues if they can reach consensus on voting issues relating to Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting.

While the League of Women Voters of the U.S. and the League of Women Voters of Missouri have broad-based positions that support voting, the Convention felt a study was in order.

In general, the study seeks to strengthen the Leagues' positions: Support an accurate, recountable, efficient, accessible, accountable and uniform electoral process (LWV-Missouri). Protect the right of all citizens to vote; encourage all citizens to vote (LWVUS).

For the consensus process, we are asking Missouri Leagues to include all relevant comments in the consensus questionnaire to clarify or expand on answers.

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## How may Leagues educate members and seek consensus?

Whatever the method, studies must expose members to balanced information on an issue. All consensus discussion must respect the fact that members may not all have the same views.

Beyond those basics, local League Boards decide how much time and effort their League can put into the process.

Each League has formed a committee to review the study materials and brief attendees at the consensus discussion meeting(s).

To facilitate the educational process, the League of Women Voters of Kansas City/Jackson/Clay/Platte Counties is organizing an educational panel. All Missouri League members and guests are invited to the event.

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**October 10 - 9:30 a.m. to noon.**

**Early Voting / No Excuse Absentee Voting Educational Panel**

**League of Women Voters of Kansas City J/C/P**

**Penn Valley Community College**

**Campus Center, Room 503**

**3201 Southwest Trafficway, Kansas City, Mo. 64111**

**League members and guests are invited to attend**

To help with the consensus process, the presentation will be videotaped and made available to League members who are unable to attend. We believe the educational panel will be useful to Leagues with less time but still want to take part in the Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting study.

In addition, this Leader's Guide material includes a variety of summaries of articles relevant to Early Voting and/or No Excuse Absentee Voting that will be beneficial in leading the discussion. In essence, a Cliff's Notes version on the topics.

Both the Summaries and Facts and Issues describe the pros and cons of voting procedures of both no excuse absentee voting and early voting, exposing members to a variety of views on the issue and a review of voting procedures in place in other states.

***Whatever method used, the discussion leader must move the discussion along, and not direct members to any specific decisions.***

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Voting procedures to increase access to the polls and to increase voting participation is a subject on which most members will enjoy expressing their opinions. Discussion of the consensus questions at a unit or general meeting is ideal because the exchange of views is an important part of the educational process.

It is the local Board's responsibility to determine whether discussion has resulted in consensus in the local League.

At the conclusion of the study, each League may submit only one completed consensus form to the state office, **LWV-Missouri, 8706 Manchester Road, Suite 104, St. Louis, MO 63144-2724**, to arrive at the state office by **Feb. 15, 2010**. **Attn. State Study** Electronic forms may be sent to [league@lwvmissouri.org](mailto:league@lwvmissouri.org) Please note: LWV-MO cannot accept forms from individuals; the consensus form will represent local League positions.

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# Leader's Discussion Guide

## Question-by-Question

Study Leader note: these are the same questions that are in the consensus form. We have added discussion “tips” to help facilitate your consensus meeting(s).

We hope you enjoy your discussions: voting is in the League's DNA.

Discussion tips and resource suggestions precede the question – because of spacing the question may be on the following page.

**Instructions for submitting the form are on the consensus form along with the address, provided earlier in this book.**

# Early Voting and/or No-Excuse Absentee Voting Consensus Questions

Consensus process: If your League can't reach a consensus on an item, please note that in the comments of the consensus form.

Please note: Currently voters who wish to vote an absentee ballot must complete an application giving the reason, an "excuse" for needing an absentee ballot to vote in person or by mail.

## Absentee Voting

*Please note: discussion tips precede the questions, which may be on the following page.*

**Discussion tip:** At present, Missouri election laws require voters to apply for an absentee ballot and complete a form, checking one of five acceptable reasons why they will not be able to vote on Election Day. A sample absentee form and envelope is included in the Resource Section.

Some Missouri voters don't realize that Missouri election laws require an excused absence, and many say that encourages dishonesty.

The LWV-MO County Clerk survey confirms that absentee ballot requirements are inconsistently enforced.

Therefore, should the Election Laws regarding absentee ballots be changed to be more flexible?

There are several options given; all of these are in practice within the U.S.

For more information, please see the summary of Alternate Voting Methods, available in the Resource Section.

**Should the League of Women Voters of Missouri support absentee voting election laws that --**

1. No longer requires a reason to vote absentee?  
(Application required)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

2. Allow early in-person absentee voting?  
(Application required)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

3. Allow early by-mail absentee voting? (Application required)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

**Discussion tip:** Many Missouri voters don't realize they need to get their absentee ballot notarized, don't know where to find a notary, and don't want to or can't pay for notarization. While banks generally will notarize documents for their customers, some may not notarize documents for the public. Notarization could be perceived as a barrier to voting or, alternately, the price for the convenience of early voting.

An absentee ballot cast without notarization cannot be counted; approximately 7,000 ballots were not counted in the 2008 election because they weren't notarized or received on time.

For more information on notarized absentee ballots, please see the Secretary of State's Voters First report in the Resource Section. Oregon verifies the signature on each ballot before it is counted by comparing it with the signature scanned from the voter registration card.

Having individuals witness the voter's signature would be more convenient and as adequate as a notary. By contrast, some feel that using witnesses rather than a notary could raise questions about the possibility of fraud.

4. Eliminates the notary requirement for absentee voters?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

**Discussion tip:** Kansas, among other states, allows seniors, and other voters, to be on a permanent absentee voter list. Ballots are not forwarded as part of the election safeguards. For more information, please see Summary of Voting Practices in Adjacent States is in the Resource Section.

5. Should Missouri make available the option of being placed on an annual or permanent absentee voting list at the voter's request?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

- Comments:

6. Continue the current practice of placing voters with a permanent disability on a permanent absentee voter list?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments

**Discussion tip:** The Missouri Secretary of State reported in the 2008 election summary that in the November election, more than 7,000 ballots were not counted because they were not notarized or were not received by the statutory deadline.

Missouri Election Laws require the absentee ballots be received by the time polls close on Election Day.

Military families said the largest obstacle they found with absentee voting was the length of time required to send in ballots from overseas. For further information, please refer to the Secretary of State's report, "Voters First: An Examination of the 2008 State and Federal Elections in Missouri in the Resources Section.

7. Develop instructions that are clear and concise to reduce the number of spoiled and uncountable ballots?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

**Discussion tip:** Some counties already practice no excuse absentee voting, according to the LWV-MO county clerk survey.

Some election officials want no changes in the current election laws, citing possible increased workload and another change in the election laws. Please see County Clerk summary in the Resource Section.

8. Should the League support no excuse absentee voting even if it costs more to administer?

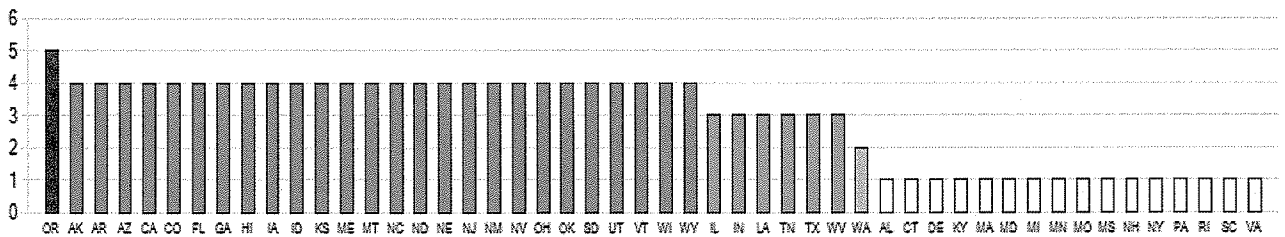
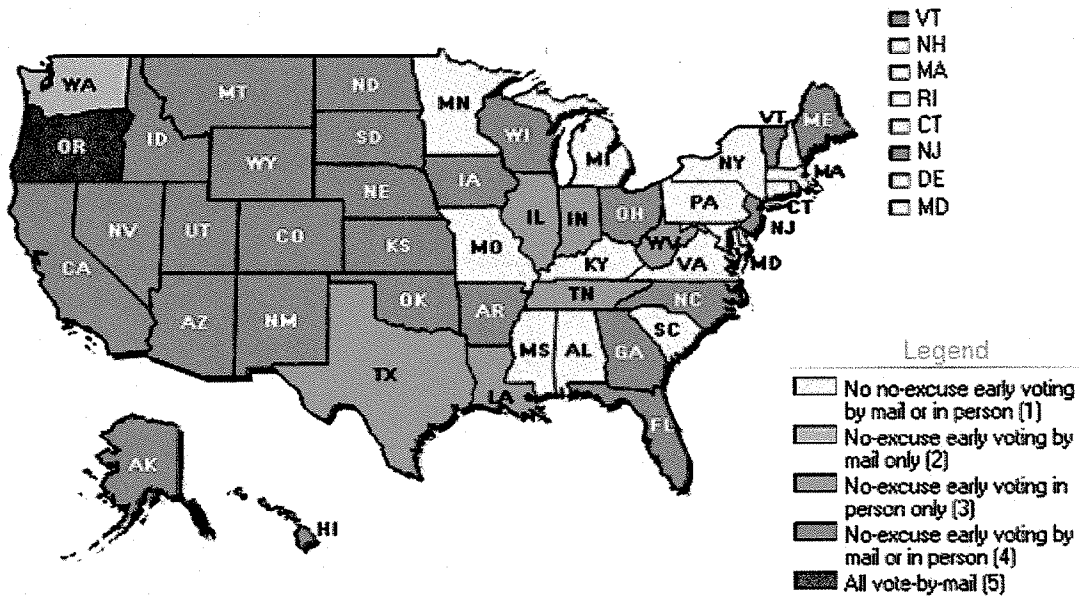
- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

## Early voting section

**Discussion tip:** More than 30 states (shown on next page) already practice some form of early voting.

To learn about obstacles and problems identified by the Missouri County Clerks, please refer to the County Clerk survey summary in the Resource Section.

To review what other states are doing, please refer to Alternative Voting Methods in the Resource Section.



**Discussion tip:** The Missouri Secretary of State’s 2008 Election Summary reported there were long lines, especially in urban areas. Velda City, in St. Louis County, for instance, had a seven-hour wait to vote.

During the Missouri February Presidential Preference Primary, bad weather included tornadoes, flooding, heavy rains, sleet and snow. Some polls closed during tornado warnings, reopening when the weather passed.

On one hand, early voting can be called a convenience, on the other, it may make voting possible for that election. For the 2008 election report, please see the Secretary of State’s “Summary of the 2008 Elections” in the resource section.

9. Should the League of Women Voters – Missouri support early voting?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

**Discussion tip:** Both Secretaries of State have proposed identical legislation each year since 2000 asking the State legislature to pass an election law change to allow Early Voting.

Each year it has been opposed by the opposite majority party.

10. Should the League support early voting for voter convenience, even if it does not increase voter turnout?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments:

11. In which election(s) should early voting be permitted?

- \_\_\_\_\_ All elections--Presidential, State, county, municipal, special
- \_\_\_\_\_ Presidential elections only
- \_\_\_\_\_ Statewide Elections only
- \_\_\_\_\_ All Federal Elections--other elections at the discretion of the local election authority

- Comments:

12. Should the League support a reasonable amount of time to allow early voting?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments

**Discussion tip:** Please see County Clerk Survey in the Research Section. There was no agreement among the clerks, some of which hold partisan, elected positions, which may explain their response.

13. Should the League support early voting even if it increases voting costs?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
- Comments

**Discussion tip:** The following suggestions listed are in practice in other states. Please see the Alternative Voting summary and other articles in the Resource Section for additional information. Please include additional suggestions

14. Please check the voting practices you support.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Same day voter registration
- \_\_\_\_\_ Automatically register all 18 year olds to vote (make it an opt out program)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow voter registration via the Internet (similar to car license renewals)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reduce the number of in-person elections by holding special elections via the mail (for instance, issue only, no candidates)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Move special elections to primary and general election days
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make Federal Election Day a State holiday
- \_\_\_\_\_ Move Election Day to the weekend -- Saturday would become the Election Day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow centralized voting via Vote Centers (combined precincts, or super precincts, where any registered voter can cast a ballot, as in Columbia, Mo.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other suggestions – please list.

*Thank you for your participation in the study.  
Please return the consensus form at your earliest convenience.*