

LWVRI POSITION ON FINANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND

Approved by Convention, June 4th, 2011

The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island believes that any method of financing public education should provide equality of opportunity for education through a system of taxation that is sufficient, equitable, flexible and coordinated among the different levels of government.

The LWVRI believes further that the best way to fund education in Rhode Island is to divide the cost between the state and the cities and towns. The state's total share of the funding of core instructional costs should be at least 50%. In determining the share that will be distributed to each city and town, the state should use a transparent formula that provides equitable funding for Rhode Island's school children and that takes into account community wealth and student poverty level.

The state share of funding for public schools under a formula should be used for core instructional costs to include school personnel salaries, books and supplies, the cost of operating facilities, and teacher development. No state funds should be used to offset the cost of teacher and employee health benefit costs because these benefits are negotiated at the local level.

The League believes that the enrollment number should be averaged over a year. The League recognizes that students have different needs. To provide equality of opportunity, low income student enrollment should be given additional weight. The League supports using eligibility for the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program (FRPLP) as a measure of poverty level and student need. The League recommends that the use of poverty as an indicator of student need be reassessed over time to assure that it does indeed reflect the requirements of the ESL (English as a second language) and other special needs student populations in an equitable manner.

When funding a regional school district, the state should determine its share by calculating the wealth and enrollment of each participating town separately and assess each city and town's per pupil's share accordingly. The funding should follow the student.

The League does not support a hold harmless position in any public education financing formula.

Finally, the League believes that when funding charter schools in Rhode Island, the funding should follow the student.