

League of Women Voters Response to Systemic Racism & Violence Towards Women

Recently, a women's violence shelter in the western part of Wisconsin was defunded by the county government for making an anti-racism statement and placing a Black Lives Matter sign on their lawn. The local government assumed that the placement of this sign meant that the shelter was anti-law enforcement. As a result, many women's lives are now in danger, especially women of color who are disproportionately victims of violence as evident by the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit.

Last year, the Common Council of the City of Appleton passed a resolution regarding racism as a public health crisis. As president of the League of Women Voters of Appleton it is my job to represent the local League and advocate for research-based positions that the League supports. Last year I was not able to advocate for the Common Council's resolution because I was not able to find positions at the national, state or local level against racism so I chose to speak up as a private citizen instead. It is only because of a resolution passed at the LWV US National Convention in June of 2020 that I would be able to advocate in support of the anti-racism stance of not only the shelter in Western Wisconsin, but all across Wisconsin. The League of Women Voters will always stand with the victims of violence. But we also know that this is not just a problem of violence. This is a systemic problem of racism and it is a problem that the League needs to deal with going forward. The League's June 2020 resolution reads:

"First, that the League advocates against systemic racism in the justice system and, at a minimum, for preventing excessive force and brutality by law enforcement. The resolution also called for prompt actions by all League members to advocate within every level of government to eradicate systemic racism and the harm that it causes.

Second, that the League help elected officials and all Americans recognize these truths to be self-evident; that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) deserve equal protection under the law; and that we demand solutions for the terrible wrongs done, so that regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and gender identity or sexual orientation we may truly become a nation "indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

This is a great start, but how hurtful is it to our sisters that it took this long to make the statement? As a League, we need to take a hard look within ourselves at why we have not done more about this and we need to make changes internally, both at the League level and at the personal level. We cannot advocate for change elsewhere if we are not willing to make change within ourselves.

Change is critical to our US American culture and nation. Isabel Wilkerson suggested that we think about our country as an old house we inherited. It's been passed down through the generations and now we own it, flaws and all. Our old home has structural problems though none of us built the foundation. The plaster is falling off the walls exposing the support beams and we see a few have dry rot. We did not build the house but we have an obligation to repair what we can for future generations. Or, we can fix up one room, one beautiful room which only some people can enjoy while others are left to the rundown parts of the house. We can continue to ignore the problems, to look the other way, to put on a new coat of paint and hope for the best for our children and all their children's children, but is that who we really want to be?

The League of Women Voters of Appleton is committed to looking at all of our structural problems and fixing our “old house”. We own our “old house” flaws and all. The 21st century LWV of Appleton is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in principle and practice, in membership and leadership. Resolutions are just words, powerful only if we take actions based upon them. We commit to being allies with our ears, our voices and our actions. Let’s be the caregivers that our descendants will be proud of.