



THE DC VOTER

A Voice for Citizens – A Force for Change

Volume 87, Issue 9

January 2012

President’s Message

By Kathryn Ray

It’s Election Year 2012! We all know that democracy isn’t a spectator sport, so the League needs your help to ensure we have an informed electorate who will make wise decisions on Election Day.

DC’s Primary Election is April 3 and our Voter Services Co-chairs **Elinor Hart** and **Judy Smith** are already at work planning the LWVDC Voters Guide. If you would like to help, please give them a call. The League’s brochure “Let’s Make Our Votes Count” is updated and ready to be distributed. The office already received a call from McKinley High School’s government teacher asking for League help in registering his eligible students.

Please plan to attend a Unit meeting on the HIV/AIDS crisis in D.C. **Goody Braun**, with assistance from Program Intern **Julia Dieperink** wrote a four page “Facts & Issues” to prepare members for the discussion.

Our National Program Planning meeting, tentatively scheduled for January 25 at noon, will be different this year. The LWVDC Board voted to sponsor for concurrence at Convention 2012 our positions against mandatory minimum sentencing and in favor of alternatives to incarceration. Since the LWVUS has no position on sentencing, here is our opportunity to share our position with the entire League. See page 5 for details

The pictorial directory will go to press soon. Please be patient as we assemble it for the printer. The new directory (and all of the previous editions) are private League publications produced for the sole use of LWVDC members to contact fellow

members regarding League business. The new pictorial directory will be well worth the wait!

Welcome **Carol Wansong**, the Newest Member of the LWVDC Board. A Mississippi native, **Carol Broun Wansong** received a BA in history from Millsaps College and, as recipient of a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, an MA in Modern European History from Columbia University. During her teaching career, she taught English and Social Studies in New York, the District of Columbia, and Virginia public schools as well as with the Academy of the Washington Ballet. In 2002, Carol retired from teaching world history and anthropology in the International Baccalaureate program in Fairfax County, Virginia. As a League member she has participated in two UN-NGO conferences and is currently a member of the League’s National Lobby Corps. Carol will be the liaison with the United Nations Association-NCA. Welcome, Carol!

League of Women Voters of D.C Speaks out on WORLD AIDS DAY

Statement by Kathryn Ray

As we remember those who have died of AIDS-related illnesses, we also celebrate progress and recommit to action. The LWVDC stands in solidarity with those who are dedicated to educating the public, working to ease suffering, and eradicating the disease.

Join our January Units as they discuss the AIDS situation in DC and learn how the League can take action to be part of the solution.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Join Now & Your Membership Will

Not Expire until March 31, 2013

Dues Rate:

Individual \$45 _____

Joint Household \$60 _____

Please make checks payable to **LWVDC**

The League never shares your contact information with non-members.

(Please print)

Name

Name 2 (for household memberships)

Street Address (include apt. # if any)

City

D.C. (or state) + zip code

Telephone

email address

In addition to my dues, I enclose a contribution to:

LWVDC Education Fund (tax deductible) \$ _____

LWVDC General Fund (non-deductible) \$ _____

Please write a separate check for each.

Mail membership form & check(s) to:
LWVDC 1100 15th St NW 11th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Thank you!

The League publishes a private directory for the Exclusive use of its members to assist in conducting League business. If you do not wish to be included In the membership directory, please initial below.

To Contact a League Leader

Please

Call the League office

202 222-0710

or

email the League

LWVDC@AOL.COM

**Website
LWVDC.ORG**

HIV/AIDS IS THE TOPIC FOR JANUARY UNITS
Please review the League's Forum Report and
the enclosed FACT & ISSUES

By Geraldine Whitley and Goody Braun

LWVDC hosted a forum September 27, 2011, on the city's HIV/AIDS epidemic, what's being done and what needs to be done. Held at the Frank D. Reeves Center, 2000 14th Street, NW, from 6:30 to 9:00 PM, it featured six speakers, four representing each of four co-sponsors -- Metro TeenAIDS, Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association, The Women's Collective, and Whitman-Walker Health -- plus city government and Shiloh Baptist Church.

Dr. Gregory Pappas, Senior Deputy Director, HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis, STD & TB Administration, D.C. Department of Health;

Dr. Pappas set the stage with alarming District of Columbia statistics, which he called "human faces with the tears wiped off," quoting Paul Brodeur. From 1980 to 2009, 10,077 deaths were directly attributed to HIV/AIDS. In December 2008, 16,513 individuals were known to have tested positive for the HIV/AIDS virus. At present, an estimated 25,000 DC residents are infected, including those who have never been tested, and two or three people are infected every day. Moreover, DC is one of 12 metropolitan areas in the US where half the country's HIV-infected people live -- but, it is misleading to say DC has the highest HIV in the country or its rate is as high as Africa's.

On the positive side, diagnosis and treatment have improved dramatically; the city gives free HIV testing at DMV locations and Income Maintenance Centers, and Mayor Vincent Gray has appointed a commission to examine the gamut of issues and recommend remedies. In addition, activists groups are working to get routine testing of HIV/AIDS in physicians' offices. Dr. Pappas also stressed the need to work across local borders to create strategies and change social norms.

Angel Brown, Director of Community Outreach and Partnerships, Metro TeenAIDS;

Brown said Metro TeenAIDS is in the forefront of helping DC teenagers confront all sexually transmitted diseases as well as HIV/AIDS. It offers counseling and testing, prevention education, pregnancy testing, care advocacy, comprehensive risk counseling service, free condoms to boys and girls. Brown reaches out to schools (public and charter) and partners with a variety of community, faith-based, local and federal government agencies and organizations -- focusing on educating and advocating for HIV/AIDS prevention. She also uses Face Book to teach young people how to be advocates on their behalf.

"DC has the highest rate of sexually transmitted infections in the United States," Brown reported, adding one in 100 DC youth has HIV and many do not know it. She also emphasized that only blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk can transmit HIV.

Michele Beadle-Holder, Health Department Committee, Metropolitan Washington, Public Health Association;

Michele Beadle-Holder emphasized the need to improve living conditions for persons living with HIV/AIDS by providing suitable housing and healthcare, and helping them secure living-wage jobs. In addition, protections are needed so a worker diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is not fired.

Hazel Smith, Testing Counselor, The Women's Collective;

The Women's Collective sponsors two programs that strive to provide HIV/AIDS prevention information and assistance to girls and women 12 years and older. (1) The SisterAct Institute enhances effective communication -- using creative and interactive activities entailing art, song and dance -- and covers sexual health issues, including prevention, care management,

individual and family counseling, and free and confidential HIV testing services. (2) Between Us Girls helps females aged 12-25 obtain skills to become positive advocates for safer sex behaviors, and gain knowledge about HIV testing, and HIV/AIDS prevention. Both programs offer family care management services, support services for depression and other mental health problems, food banks, prevention through testing and counseling services, and free medication. Smith has HIV and benefits from services of The Women's Collective.

Rev. Dr. Crystal Kuykendall, Family Life Center, Shiloh Baptist Church;

Rev. Kuykendall expressed regret that her remarks would be based on past performance, since the Family Life Center of Shiloh Baptist Church lost its grant for HIV/AIDS work. But, when the program was operating, it went into DC public schools, and 33 churches provided counseling on HIV/AIDS prevention and care management to 215 teen-age mothers.

Meghan Davies, Deputy Director, Community Health, Whitman-Walker Health

Whitman Walker Health has expanded from an HIV/AIDS clinic to a one-stop shop for the gamut of health care. Regarding HIV/AIDS, it assigns a mentor to each participant when he or she first enters, and takes a holistic approach to the care of persons living with the HIV/AIDS virus – offering prevention education, testing and care, legal services, help with obtaining and taking medicines. The mentor has had experience with HIV/AIDS; therefore, can have a positive influence.

During the question-and-answer period, participants expressed strong interest in promoting greater use of the female condom. There was considerable interest in holding subsequent meetings to explore further questions related to corrective measures.

*We appreciate the many volunteers who made this event successful. Special thanks go to **Goody Braun** and her co-sponsors for convening the Forum and to each of the speakers for sharing their expertise with the assembly. **Giant Food** and **Safeway** provided delicious refreshments. The DC Government provided the Reeves Center meeting room.*

January Unit Meetings: HIV/AIDS Crisis in DC- Take your Facts & Issues to the meeting

- **Chevy Chase/Ingleside – Jan. 25 (Wed.) 10 am at Ingleside of Rock Creek 3050 Military Road NW. Rsvp Joan Wilson 202 237-6264**
- **NW Day - Jan. 17 (Tues.) noon. Iona Senior Services. Rsvp Barbara Yeomans 202 363-8940**
- **Evening Unit – Jan. 17 (Tues.) 7:30 at the home of Kathryn Ray. Rsvp 202 244-0770**
- **SW Saturday – Jan. 21 (Sat.) Tiber Island Clubhouse, 6th & N Sts. SW. Rsvp Alex Dickson Dickson.alexandra@gmail.com**
- **Thomas Circle/Intown Tuesday, Jan. 17 (Tues.) 10:30 AM in the Club Room 1330 Mass. NW Rsvp. Jack Mathison 202 362-4612**
- **Upper 16th Street – Jan. 18 (Wed.) 9:45-noon at the home of Vivianne Mozon. Rsvp 202 722-0480**

National Program Planning:

LWVDC Will Take Major Role at Convention 2012

In order for the League to take action on an issue, it must have a position developed through the consensus process – research, study, discussion and consensus reached. The US League can conduct a national study, or alternatively, it can adopt (concur with) a position of a state or local League that was reached after a local study and consensus. The process is called **concurrence**. This year, LWVDC Board agreed to sponsor its position on criminal sentencing for concurrence at Convention 2012.

The proposed position for concurrence:

"Title: Sentencing Policy

1)The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime.

2) The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses."

ARGUMENTS FOR SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVES TO IMPRISONMENT FOR APPROPRIATE OFFENDERS:

Alternatives include drug and mental health courts, halfway houses and day reporting centers, restitution requirements, rehabilitative services, etc. They save taxpayers money. They keep offenders with their families and jobs, instead of in prison or jail with inmates convicted of violent crimes.

ARGUMENTS FOR OPPOSING MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES FOR DRUG OFFENSES:

Harsh mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses have led to an overrepresentation of drug offenders in the criminal justice system, many of whom are low-level and nonviolent. Restoring judicial discretion in drug cases would allow judges to determine punishments that are proportional to the offenses committed.

BACKGROUND: The United States has 5% of the world's population, but 25% of the world's prisoners—it is the world's biggest jailer. More than half the growth in the prison population over the last 30 years is due to changes in sentencing policies that prioritize long, mandatory sentences, including for drug and nonviolent offenses. Mass

incarceration has led to huge financial costs to taxpayers, and millions of ex-offenders who carry lifelong, daunting burdens of a criminal record after release. Moreover, appalling racial disparity pervades the criminal justice system, and excessively impacts communities of color

Our National Program Planning meeting, tentatively scheduled for January 25 (Wed.) at noon at the League Office, will focus on sentencing reform. **Melody Webb**, Esq., a member of the LWVDC Board will be the point person on this effort. Our plan is to invite a speaker to refresh our memories about sentencing reform and educate us on the most recent issues in sentencing.

Great Decisions Program for 2012

Organizational Meeting January 4 @ 2:30

in the Theater of Ingleside of Rock Creek 3050 Military Road, NW. Joan Wilson in charge. 202 237-6264

AMAZING STATISTIC!

47,837

Forty-seven thousand eight hundred thirty-seven is the impressive number of "visits" that the LWVDC.org website had in 2011.

It's clear that voters seek out the League for information to make informed choices.

News from LWVUS

League President, **Elisabeth MacNamara**, spoke to Congress about the nation-wide threat to voting rights. Across the country, 38 states have introduced or passed legislation that would make it significantly harder for people to vote – imposing voter IDs, cutting back on early voting, erecting barriers to voter registration. League President Elisabeth MacNamara spoke to a Congressional panel about the dangerous implications of these restrictive laws. You can also see Florida League President, Deirdre Macnab appear on MSNBC's Politics Nation with Al Sharpton talking about LWV Florida's decision to stop registering voters as a direct result of Florida's new restrictive third-party voter registration laws.

Help Register New Voters

January 13 & Feb. 14 (Tuesdays)

League volunteers register new voters on the second Tuesday of each month immediately following the Naturalization Ceremony at the courthouse. Volunteers **Judy Smith** and **Janet Bachman** can always use an extra hand. Please email the League if you would be interested in helping. lwvdc@aol.com. Next dates:

Jan. 13 & Feb. 14 10am US District Courthouse, 300 Constitution Avenue NW 6th Floor. Arrive early and bring an ID.

Dr. Billie A. Day, Immediate Past President of the LWVDC receives United Nations Association-National Capital Area Local Human Rights Award

Remarks published in Dec. 8 Awards Program

Serving as president of the League of Women Voters of the District of Columbia doesn't begin to acknowledge Billie's enduring commitment to justice and human rights, her energy, and her readiness to act to make good things happen. Billie expressed her life of activism for human rights as a YWCA volunteer in Turkey, followed by her work in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. With her PhD, she was an early pioneer in secondary school global education, creating and teaching Washington's Banneker Senior High School Global Perspectives course. She was a UN Volunteer in the Bosnia elections and member of the UN election team in Sierra Leone. Her commitment to full voting representation of DC residents in Congress led her, in 2010 as president of LWVDC to organize a White House rally and, in 2011, to be arrested for civil disobedience, as one of the District's forty-one witnessing leaders.

League members attending were **Robert Brandstetter, Joan Domike, Natalie Howard, Sarah McMeans, Jeanette Miller, Ken Nesper,**

*Gun Control Committee remains active and vigilant. Recent tragedies underscore the need for action. Contact First VP **Jack Mathison** to get involved. jmathison1@earthlink.net*

[UNA/NCA Continued] **Kathryn Ray, Judy Smith, Constance Tate, Geraldine Whitley, Carole Conors (US League), Julia Demichelis (NM League)**. Also, Billie's friends attended: **Joe Barbiero, Amelia Fitjohn Broderick** (longtime Sierra Leone friend), **Adotei Akwei** (Amnesty International), and **Lashawn Jefferson**, who came from New Haven, Ct. Lashawn was a student in Billie's Global Perspectives class at Banneker Senior H.S., graduating in the first class 1984; she later was director of the women's division at Human Rights Watch in NYC.

Thanking League Members

Upper 16th Street Unit Chair **Vivianne Mozon** writes "Thank you individually and collectively for your thoughtful expressions of sympathy: the prayers, cards, calls, and your presence. All are appreciated. Thanks again."

December Unit Socials

Special thanks to our hostesses for December, Mrs. **Jeanette Miller** and Mrs. **Constance Tate**. Thank you both for opening your lovely homes to our members.

DC Statehood movement Teach-In

January 7 5:30-7- free event. ACLU's first winter teach-in. Learn how you can help get co-sponsors for the DC Statehood Bill, and hear from activists and lobbyists who know how to get things done in Congress followed by post program fundraising performance. Tickets for sale by **Johnny.Barnes@aclu-nca.org** or call 202-457-0800. Carnegie Institution, 16th and P Streets NW.

Charity Navigator, the well-respected non-profit guide to charitable giving, awarded LWV Education Fund the highest rating

Nominating Committee

Don't just wait for a call from the Nominating Committee. It's the time of year to be considering standing for League office. Please volunteer! Give **Joan Domike**, Nominating Committee Chair, a call 202 966-3865.

**Excerpts of Remarks of Natalie A. Howard at
the Memorial Service for
Sheila Spear Keeny**

Sheila Keeny, for many decades provided outstanding leadership in the D C League of Women Voters. I was already a member when Sheila joined the League in 1965. Along with several very impressive academic degrees she brought with her a warm spirit, a kind heart and a mission to serve her community, her city and her nation. I remember Sheila Keeny well. She spoke out easily for what she believed in, always without rancor but with dignity and concern. There was never a hint of prejudice or bias in any of her remarks or actions.

She affiliated with the Cleveland Park Unit of DC League and her talents were immediately recognized. Sheila soon became the Unit Chairman and by the late sixties moved on to the League board of directors as Calendar Chair. That entailed guiding the production and sale of the League Calendar, our signature item and major fund-raiser.

The early seventies found her co-chairing the Land Use and energy committee which later became her Environmental Quality Committee. At that time our monthly newsletter reported the resource information on green paper. Members waded through many pages of Sheila's detailed information on hydrocarbons and fluorocarbons as we advocated for cleaner air and for cleaning the nations brooks and estuaries. It is because of her work that I often tell friends, the League of Women Voters was in the forefront of saving the planet long before "Green" became popular. In the later seventies, representing The District of Columbia in the National Capital Area (NCA) league, with other suburban members, Sheila drafted positions aimed at guiding the League in addressing national public and private land use goals, including the role of the federal government in land use decisions.

The eighties found her as our elected

vice president deeply immersed in her International Relations Committee as they tackled problems of reducing the federal deficit. The late eighties had us reading more green pages, along with attending seminars and panel discussions as Sheila led the Star Wars studies, *on the implications of arms control and the budget*.

As DC League president 1989-91 Sheila was a modern day embodiment of intellect, energy and compassion. Organization and efficiency were her hallmark. She found the time to be a confidant and advisor to many. Her advice was always inspirational. We have her memos to her board members articulating every detail of programs to be covered, but included also were questions that showed the necessity for your participation. She was intensely devoted to the League. Illness interrupted but did not halt, her service.

Later, now thinking globally, Sheila organized trips to the United Nations when non-government organizations were a part of the agenda. I was in New York with Sheila and the DC League for the United Nations, NGO conference on Sept. 11, 2001. As the sessions were canceled there was no place to go as all traffic in or out of the city came to a standstill. That was my second NGO conference with her. Sheila returned to the DC League board in 2003, again as Vice President in charge of national program, and chaired our League study of the Electoral College.

Sheila's many interests included the United Nations National Capital Area branch, the Great Decisions discussions and an informal group that met regularly to enjoy French language and culture. Her League career was marked by highly professional ethics and deep appreciation for those she served and those who served her. When I think of her now, I choose to remember the beautiful red Amaryllis on the piano.

---Mrs. Howard was invited by the Keeny Family to speak on behalf of the League at the Memorial Service held at the Woman's National Democratic Club November 20, 2011

**THANK YOU TO THE
UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA
FOR HONORING
LWVDC MEMBERS
FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO
WORLD PEACE, EDUCATION &
HUMAN RIGHTS**

**REMEMBERING PAST PRESIDENT
SHEILA SPEAR KEENY
THE WORLD WILL MISS YOU, SHEILA.**

**HONORING DR. BILLIE A. DAY
2011 UNA-NCA
LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD RECIPIENT
LWVDC PAST PRESIDENT
UNA GLOBAL CLASSROOMS
PROGRAM ADVOCATE**

**RECOGNIZING RECENT UNA-NCA LOCAL
HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDEES
LWVDC BOARD MEMBER MADLYN CALBERT
& REV. W.E. CALBERT
D.C. VOTING RIGHTS CHAMPION KATHY SCHMIDT
VOTER SERVICES CO-CHAIR JUDITH A. SMITH**

Calendar

Jan. 4, 2012 (Wed.)9:45-12pm **Board Meeting.**

Jan. 4, 2012 (Wed.)2:30 **Great Decisions** Organizational Meeting. Ingleside at
Rock Creek 3050 Military Rd. NW Joan Wilson in charge. – see p. 5

Jan. 10 (Tues.)10am-12pm Help **register new voters** at the courthouse. –see p. 6

January 16-25 Unit meetings HIV/AIDS - See page 4
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Jan. 25 (Wed.) noon **National Program Planning** General Meeting/Brown Bag on
Criminal Sentencing. noon (tentative) at the League Office– see p. 5

Jan. 27 (Sat.) 9-11:30 program 11:30 lunch. **LWV of the Fairfax Area General
Meeting on Voter ID** COUNTRY CLUB OF FAIRFAX. Program Free. Lunch \$35.
Luncheon Reservation Deadline January 13. Questions, call Mary at 703-319-2185

Feb. 1 (Wed.)9:45-12pm **Board Meeting.**

Feb. 14 (Tues.)10am-12pm Help **register new voters** at the courthouse. –see p. 6



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (LWVDC)

FACTS & ISSUES

HIV/AIDS CRISIS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 2012

LWV has health and education positions that allow our League to take action to help reduce HIV/AIDS in Washington, D.C. This is a critical health problem that has generated a great deal of attention and witnessed some recent progress, but requires much more action.

LWVDC has hosted two public meetings – one on the global situation and its impact on DC, the other on local government and community programs. January 2012 units are asked to recommend the best next steps – for example:

- organize and host another public forum to focus specifically on how to make current action programs more effective – perhaps with an eye on cooperating with agencies and organizations in surrounding counties.
- locate organizations – in the city and the counties -- whose programs allow LWVDC to cooperate directly on issues such as improving housing for individuals with HIV/AIDS, requiring HIV/AIDS testing be part of routine physical examinations and checkups.
- Support legislation when it is introduced into City Council. To illustrate, City Council Health Committee Chairman David Catania has said he would require all physicians, nurses and physician assistants to take three hours of instruction on HIV/AIDS topics every two years as a condition for keeping their licenses. The Medical Society of the District of Columbia objects to such a mandate.
- something else
- all of the above

Background on HIV/AIDS

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). HIV kills or damages the body's immune system cells so it is not able to combat infections or diseases. HIV positive people are at very high health risk. The first signs of HIV infection may be flu-like symptoms. Severe symptoms may not appear until months or years later, which is one of the great challenges in getting early treatment. A blood test is needed to confirm HIV infection. There is no cure, but there are many medicines to fight both HIV infection and the infections and cancers that come with it. People can live with the disease for many years. (For more information see the National Library of Medicine's website: medlineplus.gov)

The first HIV/AIDS cases surfaced in the 1930s, but the number increased dramatically in the 1980s among homosexual men. The stigma of AIDS being a homosexual disease persists though it afflicts both sexes and all ages – embryos get it from their mothers, for instance, and middle aged women are a growing high risk group. (See chart on significant numbers.)

HIV is contracted primarily through sexual intercourse, but also from the use of intravenous needles, which puts drug users, hemophiliacs, and blood transfusion patients 'at risk.' The disease spreads through direct contact with an infected person's bodily fluids (blood, semen, saliva, tears, etc.) Women can pass it to their babies during pregnancy or childbirth. However, HIV-positive blood presents the greatest risk of transmission.

Significant Numbers:

Today roughly 34 million people in the world live with HIV/AIDS; 3.4 million (or 10%) are children 15 years and younger. In 2010, 1.8 million with HIV/AIDS died and 2.7 million people were newly infected.

More than 1 million individuals in the United States are estimated to be HIV positive. Around 1/3 of them do not know they have HIV. In DC, 3% of adults are known to have HIV/AIDS, but estimated that an additional 3%-4% are unaware of their infection.

In Washington, D.C. it is estimated that:

-- 1 in 20 adults have HIV/AIDS. This high rate -- roughly that of Sub-Saharan Africa -- is similar to urban areas throughout the U.S. and is lower, for instance, than in Miami and New York City.

--1 in 7 gay or bisexual men are HIV positive.

--1 in 3 gay or bisexual African-American men are HIV positive.

-- African-Americans account for 3 in 4 cases of HIV/AIDS

-- 1 in 21 African-Americans, 1 in 47 Hispanics/Latinos and 1 in 66 whites have HIV/AIDS

HIV and AIDS also occur at different levels in different age ranges. In the District, people aged 40-49 have the highest rate of infection, with almost 8% of these adults living with HIV/AIDS. Among all other adults the rate exceeds 1%. The rate among children is much smaller.

Prevention

Sexual abstinence is a sure way to prevent HIV infection. However, condoms (male and female) can reduce the risks significantly. In addition, intravenous needles never should be shared, whether their purpose is medicinal or for recreational drugs. Hospitals and clinics have become increasingly diligent to avoid both contaminated needles and blood, but accidents do happen. Individuals should feel free to ask questions of their physicians and other health care providers.

New research findings show early treatment of HIV-infected individuals both enhances their health and lessens chances they will spread the virus to others. New financial aid from the city and the federal government might be necessary to provide the needed medicine.

DC Government Activity

The City has made strides with the distribution of free condoms. Washington was in the vanguard of this effort. Beginning in 2007, the Department of Health provides condoms at

no charge. Condoms are available in high schools through nurses, among other places. In Washington, in addition, public and private testing is widespread: 111,000 individuals were tested last year. It is done automatically in emergency rooms, for example, and is becoming routine in physician's offices. The city also gives free HIV testing at DMV locations and Income Maintenance Centers.

The District has a needle exchange program, which Congress has threatened to stop. Such programs are known to reduce the rate of HIV/AIDS across the country.

The sex education curriculum in DC public schools includes open discussion of the use of condoms. The manual contains a project for grade 6 and a curriculum for middle school, where students can choose to take the course in grade 7, 8 or 9. Senior high schools began using a manual called "Making Proud Choices" one or two years ago, but the extent of its use is not known.

For those living with HIV/AIDS, city services include assistance with medications, dental care, transportation, baby sitting/child care plus substance abuse treatment and mental health services. A full list of these services is available at the website: <http://www.dchealth.dc.gov/doh/cwp/>. City agencies with HIV/AIDS responsibilities include the Department of Health www.dchealth.dc.gov and the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration (HAHSTA).

Early this year, Mayor Gray created an HIV/AIDS Commission, which has 27 members representing government, the medical community, business, faith-based organizations, health, nonprofit and community groups with HIV/AIDS programs. The Commission has been asked to: recommend policies to reduce HIV infection rates; increase testing; improve access to treatment and housing; recommend ways to work with the National HIV/AIDS program regarding (1) public-private partnerships on health care delivery and related services, and (2) coordination and collaboration across jurisdictional and international boundaries, and recommend ways to create training and employment opportunities within the District.

Activities of Community Groups

Metro TeenAids helps DC teenagers confront all sexually transmitted diseases as well as HIV/AIDS. It offers counseling and testing, prevention education, pregnancy testing, care advocacy, comprehensive risk counseling service, and free condoms to boys and girls. It reaches out to schools (public and charter) and partners with community, faith-based, local and federal government agencies and organizations – focusing on educating and advocating for HIV/AIDS prevention.

Metropolitan Washington, Public Health Association puts great emphasis on the need to improve living conditions for persons living with HIV/AIDS by obtaining suitable housing and healthcare, and helping them secure living-wage jobs as well as keep their jobs if diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. www.mwpha.org

The Women's Collective sponsors two programs that strive to provide HIV/AIDS prevention information and assistance to girls and women 12 years and older: (1) The Sister Act Institute enhances effective communication – using creative and interactive activities entailing art, song and dance -- and covers sexual health issues, including prevention, care management, individual and family counseling, and free and confidential HIV testing services. (2) Between Us Girls helps females aged 12-25 obtain skills to become positive advocates for safer sex behaviors and gain knowledge about HIV testing and HIV/AIDS prevention. Both programs offer family care management services, support services for depression and other mental health problems, food banks, prevention through testing and counseling services, and free medication. www.womenscollective.org

Whitman-Walker Health has expanded from an HIV/AIDS clinic to a one-stop shop for the gamut of health care. Regarding HIV/AIDS, it assigns a mentor to each participant when he or she first enters and takes a holistic approach to the care of persons living with the HIV/AIDS virus – offering prevention education, testing and care, legal services, and help with obtaining and taking medicines. The mentor has had experience with HIV/AIDS; therefore, can have a positive influence. www.whitman-walker.org

Other groups include the National Council of Negro Women, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, DC Appleseed and the United Nations Association/National Capital Area.

Churches and church groups have made contributions, but have not been as active as many think they should be, according to participants in both forums hosted by LWVDC. At the most recent, Rev. Dr. Crystal Kuykendall said the Family Life Center, Shiloh Baptist Church, which she had headed, expressed regret that her group lost its grant for HIV/AIDS work. But, when the program was operating, it went into DC public schools, and 33 churches provided counseling on HIV/AIDS prevention and care management to 215 teen-age mothers.

Prepared by Goody Braun, LWVDC Health Committee Chair and Julia Dieperink, LWVDC Program Intern

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1100 15th St. NW - 11th Floor * Washington, D.C. 20005 * 202-222-0710 * lwvdc.org