



The League of Women Voters  
of Umpqua Valley

P.O. Box 2434, Roseburg, OR 97470

November 18, 2004

Dear League President,

The League of Women Voters of Umpqua Valley is proposing **Homeless Youth in Oregon** as a study item for adoption at the State League convention in May 2005. We have come to concurrence on such a study locally, and we see that our county's situation reflects conditions across the state. Homeless kids are on the street and under the bridges in cities and towns all over Oregon.

We were launched into our study when we realized that American citizens are not allowed food stamps if they are between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Nor can a young person not living with his or her family, receive housing or medical services without a parental/guardian signature. This reflects the common assumption that children belong with their families. According to Dona Bolt, Specialist in the Homeless Education Program of the Oregon Department of Education, "...the majority of youth leaving home are leaving to cope with what they perceive as an untenable circumstance, and more often than not, the circumstance involves some or all of the following: emotional and /or physical abuse, domestic violence, family distress, and poverty." Once on the street, more than 50% are involved in prostitution or other survival crime.

A statewide study is appropriate. We helped our county's Commission on Children and Families respond to a query about the status of homeless youth from the Task Force on Homeless and Runaway Youth. This report and others will soon be presented to the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services of the Oregon Legislature. Such awareness by our legislators suggests that it is timely for the LWV to be arriving at a position, so we can influence the eventual decisions.

The League's role is raising awareness in the community and leveraging collaborative partnerships in solving these problems. During our study, we tapped a surprising fund of energy ready to work on the solutions to the problems facing these young people. There are agencies, non-profits, religious groups, and individuals who are working independently on aspects of this issue. Our interest is more than timely! The situation seems to be waiting for community encouragement and leadership of the sort the LWV does so well.

The proposal included here will be supported in detail by information available on our website on December 1, 2004. Our work on this study has been exciting. We are eager to offer any encouragement your Program Chair considers helpful in presenting this item for approval in your unit meetings.

Sincerely,

Robin Wisdom  
President, LWVUV

Jacqueline Pratt  
Local Item Chair  
LWVUV