



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF NEW JERSEY

SUMMARY REPORT: LEAGUE MEMBERS LOOK AT IMMIGRATION

Members of sixteen different local leagues/units (from ten of New Jersey's twenty-one counties) participated in the LWV/NJ survey and discussion concerning immigration during 2010 and 2011. (See **Conduct** below.) Detailed knowledge is generally more limited than the Immigration Committee expected. Indeed it is more limited than most participants expected until they tried to answer the questions, even if they already understood that they might need substantial help from others in their communities. Nonetheless, most found the survey and discussion to lead to increased interest as well as increased understanding.

Changes League members associate with recent immigrants in their communities

Two or more participants mentioned:

- Increased diversity of background, skills, cultural ways, games played in playgrounds, ethnic restaurants, food stores, and other stores
(Some northern communities have large numbers of temporary residents rather than immigrants, especially business people sent by Japanese and Korean companies who nonetheless add to the diversity of these communities)
- Increased workforce, including professional, manual, and low cost labor
- Increased burden on social services, including emergency healthcare services provided for immigrants with no insurance and hospital/emergency care provided to those who have avoided healthcare because of no insurance until more serious care is required
- Language issues, including ESL classes, communication/bureaucratic issues, lower participation in civic life, and less certainty of understanding of complex community issues such as those concerning the environment
- Increase in crowding and multi-family households

At least one participant mentioned each of the following:

- Concern about gangs (including pointing to immigrants as the cause)
- Lower test scores in schools with multi-ethnic/non-English speaking students
- Increased use of bicycles for transportation
- Increase in Spanish-language taxis
- Income for existing churches from rentals to immigrant churches
- Betting on volleyball

Issues League members see as important

Few League members are ready to speak for their communities generally, and fewer yet are ready to speak for their recent immigrants. Nonetheless, language issues stood out as the area they see as most important across both those groups and the Leagues themselves. A path to permanent residence or citizenship for unauthorized immigrants was seen as important for recent immigrants as well as for League members. Other issues noted as important for most League members included balancing family reunification and workforce needs in allotting visas and law enforcement issues surrounding immigration.

Interest in “fact sheet” about allocation of temporary visas among League members.

Few Leagues are looking for speakers on immigration, but the area of temporary or seasonal visas generated requests for a fact sheet from half the participating Leagues.

Different communities differ in immigrants, their treatment, and how fully they are accepted

Hiring sites: None of the seven League units that provided detailed information about their communities had formal hiring sites.

- Three had informal sites, however. These sites create at least minor problems by impeding traffic and crowding pedestrians in the area. At one, which has grown from a local to a regional site, some residents express some fear of the individuals who frequent it. These sites provide neither social services nor other services than hiring.
- Those with no sites, neither formal nor informal, generally saw little need, neither for their immigrants nor for those who might hire them. The fourth saw some need, but believed that sites in nearby communities must meet it.

Health care: When asked to identify where and how recent immigrants in their communities received health care, participating Leagues identified a variety of different community groups, health care organizations, sliding payment scales, and other charities. Children were seen as different in their care only in that schools provide some of the care, and identify some of the needs, such as lead issues and vaccinations. One major community hospital noted that no formal records are kept of immigrant status, but it estimates that 2,000 of its 5,000 annual clinic patients are unauthorized immigrants, sent there by emergency rooms. It also notes that most immigrants are young and healthy, and that many recent immigrants still go back and forth to their countries of birth and receive at least some of their healthcare there.

Housing: Three of the six Leagues answering did not report crowding issues resulting from recent immigrants. One League reported denser immigration populations overburdening schools and social services. One said that issues of crowding had been documented, but given little or no evidence of related problems such as fire safety or health, they felt the “problems” were cultural rather than health-related. The third said issues had been raised, but not documented. It did note, however, that neither officially “affordable” housing nor public housing are available to unauthorized immigrants.

Safety/law enforcement: None of the communities' law enforcement agencies participate in the enforcement of federal immigration laws except as required by the state's Attorney General. Enforcement of laws is generally seen as even-handed, with local police doing outreach to recent immigrants as well as others in the community. The police chief in one community was the one to draft the ordinance on how all community members were to be treated equally without regard to immigration status, and to require sensitivity training of all members of his force. Another police force is involved in the local provision of identification cards to facilitate use of services such as libraries by those with no access to other identification. Most saw no or minor costs associated with the influx of recent immigrants.

Two of the communities noted small numbers of violent harassment, but on the part of youths, not of law enforcement. Profiling on the part of police was believed to exist, but not to be common.

Bicycle safety, including use of helmets, night bicycling, and need for more sidewalks to separate bicyclists and pedestrians, is an increasing concern for three of the communities, but not one that has created major issues.

Acceptance of recent immigrants: League members from all communities covered felt there was at least some acceptance, and in three communities they thought it was largely complete, pointing to members of the immigrant community who were prominent in the community generally, and to the even-handed treatment of all. One League noted that acceptance varies by neighborhood and socioeconomic status. One League said that recent immigrants, including unauthorized immigrants, were seen as an essential part of the community's workforce, but that lack of acceptance can feel stressful and intimidating.

DETAILS OF THE CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY

Note that all information should be considered qualitative, not quantitative. It represents information and attitudes among League members, not New Jerseyans generally, and even that representation is tentative given the small numbers of responses.

Participation in the survey: Sixteen local league units from roughly 40 total Leagues participated in one way or another. Participation included:

- Formal response to both parts of the survey distributed (7)
- Formal response to the first part of the survey, but not the second (4)
- Regular participation in the LWVNJ Immigration Committee's discussion of the survey (but not included above) (1)
- Discussions, questions, or requests for information during the course of the survey which were generated in part by the survey even though they did not lead to completed surveys (4).

Participating Leagues came from ten of New Jersey's twenty-one counties.

Timing of the survey: Both parts of the survey were sent out to all Local Leagues in May 2010. Most completed responses to Part 1 came back within the next two months. Most Part 2

responses came in during the summer and fall, a few trickled in during the winter and one additional response is still expected.

Recent immigrants: Because the survey asked about “recent immigrants,” we asked Leagues to tell us how they would define the phrase. Most see recent immigrants as those here for “5 to 10 years.” Only one League mentioned a shorter period (three months), and none mentioned a longer period. After ten years, many immigrants are probably still seen as immigrants, but most League members no longer see them as recent.

Wording of survey questions: The survey is available at <http://www.lwvnj.org/members>

Prepared by Deborah Macmillan with help from the rest of the LWVNJ Immigration Committee as well as from all participants in the survey and all those who helped them.