

League of Women Voters of the Copper Country December, 20 2018

Guidelines for Agency Observers

League observers are an extension of the League into their community.

Observers should:

- Wear a League pin - if asked, explain that they represent LWV of the Copper Country
- Arrange to be on email list to receive agenda.
- Listen, observe - especially action items - and take notes.
- Be discrete and courteous.
- Know the function of agency.
- Know the jurisdiction (city, county, region).
- Learn the names and titles of agency/board members.
- Verify date, time and place of meeting.
- Be familiar with open government laws - Brown act (know both what is required to be in open sessions and what does not need to be disclosed to the public).

Here is a link to a guide to the Brown Act:

<http://www.cacities.org/UploadedFiles/LeagueInternet/86/86f75625-b7df-4fc8-ab60-de577631ef1e.pdf>

For a short report to the relevant League board, (a paragraph or two) the observer should try to include as much of the following as possible:

- Who attended, who was absent from the meeting
- How the meeting was conducted. Whether there were any red flags about procedure, accountability and/or transparency as a public agency.
- Was the meeting announced in advance as required.
- Was the agenda available 24 hours in advance.
- Was the agenda followed.
- Did the meeting proceed in a professional manner.
- Were agenda items discussed by agency board members, or are decisions reached without discussion (this can happen when board members discuss items beforehand amongst themselves - not allowed by law [see Brown Act for specifics] or discussion doesn't take place because board members come prepared to vote and don't have additional questions)
- Were all action items posted online
- Was the meeting venue accessible to the public.
- Did any agenda items voted on relate to League positions/priorities and did decisions align or not with League positions/priorities.

In general League observers do not speak at meetings they observe. When comment from the League is needed, another League member (usually the League's president) will attend or write a letter to the agency head or the chair of the board. There may be an exception to this rule, but the observer should contact their president/liaison before making comments themselves to the agency. For example, the observer may want to remind the agency that not enough time was given to post the agenda or the description of the agenda item was insufficient for the public to know what was being discussed or voted on.

What does your League do with the information gathered? For example,

- Make written comments to the agency regarding correction of a violation of open government laws.
- Publish a short piece in the local and/or regional *Voter* to educate the League members on what an agency is doing/not doing.

Comments sometimes lead to significant changes in how an agency runs its meetings or comes to a decision on an issue if the observations lead to League testimony at the agency. If asked by someone attending the meeting why the League representative is there, the best answer is, "The League supports transparency in government. Observing this meeting is one way we support that principle." League observers also extend the League's visibility in their community.