



Testimony in Favor of AJR 196 and SFJ 100  
Assembly State and Local Government  
May 11, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Verelli and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey (LWVNJ). My name is Philip Hensley, I am the Democracy Policy Analyst with LWVNJ. We are here to testify in support of Assembly Joint Resolution 196.

Assembly Joint Resolution 196 and its companion, Senate Joint Resolution 100, would designate the month of August in New Jersey as "Civic Health Month." By passing this resolution, New Jersey would be joining a national movement and standing alongside over two hundred healthcare institutions across the country that have recognized the relationship between healthy communities and civic participation. New Jersey would be recognizing what public health research has increasingly shown: that our physical and mental health is linked to the health of our democracy.

In recent years, researchers and public health experts have demonstrated the significant empirical links between health and civic engagement. A literature review conducted by the RAND corporation found that "increases in physical and mental health and well-being are related to increases in civic engagement, whether through voting or through other activities, such as volunteering and membership in civic organizations."<sup>1</sup> Although the nature of the causal link between health and civic engagement continues to be studied, the evidence suggests that improvements in health and civic participation are mutually reinforcing. For example, nonpartisan voter registration activities in medical settings have proven to be successful in registering patients to vote and increasing civic participation, as well as being associated with better individual-level health.

Civic health is about the capacity of our communities to change the social and economic conditions that determine their physical and mental well-being. Researchers have shown that health is not just determined by clinical treatment, but is also affected by social and economic conditions. Access to

---

<sup>1</sup>Christopher Nelson, J. S. (2023, February 1). *Examining Civic Engagement Links to Health*. Retrieved from Rand.org: [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3100/RR3163/RAND\\_RR3163.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3100/RR3163/RAND_RR3163.pdf)

quality education and housing improve public health, while deep poverty, systemic discrimination, and social exclusion have been found to negatively impact health outcomes. These social and economic inequities, in turn, are tied to inequities in civic participation. Communities with robust civic institutions and broad civic engagement are able to marshal resources to address the many social determinants of health. But barriers to civic participation, including legal barriers to voting and efforts to disenfranchise and discourage voters from participating, can in turn exacerbate social and health inequities. As the *Compendium on Civic Engagement*, produced by University of California, Riverside and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, notes: “Communities that experience fewer barriers to involvement in various forms of civic engagement are more likely to have their needs addressed than those groups that have limited opportunities to participate, or that otherwise face barriers to civic engagement.”<sup>2</sup> As the *Compendium* goes on to show, the link between health and civic participation extends far beyond voting, to include other forms of civic participation, including attending public meetings, contacting officials, and community organizing. These individual-level behaviors are associated with better health outcomes for the individuals concerned, and collectively, they constitute the kind of civic engagement which empower communities to advocate for policies that produce better health outcomes at the community level.

The League has long supported policies which promote equitable access to healthcare alongside our work promoting and encouraging civic engagement. The declaration of “Civic Health Month” in New Jersey would further both of those goals, and serve to highlight the connections between them. We respectfully ask that you vote yes on Assembly Joint Resolution 196.

Testimony presented by:

Philip Hensley  
Democracy Policy Analyst  
League of Women Voters of NJ

---

<sup>2</sup> University of California, Riverside and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2023, February 1). *Compendium on Civic Engagement and Population Health*. Retrieved from Center for Social Innovation: <https://live-ucr-socialinnovation.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/2022-09/compendium-civic-engagement-health-june2021-2.pdf>