**Welcoming Immigrants in Washington State**

**Position in Brief**: The League of Women Voters of Washington believes that all residents of Washington state, regardless of immigration status or citizenship, should be treated with dignity and respect. This means that all residents, regardless of immigration status or citizenship, should have access to essential state-funded services, have the opportunity to avail themselves of legal representation in court and immigration proceedings, and have the opportunity to live and work in safety. The League encourages all elected officials and government leaders in Washington to continue to take action to ensure these fundamental rights. It also means that political leaders in Washington have an obligation to condemn xenophobia, discrimination, and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The League of Women Voters of Washington State believes:

1. Xenophobia, racism, discrimination against immigrants, and anti-immigration rhetoric must be condemned at all levels of government, business, and civil society. In particular, elected officials and government leaders in Washington state should take clear and consistent actions to counter these threats to democracy.
2. The State of Washington should continue to challenge federal policies that undermine the rights of immigrants in the state.
3. The State of Washington should take leadership in ensuring access to legal services for all persons, regardless of immigration status. This is particularly important for immigrants in removal proceedings.
4. State and local governments should seek to provide essential services to all residents, regardless of immigration status.
5. The State of Washington should take steps to ensure effective coordination amongst state agencies and other organizations that interact with immigrants and refugees, including funding to permit such coordination.
6. Washington state should ensure safe working conditions, fair pay and benefits, and the right to unionize for all workers, regardless of immigration status.
7. The state should urge the federal government to issue timely work authorization permits to immigrants and refugees.

**Background**: The League of Women Voters adopted a nation-wide policy on immigration in 2008. This position supports admission policies that are in the national interest, as well as protection of immigrants’ rights, regardless of their status. It does not address many issues of state and local laws, policies, and programs that concern immigrants once they reside in the US.

In 2023, delegates at the state Convention approved a Study on Welcoming Immigrants in Washington state. The name of the study reflected Washington’s official commitment to ensure “the State of Washington remains a place where the rights and dignity of all residents are maintained and protected (SB 5497).” The proposed study was to examine a broad scope of policies affecting immigrants and the role the League could play to ensure immigrants have pathways to economic, social, and civic engagement in the communities in which they live.

Over 18 months, the Immigration Study team conducted rigorous research on the situation of immigrants, the challenges they faced, and the contributions they made to the state. The study defined immigrants as persons in the US who are foreign born, with the exception of foreign-born children who derive their U.S. citizenship from their parents. There are more than 30 different categories of immigrant status, each with different rights and benefits, some with pathways to citizenship and others without. The study findings also pertain to stateless persons who do not have the nationality of any country.

The study team, composed of League members from throughout the state, used both quantitative and qualitative analysis to address these issues. The sources of information include: a literature review; survey of Local Leagues; state legislation, regulations and law cases pertaining to immigrants; and census and other quantitative data on immigrants in Washington. Interviews were conducted with 25 informants representing expertise in a range of issues, geographic areas, and socio-economic characteristics of immigrants, including state and county officials, nongovernmental organization (NGOs) that are led or work with immigrants, public schools, healthcare facilities, employers, and immigrants. The team also engaged in a systematic review of websites and reports issued by state and local governments and NGOs working with and for immigrants and refugees.

In January 2025, the state board formally accepted the completed study. In February, the committee began presenting highlights of the report to representatives from local leagues. Meetings to discuss the findings and determine if local leagues concurred with the findings took place. From this consensus process, the positions were adopted by the LWVWA board.