



LWVIL Testimony on School Funding September 2008

The League of Women Voters Illinois believes that schools should be provided stable, reliable, and adequate revenue through a combination of federal, state, and local sources. That schools are currently funded in a manner that is heavily weighted on local resources, creating a disparity in quality based on local property wealth, is unacceptable.

The League recognizes that the current method of taxation is regressive, bringing to bear a heavier tax burden on the lowest-earning 20% of Illinois households. We support a graduated income tax as a preferable method of taxation rather than the current flat income tax.

However, until such time as a progressive income tax is a reality, Illinois needs a tax policy that will balance the inequities of tax burden and that will address the inequities of funding that doom schools to what their property tax base can support rather than what is needed to supply a quality education for the population they serve.

Therefore, the LWVIL strongly supports the concepts offered in HB 750 and SB 2288, including:

1. A balance between property tax and State funding, with the State assuming the major responsibility for school funding. The LWVIL opposes a funding system where all moneys would come solely from State funds. (This is in answer to Meeks' latest 'Doomsday' proposal)
2. An increase in income taxes balanced with a family tax credit for the lowest-earning households.
3. An expansion of sales tax to include services.
4. The creation of the School District Property Tax Relief Fund, requiring the General Assembly to appropriate moneys into the Fund to provide grants from the Fund to school districts. It must require that property taxes be abated in school districts by the amount of the grants from the Fund.
5. Improved special education funds for personnel. The LWVIL believes this should include gifted programs.
6. Strong academic and fiscal accountability measures such as those outlined in the School Quality and Accountability Standards.

In short, the League of Women Voters of Illinois supports and urges the General Assembly to enact tax reform legislation during the next Legislative session. We strongly support HB750/SB2288, which provides a comprehensive plan to address the needs of the State for equitable, sustainable, and consistent revenues to fund schools and other important social programs that have been shortchanged for the past several years. The League also supports a progressive income tax, a broad based sales tax and the use of the property tax for only PARTIALLY funding education and local government services.

The current system of taxation fails to meet these criteria and fails to provide adequate revenues for education and other vital state services. These discussions have been going on for far too many years and it is time for our elected legislators to act in the name of good government and on behalf of all people of Illinois – especially the children who will inherit the debts that have been amassed due to the tax structural deficit.