

Leagues Accomplish County Ethics Law

The Leagues in Greater Cleveland successfully advocated for transition from three statutory commissioners to a charter form of government for Cuyahoga County. As County Government Chair, I'd been very involved, but it seems even more was needed. So for our next act – the toughest Ethics Code in all Ohio just got adopted!

The 2010 transition to an Executive-Council structure was arduous. The mandated Transition Advisory Group asked me to form a LWV “Workgroup” to research and develop an ethics ordinance for the new government. They wanted our “good housekeeping seal.” So ten of us went back to work. Six months later, after scrutinizing ethics codes from many similar U.S. counties, we wove the best ideas together into a best-practices draft ordinance.

The new Council's Rules/Ethics Committee received our proposal and set about merging it with their own ideas and Ohio Law. Nearly all provisions we recommended made it into the final product, many in our exact words. True, our preferred readability and coherence took rather a hit, but they promise a “plainspeak” manual to improve upon the “legalese” they had to add.

To enforce those rules, though, the new lawmakers preferred an approach different from the “ethics board” we recommended. Instead, they fashioned one of the first county Inspector General agencies in the US, for receiving complaints and investigating code violations. We watched, critiqued, and feel cautiously confident this approach will prove effective.

The Leagues of Women Voters (Cuyahoga Area, Cleveland Area, and Shaker Heights) share proud parenting rights to the remarkable reforms the voters of our county have wrought. Participants: League presidents, charter campaigners, and Ethics Workgroup members –Barbara Barlow, Ellen Carter, Mary Dunbar, Susan Gray, Barbara Guy, Janice Patterson, Barbara Sones, Roslyn Talerico, Debra Talley, and Lynda Mayer, Chair.