



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF THE FAIRFAX AREA**

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**LWVFA Carryover Budget Testimony to the Board of Supervisors  
September 9, 2014**

Good morning, Chairman Bulova and members of the Board of Supervisors. I am Helen Kelly, Co-President of the League of Women Voters, speaking on behalf of our members in Fairfax County. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am happy to say that the League supports the County Executive's proposal to use \$3.5M of carryover funds to purchase new voting equipment in FY2015 rather than in FY2016. Because the cost of the new voting machines was lower than expected, there will be a budget savings of \$2.5 M in FY2016. Use of carryover will allow the Office of Elections to test the new equipment and to train election officers to use it well before the 2016 presidential election. We hope this will mean shorter lines on election day.

As taxpayers, we are grateful that you have maintained Fairfax County's AAA bond rating. And with the challenging economy, we understand that decisions to spend money can never be made lightly. With this in mind, we honestly believe that our proposal to begin paying salary supplements to Public Defenders is a good idea. Here's why:

- Prosecutors, who are County employees working for the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney, receive salary supplements that raise their pay, depending on seniority, between 25% and 72% higher than Fairfax Public Defenders who handle the same cases with the same defendants in the same courtrooms. And the Public Defenders have a higher average workload than the Prosecutors do.
- Public Defenders are State, not County, employees. However, Fairfax County already pays, and we support, salary supplements to its Magistrates, who are also State employees. It also pays over \$10 million annually to non-Fairfax and non-governmental agencies through the contributory fund.
- In 2008, Fairfax legislators in the General Assembly voted to allow local supplements to Public Defender salaries because it was clear that the General Assembly was not going to pay salaries for Northern Virginia that were comparable to what Fairfax was providing to the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney. The situation has not changed since then.
- Because of the heavy workload and the low pay, there is much higher turnover in the Office of the Public Defender than in the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney. While the Prosecutors have replaced 22 attorneys in the last 11 years, the Public Defenders have replaced 33 attorneys and 11 Administrative Assistants in only seven years. According to the Alexandria Public Defender, the people hurt most are the clients who find themselves in a courtroom where the Prosecutor has ten times more experience than the Public Defender.

We estimate that our proposal would cost \$220,000 plus benefits in 2015 and \$440,000 plus benefits in 2016.

We know you cannot, nor do we expect you to, right every wrong in the Commonwealth's appropriations. However, we believe that salary supplements for Public Defenders are a good idea. Just as the early voting machine purchase helps guarantee our Constitutional right to vote, paying salary supplements to Public Defenders would help guarantee the Constitutional right to a fair trial for all defendants, regardless of their income. I will add that we make this proposal not just because we think it's fair, but also because we honestly think it's doable.

Again, we agree with the County Executive's proposal for the early purchase of the new voting equipment in FY2015 to allow time to test it and to train election officers before the next Presidential election. We also support paying salary supplements to Fairfax Public Defenders, who, in partnership with Prosecutors, Judges, Magistrates and other Court personnel, help our Court system to function the way it should.