

I'm Barbara Wysocki and I'm here on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Champaign County. I've come to endorse the recommendations found in Dr. Kalmanoff's report to the County Board and to the citizens of Champaign County regarding incarceration and the criminal justice system. I can only speak on behalf of the League, if the endorsement is consistent with the position of both local and state League organizations. In this case, both are already on record supporting the implementation of "intermediate sanctions" in the community. Both favor prompt trials, support an adequate and professional staff to work with those incarcerated, and encourage expanded prevention and treatment program to ease the burden on the criminal justice system. The League also promotes a bail system that does not rely on financial ability alone as a criterion for pretrial release and a more streamlined assessment of a suspect prior to arrest and booking. The League backs proposals that promote programs and services for self-improvement – so that the focus from the beginning of one's confinement is being better prepared on release.

It goes without saying, then, that we are gratified to see so many of these recommendations on the agenda for consideration this evening for incorporation into the 2014 budget. There is no doubt that implementing these recommendations is an ambitious undertaking – one that will require the cooperation of every department in the county judicial system and law enforcement areas and their key personnel.

Besides the report itself, the League also endorses the process that brings us to this point. While the findings and recommendations are themselves noteworthy, the League holds up for appreciation the work of a number of individuals both in and out of county government. Over a year of study, research, and dialogue has ensued, providing a model of civic discourse around a concern where there are strong opinions and feelings and a long history of practices and encoded and statutory procedures. Much of the methodology employed is consistent with the procedures League uses in reaching consensus and in deciding subsequent action.

I have not addressed the matter of our jail facilities, and that is purposeful. While we deplore the conditions in the downtown jail, we are willing to trust – for the moment -- that the successful implementation of other recommendations will sufficiently decrease the jail population rendering that site unnecessary for continued incarceration. We also recognize that further study will be needed to either re-purpose or re-design that facility or to move in an entirely new direction for the site itself.