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League of Women Voters of WI Opposition to AB624 and SB610

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin opposes AB624/SB610, which calls for enhanced drug penalties within 1,000 feet of a homeless shelter. This legislation expands ineffective and expensive sentencing enhancers, rather than investing in proven public health solutions.

AB624/SB610 will disproportionately impact unhoused and other vulnerable populations through its prioritization of punishment over treatment. By designating a 1,000 foot radius a “drug-free zone,” the bill effectively criminalizes the very areas where unhoused individuals seek services. The bill risks further marginalizing individuals experiencing poverty and contributes to cycles of incarceration.

As stated in our public policy position on criminal justice, the League of Women Voters supports “reliance on evidence-based research in decision-making about law enforcement programs and policies (including scheduled, periodic audits of program and policy effectiveness)” (Impact on Issues pg 137). Research has shown that “drug-free zone” laws do not deter or reduce drug activity or improve public safety. Instead, these laws contribute to mass incarceration.

The reliance on high-cost sentence enhancers contributes to the diversion of resources that would be better spent on addressing root causes, including substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and affordable housing. Incarceration is an ineffective primary response to a public health crisis.