

Oakland ballot proposals face court challenge

The League of Women Voters is in Oakland Circuit Court to block four public transportation advisory questions from going on the Nov. 4 ballot.

The questions are "misleading and poorly worded," according to Libby Richards, president of the Detroit Metro Area LWV.

Moreover, the county lacks legal authority to place the advisory questions on the ballot, the league charged Friday.

"The citizens would be poorly served by having to vote on such questions," Ms. Richards said of the proposals, which relate to the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority. "Our efforts at persuading the county commission to withdraw the questions, or at the very least reward them, were unsuccessful."

The league is pro-SEMTA. Placing the questions on the ballot was largely the work of anti-SEMTA commissioners John Peterson, R-Avon, and Anne Hobart, R-Waterford, and those who

object to a partly-underground rapid transit line.

REPRESENTING the league is Tom Downs, a former Constitutional Convention delegate and one of the state's top election law specialists. Downs is asking a court order to remove the advisory questions from the ballot.

The league is a nonpartisan voter education group with eight chapters in Oakland County. It charged:

- Robert Allen, county corporation counsel and legal adviser to the board, advised the board that neither the state constitution nor state laws granted counties authority to ask advisory questions on the ballot.
- "Elected officials are empowered to make decisions, difficult and controversial as some may be, and... should not abdicate that responsibility."
- The first ballot question ask, "Should a tax be assessed against the residents

of Oakland County for the construction, maintenance or operation of the transportation system, including a subway, as proposed by SEMTA?" The league said the question is poorly worded because it's unclear whether the intent is to ask willingness to give tax support or opinions of a subway project.

- Another ballot question asks, "Should the County of Oakland provide a transportation authority for the residents of Oakland County and raise funds for the construction, maintenance and operation of such a transit system?"

The league called it misleading because "a voter could assume incorrectly that a 'yes' vote... would give complete local control to Oakland County. This is questionable," it said, citing a law that gives three of nine board appointments to the governor.

- The league said many ramifications of Oakland's withdrawing from SEMTA — the subject of one question — are unexplained.

MS. RICHARDS said the league's own positions are that if it supports financial support of SEMTA, 4) opposes Oakland's withdrawing from SEMTA, 3) opposes setting up a separate Oakland County transit system and 4) has no opinion on the question of assessing taxes for a separate Oakland transit system.

County Board Chairman Wallace Gabler Jr., R-Royal Oak, who "reluctantly" voted to place the questions on the ballot, said:

"I generally follow the opinion of corporation counsel and respect it. But there was precedent for advisory questions in three or four other counties" — he cited Washtenaw and Kent — "so I saw no problem."

"There is no permissive legislation

(allowing advisory questions) but no restrictive legislation, either.

"My basic position is that there should have been one clean and concise ballot question. I reluctantly voted to

support on the basis of 5,000 petition signatures asking for a vote. My respect for the petition process overrode my feelings about the ambiguity of the questions. Most on the board didn't like

some parts of the wording." Gabler questioned whether the league's action was being taken soon enough to keep the proposals off the ballot.

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Cancer Society slates 'I Can Cope' programs

A patient education program designed to help people cope with cancer and its therapies is offered for eight weeks in Southfield.

The "I Can Cope" series will be presented from 7:30-8:30 p.m. on eight consecutive Mondays beginning Oct. 27 and continuing through Dec. 15. They will take place at the offices of the American Cancer Society, 29500 Southfield Road in Southfield.

Upholstered Healthcare Services is providing funding for this program.

Objectives of the patient education classes are three-fold: to increase the cancer patient's knowledge of the disease; to increase the patient's control over his/her life; and to decrease the anxiety felt about the disease.

Classes are instructed by inter-disciplinary teams of healthcare professionals including an oncologist, nurse, medical social worker, clinical dietitian, physical therapist, chaplain and community resource professionals.

The program will be co-led by Lynn Parker, clinical dietitian at Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital, and Josephine Wharf, nursing supervisor at Uptown Healthcare Services.

Cancer patients and family members can register for the "I Can Cope" course by calling the American Cancer Society at 857-5353.

There is no fee but class size is limited and participants are expected to attend every class session. Persons interested in courses at other tri-county locations should inquire at the same telephone number.

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