

As Sworn Guardians of the Constitution, Be a Part of the United States' Democratic Experiment—Make a Plan to Vote

“Your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have to create a more perfect union.”

—U.S. CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Being a lawyer is a gift. Through our profession, we have the privilege of taking an oath for justice and to uphold and protect the Constitution. That brings with it a certain amount of responsibility that I believe all attorneys have for the greater good. The right to vote is one of the most sacrosanct and cherished in our democracy and is mentioned no fewer than five times in the Constitution. This election year is like no other, and I urge everyone to take a moment to reflect on the meaning and power of that right, and to make a plan for casting your vote, no matter what party or causes you support. The New Jersey State Bar Association believes voting rights matter and has dedicated energy this year to reflect on the journey many have taken to earn that right and to urge attorneys to serve the public as poll workers. We celebrated the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Today, it is hard to believe that it would be at all controversial that women shouldn't have the right to fully participate in elections. But earning that right was hard fought for decades before the amendment was ratified in the summer of 1920.

I am in awe of the many women who fought in a more than seven decades-long struggle for women's suffrage, including New Jersey's own Alice Paul who organized a march and protests in front of President Woodrow Wilson's White House. Many of the women endured not only demeaning, sexist verbal attacks, but sometimes physical attacks and imprisonment. We stand on the shoulders of these brave, strong women. Unfortunately, that was not the final chapter in voting rights in our country, as we saw during the civil rights era and even still today.

This year we have a unique challenge to navigate: voting in the midst of a global public health pandemic. That is why this fall, the NJSBA teamed up with the New Jersey Secretary of State, as well as bar associations and election officials around the country, to be a part of Poll Worker Esq. It is a national non-partisan effort to ensure a fair and secure election by encouraging lawyers to sign up to be poll workers because even with mail-in ballots in New Jersey, poll workers are needed, since some voters will deliver their ballots to polling sites or cast provisional ballots in person on Election Day. The goal was to head off a predicted shortage of poll workers, who tend to be older and may not want to work the polls because they are part of a demographic that is at higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

I applaud all who volunteered to be a part of that project to protect voting rights of the citizens of New Jersey.

We all have a role to play in the election process. I have always believed it is good to get involved in your community, whether it is your town, your church or local politics. My involvement in politics began because I had a little itch when I was on maternity leave after my first daughter, Abigail, was born. I volunteered to make calls for a gubernatorial candidate. Though my candidate didn't win, I walked away from that experience energized from being a part of something consequential and bigger than myself. Since then, I have tried to also get my family involved in the hopes that it will cultivate a passion for leadership and democracy and an appreciation for the power of elections in my two daughters. I think it's starting to work. A few years ago, my younger daughter, Madeline, was running to be a representative for her third grade class. Her platform: end cold pizza in the cafeteria. Apparently, sometimes the pizza arrived on the students' lunch trays nearly frozen. Fast forward to Election Night party in our hometown of East Brunswick, where Maddie got to meet the very newly elected member of the local school board. She organized the other children at the party to approach the board member to lobby for hot pizza. He saw her passion and told her to reach out and she did. She emailed and set up an appointment and the board member ended up visiting the cafeteria at her school

and sampled the pizza. Based on that, she was invited to make a presentation at a school board meeting and the Superintendent acknowledged the issue.

I am happy to report that she won her election and the ovens were fixed so the children could enjoy hot pizza in the cafeteria. It was a great experience where she got to understand what it takes to be a leader and how to engage in the political process to address the needs of the public. We all have limited time. We all have practices and so many other things happening in our lives, especially now. But I implore each of you to make time for democracy. It doesn't matter if you are a Democrat, Republican or Independent, voting rights are voting rights, and I hope the lawyers of New Jersey will seize this opportunity to use and protect this important tool to help "create a more perfect union."