



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF WESTCHESTER

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Good Afternoon –

My name is Mary Beth Gose, and together with Marianna Stout, I am Co-President of the League of Women Voters of Westchester, which coordinates the activities of the 11 local Leagues within the County. On behalf of the Executive Committee of the League of Women Voters of Westchester, I thank the Legislation Committee for inviting the League to comment on the possible restructuring or elimination of the Board of Acquisition & Contract (BAC).

Although the League does not have a consensus position on the current proposals to restructure or eliminate the BAC, the League has, in its past annual letters to the Board of Legislators and Administration regarding the County Budget, expressed continuing concern about the BAC's lack of transparency in its deliberations and decision-making. In addition, members of the League's Executive Committee have attended all of the recent meetings of the Legislation Committee, and have closely followed the statements provided to this Committee by those involved in the process leading up to the BAC's abbreviated meetings of approval.

Consequently, the following remarks are the result of our long-time, closely-watched observations of both the BAC and of the current examination of its operations by the Board of Legislators and the County Executive's office.

It would appear that the BAC – or some other “mechanism” – is needed to provide a more timely and expeditious process than that which can be provided through normal budgetary proceedings under the Board of Legislators' current part-time schedule. Nevertheless, the formal, established process described to this Committee by participants in that preliminary process does not provide

public access to the meetings prior to the BAC's final votes on acquisitions and contracts, preventing the public and/or media from examining those proposed acquisitions and contracts before a vote is taken.

While also recognizing the need for confidentiality in matters of personnel contracts, the League questions why preliminary meetings leading to the BAC's votes could not be opened to the public and provide for "Executive Sessions" on such matters regarding personnel contracts, allowing for transparency in this important area of budget and management.

§100 of the Open Meetings Law provides that: "the citizens of this state be fully aware of and able to observe the performance of public officials and attend and listen to the deliberations and decisions that go into the making of public policy." Although the final decisions on contracts are listed in the BAC's minutes, the deliberations conducted by the BAC are not open to the public, leading a reasonable person to conclude that the BAC is not in compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

It is the League's position that if true transparency is desired at all levels of government, every effort should be made to open the proceedings of the Board of Acquisition and Contract to examination by the public, whether the public affords itself of that opportunity or not.

Again, on behalf of the Executive Committee of the League of Women Voters of Westchester, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue.