



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 25, 2014

CONTACT: Heather Hope-Hernandez
918-607-2923

**Tulsa League of Women Voters Supports Passage of County Tax Propositions on April 1 Ballot
*At-Risk Children and the Mentally Ill Will Be Most Helped by Passage of the Propositions***

TULSA—The League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa urges county voters to support the two propositions on the Tues., April 1 ballot. If passed, these propositions will fund the construction of a new juvenile facility, including a court and detention center, and additions to the Tulsa jail to combat unsafe conditions for police officers, staff and inmates in the overcrowded facility.

“It is clear from news reports and public meetings hosted by county officials that there is a genuine and pressing need for both projects,” said Kathleen Kastelic, Tulsa League of Women Voters president.

“The League adheres to well-studied and thoughtfully constructed positions when deciding whether to publically support or oppose a ballot issue,” Kastelic said. “Both of these sales-tax proposals meet our criteria for good government, for capital improvement bond issues, and for City of Tulsa revenue and budgeting.”

Of the two 15-year sales-tax propositions, one calls for a 0.041 percent sales tax to fund construction of a new juvenile justice center; the other asks voters to approve a 0.026 percent sales tax to fund construction at the Tulsa Jail. Passage of the two propositions would not increase sales tax in the Tulsa city limits; current sales tax within city limits would remain unchanged. The sales tax for areas in Tulsa County outside city limits would go up only slightly—less than one-tenth of one penny.

As has been widely reported, the Tulsa County Jail is overcrowded and does not have the facilities to handle the number and nature of mental health cases it has to deal with. The jail has 2,500 inmates but just 1,700 beds. And the open design makes it difficult to separate regular inmates from the rapidly growing number of inmates with mental illnesses. Over the first six months of 2013, the jail had more than 6,400 inmates with mental health issues and more than 4,300 inmates on psychiatric medications.

The current Juvenile Justice Center was built in 1969 and it is literally falling apart. Juvenile offenders, security, staff, and innocent abused and neglected children are all crammed into the crowded, deteriorating facility. Records show that fully 41 percent of the cases handled there involve children who have been victims of neglect or abuse.

“The League’s support for the two propositions does not mean we believe that the proposed building projects at these two facilities will solve the problems that led to the jail overcrowding and the increasing case-load at the Juvenile Justice Center,” Kastelic said. “The bigger issue of a critical lack of funding for both mental health services and public education must be addressed before we can expect to see a declining need for such facilities. Action on the part of the state legislature on both of these issues is urgently needed.”

-more-

About the League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization. Its mission is to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. For more information about the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa, visit lwvtulsa.org or call 918-747-7933.

###