

Remarks of Victoria Markell

League of Women Voters of Louisville

Louisville Metro Council

Committee on Health, Education & Housing

October 15, 2014

Good Afternoon Madam Chair, Members of this Committee and other Metro Council Members. I am Victoria Markell and I appear before you today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Louisville. I appreciate the opportunity to once again endorse a Resolution concerning CEDAW—the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women.

I say again because the last time the Louisville League discussed this topic before a local government body was in 2000 when the Jefferson County Fiscal Court adopted a similar resolution endorsing CEDAW. Commissioner Dolores Delahanty presented the resolution and it was unanimously accepted by her fellow Commissioners Russ Maple and Darryl Owen and signed by Jefferson County Judge Rebecca Jackson, a republican. It was just one example of how the county government worked in unison regardless of party affiliation. I will submit a copy of the 2000 Resolution with my written remarks.

The League of Women Voters is perhaps best known for our voter service and voter education activities including conducting candidate debates and forums. But we do much more. Since the 1920s the Louisville League has developed positions on all the major issues based on extensive research and discussions. We have monitored thousands of city and county government meetings. League members have been appointed to numerous boards and commissions and still serve on a wide variety. We have an understanding of how our Metro Government works and stand ready to support the good practices and offer solutions when improvement is needed.

It is due to this understanding and involvement that we joined the Cities for CEDAW Coalition. Earlier you heard from Reverend Barnett about the broad and diverse organizations that make up the Louisville Cities for CEDAW Coalition. These organizations have come together because we know that despite our best efforts—discrimination based on gender—exists in our community and we want to eliminate it. We want to demonstrate to the World that Louisville, Kentucky is a city within which girls and women can thrive on an equal basis.

When Coalition members first began meeting and discussing what steps we could take to assist Louisville in becoming a CEDAW City we anticipated writing an ordinance that would be far-reaching and call for—among other things—ratification of the original Treaty and inviting other cities to join Louisville in doing so. So that is what a few of the Coalition members did—crafted the perfect ordinance and brought it to the next full Coalition meeting.

During the meeting all the members present weighed the pros and cons of an Ordinance or Resolution and how far we would be able to advance this cause—who our partners would be and what compromises we might need to make to be successful. It was a very long meeting.

In the end CW Tina Ward-Pugh agreed to draft the Resolution in such a way that allows us to remain in solidarity with our Sisters around the country and to obtain the broadest nonpartisan support. The Coalition Members are pleased with this Resolution and ask for your full support when it comes to the full Metro Council for a vote.

The CEDAW Treaty has been around since the late 1970s and the League of Women Voters continues to support its ratification and advocate for it at the local, state, federal and international level. Obviously we have heard, read and studied all of the arguments used by those who oppose ratification. Some are easily countered by stating the facts and clearing up misunderstandings. Others are more challenging particularly when they resort to deliberate misrepresentations. While the Resolution before the Council does not call for ratification—it is based on the underlying principles of the Treaty.

This Resolution is very direct. It simply states that Louisville Metro Government opposes all forms of discrimination against girls and women and will not tolerate it. It does not call for the ratification of the CEDAW Treaty. It does not put in danger our national sovereignty. It does not contain any language that threatens the role of the family or motherhood. It does not address the issue of abortion. The Resolution does state that Louisville Metro Government is committed to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, to promoting the health and safety of women and girls, and to affording them equal academic, economic and business opportunities.

I do not believe for one moment that any member of this Council supports the practice of discriminating against any person based on gender. Therefore, I am hopeful this Resolution will again garner broad bipartisan—if not unanimous support.

In closing, first let me thank those of you who are co-sponsors of this Resolution. I look forward to working with you in the weeks ahead.

And I thank all of you for your time and consideration of this important Resolution.