

The League of Women Voters of Villages/Tri-County Partner With Local Organizations

Nonprofit Equal Ground educates local residents about state legislation that affects voters.

By **BREA JONES**
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Genesis Robinson knows information equals power.

As the executive director for Florida nonprofit Equal Ground, Robinson works to share information with Florida voters.

The nonprofit — which advocates for equality, health care access, fair elections, social justice and living wages — helps provide leadership development, collect petitions, educate and register voters in the state, with a focus on voters of color.

In an effort to educate local residents about state legislation affecting voters, the nonprofit explained the process of local government and reviewed legislation debated by state lawmakers throughout the 2025 legislative session during the On the Ground Tour: 2025 Legislative Debrief on July 20.

The Ocala event marked the 10th stop for the statewide tour that began June 7. Next, the nonprofit will travel to Hillsborough County, Bay County and Duval County.

Robinson said the purpose of the nonpartisan tour is to make sure all voters in the state are “informed, engaged and aware about the voting process.”

“We, the voters, are essential

to this process. This process exists because we exist,” he said. “I encourage you to get to know your elected officials regardless of their political party.”

“We are ensuring that all Floridians understand what happened this year as lawmakers not only attacked our rights, but also failed to meet their most basic constitutional obligation — passing a budget on time,” Robinson said.

The event was held at the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place in Ocala. Completed in 2023, the site is named after Ocala residents who advocated for change in the area, Mary Sue Rich and Ruth Reed.

Rich was Ocala's first Black female city council member and pushed for a community center meant for arts, education and recreation. Reed, the former president of Neighborhood Citizens of Northwest Ocala, campaigned to shut down a charcoal plant that was polluting the neighborhood. The location was shut down in 2006 and later became a community center named in her honor.

Ire Bethea Sr., a city councilman representing District 2 in Ocala, opened the event with a special greeting. He said the event fulfilled the purpose of the community center set by the two people the building is named for.

“The building is a powerful beacon in the community named after two women who stood for justice, education and equality,” Bethea said. “This place signifies their legacy and the need for a space



Charlene Griffin, the president of The League of Women Voters of Villages/Tri-County, encouraged participants to stay educated and engaged with the voting.

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of empowering community action. We are continuing the legacy these women fought for.”

During the event, Robinson focused on the nonprofit's efforts to get Floridians informed about and engaged with the state legislative process, including hosting a Day at the Capitol. For that event, the nonprofit invites members of the public to bus to the state capital for free to meet with community leaders and legislators about issues important to them.

“We make the commitment to be present and have an Equal Ground staff member in Tallahassee every week of active legislative session,” he said. “We also produce a weekly newsletter. With all that we want to reflect the truth of what

happened in Tally.”

Along with reviewing the approved 2025 state budget, dates for the seven approved sales tax holidays in the budget and funding allotted for projects in counties across the state, Robinson highlighted key issues including voting rights and the importance of participating in the 2026 Census collection.

“Florida is the third largest state in the nation,” he said. “There were 750,000 people undercounted during the last census. That had a real impact.”

The nonprofit partnered with the NAACP Marion

County Branch, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. Eta Tau Omega Chapter, The League of Women Voters of Villages/Tri-County, All About The Ballots and Black Women's Roundtable to host the Ocala event.

Charlene Griffin, the president of The League of Women Voters of Villages/Tri-County, said she felt the event was a way to protect the foundations of local government for her children and grandchildren. She also said the event is a way to ensure people make informed decisions about voting.



"The fact that about 75 people gave up their afternoon to learn about and support local government in a very positive environment is great," said the Village of Tamaran Grove resident.

Wantanisha Dawson Morant, president of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., said she hopes the event inspires people to use their voice for what they believe in.

"The room is filled with power, potential and purpose," Morant said. "Whether you are 12 or 88 years old, your voice matters. We are determined and excited to bring tools by knowing issues and staying constantly engaged."

Judy Johnson, former Marion County commissioner and the second woman elected to the commission in 1922, said she felt the event was informative and beneficial for the community.

Robinson ended the meeting by encouraging attendees to stay educated and up to date about their local government, check their voting status and make sure they participate in the upcoming Census collection.

"We need more people paying attention to what is happening in our government and less people checking out," he said.

Cassandra Brown, co-founder of All About the Ballot and president of Black Women Roundtable of Lake County, challenged participants to take the information they learned and pass it along.

To learn more information about the Equal Ground nonprofit, visit equal-ground.com.