

December 6, 2005

Dear AAUW member, Flagler County Branch:

When I first heard that the Flagler County Branch was thinking of breaking away from AAUW, I hoped it was just a rumor and that it wouldn't happen. I was very sad to hear more confirmation that some are thinking along those lines. I immediately wrote Margie Bushnell expressing the hope that the branch would reconsider and Leslie Henderson, the State Director for Membership, called her. Leslie and Margie agreed that Leslie would write a letter expressing her thoughts about AAUW and membership in this great organization that would be published in your branch newsletter. However, the board decided not to publish Leslie's letter, so we opted to write to all of you to express our thoughts about the possible disassociation of the Flagler County Branch from AAUW

I understand that there is some unhappiness with the change in membership requirements that was passed as a bylaws change at the national convention. Most of the Florida delegation voted against this bylaws change, but there was considerable interest in making the change by others - particularly those from smaller states. They argued, that NOW and BPW chapters are practically non-existent in many places and that AAUW should be THE women's organization for women who formerly belonged to other women's organizations. So the bylaws change passed by a vote of the delegates.

Originally, I thought this change would have little effect on our membership numbers. I didn't think there were large numbers of women clamoring to get into AAUW. But I'm beginning to change my mind. I live in a small condominium with only 12 units. In the summer and fall, there are only 4 units occupied. When I mentioned this change to our membership requirements, two of my friends here in the condo expressed an interest in joining. They were both nurses and have a two or three-year nursing degree which now qualifies them for membership.

Certainly, the decline in membership numbers is a big problem in Florida. When I took over as Finance Director in 1999/2000, Florida had 5044 members - in 2004/2005 we had dropped to 3565. During that period, Flagler County Branch dropped from 177 to 150.

Even though there was considerable opposition to this change in Florida, other branches have accepted the change and are even viewing it enthusiastically. They are looking on the change as a chance to forge stronger ties with community colleges and as an opportunity to introduce friends who weren't qualified before, to our wonderful organization.

Your dues are paid to the state and the Association through June 30, so there is certainly no urgency of action. I hope you will consider what you will be giving up if you leave AAUW. First, you will no longer be part of a national organization that promotes equity for all women and girls. Then you will lose your association with other AAUW members throughout the state of Florida. You may support some sort of local scholarship program, but you will no longer be able to take pride in being part of organization that gave 3.6 million dollars in fellowships and grants last year and that has supported groundbreaking research on issues of importance to women and girls.

And you won't be part of the Legal Advocacy Fund, which is so important in fighting discrimination in the academic world. You will not have our state convention as an opportunity to exchange ideas, to renew acquaintances or make new friendships with AAUW members in Florida. You will not have the Association Convention or our South Atlantic Regional Conference and you will not have access to the terrific officers and staff that support our organization. You will not have a staff in Washington lobbying in your interest on issues of concern to women. You will not have a lobbyist in Florida devoted to promoting the issues that we, as AAUW members, support.

Those are only a few things that came to my mind that you would be losing by leaving AAUW. I hope you will consider this action carefully and that most of you will decide to remain within the AAUW organization. It is not your officers who can make this decision; it is a decision that must be made by the membership of your branch. Certainly, those of us on the state board stand ready to help those who remain with AAUW to continue the Flagler County Branch.

I am attaching the letter that Leslie Henderson wrote for inclusion in your branch newsletter. I think you will see from this letter, just how deeply she feels about AAUW membership. She and I have agreed to come to a meeting with your branch members on January 7 at 11:00 am to answer your questions and hear from you on this matter. I hope you will attend this meeting so that we can resolve any questions and problems that remain.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this decision.

Sincerely,

L. Carol Newnam, President
Florida AAUW

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