



LAF Deadline Draws Near

Doris Bernlohr
AAUW NC LAF Liaison

As we get closer to the finish line of our LAF reporting year, we still have work to do. The total giving for LAF from Jan 1, 2001 to the present totals \$2,408.00. This is a distance from our \$10,000 goal. I hope every branch will support our efforts to reach this goal. Each branch has a goal that is determined by your Feb. 1 2001 membership count x \$5. Please send all contributions to me at 500 Fearington Post, Pittsboro, NC 27312 as early in December as possible.

As you consider your gift in support of the Legal Advocacy Fund, please take time to read *Women As Donors—The Power of our Gifts* included in this issue. Gloria Weston, the author, makes a valid point.

Thank you to all AAUW members and friends who continue to support the Legal Advocacy Fund which allows more case awards to very courageous women fighting sex discrimination and tenure issues on college campuses in our country.

Women As Donors—The Power of our Gifts

Gloria Weston
AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund
Development Committee

When we are seeking support for the Legal Advocacy Fund, whom do we think of as the more likely donors: women or men? Each may recognize the importance of our cause and the need to support women in academia as they fight to achieve equity with their male colleagues. There is, however, a major difference between men and women in how they are affected by the issue. Men view discrimination on an intellectual level, sympathizing with plaintiffs who are suing their academic institutions. Yet it is not something many men can identify with from personal experience. They cannot empathize with the victims as women can.

Most women have dealt with some form of sex discrimination in their lives—in their families as daughters and wives, in school or in the workplace. Few women reach adulthood without every having felt put down or held back for no other reason than that they are females. This gives women a more personal connection to the Legal Advocacy Fund and its mission to support women fighting sex discrimination, from the first moment they hear about the Fund and hear about some of the plaintiffs we support.

This is where the power of our gifts becomes evident. We can identify with the plaintiffs and can give generously to the Legal Advocacy Fund, going well beyond the writing of the checks. We emphasize with the individual women and become determined to work to bring change in the academic structure in ways that go well beyond the gift itself.

While a man may see the need for change in an institution largely built by and for men, he may not do much beyond writing that check. He may not see his own personal role in helping to transform an institution that does not value hiring women or granting women tenure.

A woman, on the other hand, realizes the power of her gift from the moment she writes a check—she has bought a piece of the action going well beyond the gift itself. Women talk about the issues to others, both AAUW members and non-members, and share with them what we have learned about the necessity of our and their support. We tell them about the cases, and encourage them to become involved, too. We do not write a check, consider it a charitable deduction for tax purposes, and forget about it.

As the Legal Advocacy Fund has grown from its modest beginning twenty years ago, much of its strength has come from our recognition of the power of our gifts. We see more of our plaintiffs winning their cases and the impact this has on their institutions and the higher education environment in general. Just as MIT has realized its part in unequal treatment of women, other institutions are beginning to look more closely at their own discriminatory practices. More and more is being seen in the press about this important issue, and colleges and universities are turning their attention to making changes. We as alumnae are making known to the leaders of our colleges and universities our support of the Legal Advocacy Fund and our dissatisfaction with how these institutions are dealing with sex discrimination—and it is being noted. Many of us have stated clearly that we will not financially support an institution as long as it discriminates against women on campus. Here again is the power of our gifts—in this case, when they are being withheld.

Women as donors to the Legal Advocacy Fund know the power of our gifts and are learning well how to use it. The next twenty years in the life of LAF promise continued growth as well as greater movement towards equity for women in academia. We will not stand still or move back—the only way to go is forward and we know the way!