# **Fall Conference 2022 Opening Remarks Donna Jean Simon, AAUW-Illinois President**

Welcome to all of you. It’s great to see so many branches participating as well as national members who are also joining us. I want to brief you on what is happening at the state level and give you some guidance on a future direction.

The State Board did some Strategic Planning in July and August. . . . We believe

**Our role** is to be a liaison between branches and national. We also believe our role is to champion and interpret the AAUW mission; to support Public Policy chairs and lobbyist to enact mission focused legislation; to establish collaborations and coalitions between and among branches and with outside organizations who share our mission; and to provide leadership and training opportunities through the state convention, fall conference and affinity groups.

Several state board members are on national committees as is our Past State President and we appreciate their ability to keep us informed as well as elevate our concerns when needed.

As a State President I participate in a bimonthly meeting with National Board members and will have a voice in raising issues and will also have dedicated board members who liaise with me and our state on a regular basis. I was gratified by the reaction I had to several issues I had raised and hope that the ongoing dialog will be a positive one.

As a state board, we identified some **initiatives**. These are

* Publicize and market AAUW (with an outcome being to increase membership and better support our mission)
* Establish coalitions and collaborations (that support our mission and which can provide opportunities to engage members and increase membership)
* Engage members through support of mission-based programs and active participation in community events
* Support Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) – each member of the Board has undertaken the responsibility to include DEIB in all aspects of their work
* Address Tech / IT competency gap and create user friendly tools

The **break-out sessions** today cover these areas, so you will find ideas that will help you identify opportunities to increase membership, raise funds, and increase your profile in your community.

There are many resources available to you. Please read **Connection** every month where we profile your state board members, describe what is happening at sister branches, and share best practices. Connection goes to all members including national members on the 15th of each month. If you are not receiving it, check your spam folder. Jennifer Urish has been our stalwart editor and we are grateful that she continues to oversee this monthly publication.

The **website** contains information about what is happening at the state level and is updated periodically. Make sure to visit it to see what’s happening around the state and with your sister branches. Thanks to Leslie Sulla for her oversight of it.

Some **thank you’s** are in order . . . .

To Sue Topp, Jennifer Urish, Kate Skegg, Lynn Frager for putting on this meeting and providing tech support

To the State Board members who are devoting their time and preparation to facilitate the break-out sessions

To all the branch officers and members who volunteer their time and talents to our mission of advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education and research.

Sadly, we live in a time where the assaults on women are growing, and we need everyone to work toward our mission in whatever way you can. We need to become an activist organization that supports women in all aspects of life. We also need to defend schools and libraries from the assaults that are coming at them. We have always defended books, reading, and education. It is horrifying to think that our teachers and librarians are having to fear for their lives because they support a particular book. To all of our teachers and librarians, we salute you and we support you. I ask each branch to determine how you can best support your members in these professions as well as defeat the disinformation campaign that makes their jobs so difficult.

While we are non-partisan, we can be political. To that end, we need to protect our voting rights and privileges, do our due diligence about our candidates and vote to support candidates who support the rights of women and girls. League of Women Voters (a non-partisan organization) has objective and accurate information about candidates at the local, state, and national level on their websites.

This conference is about discovering new ideas, gaining guidance on next steps, and joining with your sister AAUW members across the state to increase our strength and impact.

I hope that you will find this conference to be time well spent. Thank you for being part of this very important organization.