

League of Women Voters of Connecticut Testimony for the 2021 CT Legislative Reapportionment Committee

September 8, 2021 7 pm LOB Hartford

My name is Laura Smits and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee about the important subject of Redistricting.

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots member organization whose century-old mission is to empower voters and defend democracy in a non-partisan manner. We believe that voters are at the center of our democracy and strive to protect voting rights at all costs. Redistricting may not sound like voting rights but it is—after all, the way districts are drawn determines who is on the ballot. If voters don't feel their vote will count because of the way their district is drawn or feel that their preferred candidate has little chance of prevailing, they don't vote. Voter alienation equals voter suppression.

Unfortunately, the redistricting process remains cloaked in mystery to many voters. Connecticut's process and timetable are set in our constitution; and therefore cannot be changed except by changing the constitution and as we recently found during this past year with statewide efforts to expand voting rights, changing Connecticut's constitution is at the very least, complicated.

This year, the League focused on ensuring that the 2020 U.S. census data will be used to draw fair, representative voting districts. The late delivery of this data in August, 5 months later than usual and amid a pandemic, has resulted in additional pressure on your committee as well as the public's access to the process and so, here we are.

And while your committee is a bipartisan one--appointed by party leaders in the state senate and house, this process is far from objective. The League supports the establishment of an independent redistricting commission in CT that would include the citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups and members of minority groups. But that is a mission and goal for another day.

Right now we cannot change the process or expand the timeline for 2021/2022. What we can do is ask that this year's process be:

- **Transparent:** by expanding your website and sharing criteria the panel has adopted in full view of the public including plans for map creation, revision and approval.
- **Engage the public in good faith:** by sharing draft maps, political and demographic data with time for interested communities to comment on them.
- **That the committee take responsibility:** by publicizing your work and encouraging citizen input by using as many CT news outlets as possible, including social media, to get information to the public quickly.

In summary, the League's goal is to bring Redistricting out of the shadows and into the light of day. We want CT residents and their communities to be the central concern and constituency when it comes to Redistricting. Voters should choose their legislators rather than current legislators choosing their voters. The League's People Powered Fair Maps (PPFM) campaign was initiated to stimulate citizen action on Redistricting in order to create fair maps. When this cycle concludes on or before February 15, 2022, and maps are adopted, the League's activism will continue.

Fair and equal maps are key to a representative democracy.

Thank you again and best of luck in your work.

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