



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE RULES AND EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 356 General Assembly and Congressional Legislative Redistricting and Apportionment Commission

POSITION: Support

BY: Elaine Apter and Richard Willson – Co-Presidents

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) supports a state redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation in the state legislature and United States Congress with maximum opportunity for public scrutiny. After study and consensus, our members agreed that an independent commission is the preferred redistricting body, and the membership of the redistricting commission should be multi-partisan, including unaffiliated voters, geographically representative, and not include any current state elected official. Standards on which the redistricting plan is based should include: substantially equal population, geographic contiguity, and geographic compactness. The standards laid out in HB 356 fulfill this criteria, and accordingly we support its enactment.

LWVMD considers the work and recommendations of the multi-partisan Maryland Redistricting Reform Commission to be the gold standard for reforming this process in Maryland. Accordingly, we are pleased to see these recommendations reintroduced this year, with adjustments made based on the 2017 feedback from the committees and the Attorney General's office. We commend the commission for requesting to extend their duties for the past two years in order to further examine this issue, and to visit two additional locations in Maryland for public feedback. We believe this shows the group's commitment to promoting the best, and most thorough plan for reform in Maryland.

The recommendations outlined by this commission provide for a multi-partisan citizens' commission to draw Maryland's electoral maps. The process for selection of the commission members is far removed from the political realm to avoid promotion of political interests by partisan actors. The screening panel to select these commission members will be a balanced multi-partisan panel as well. Pooling and random selection of qualified auditors and applicants, will further bolster the independence of the body drawing district lines from political influence. (See attached infographic for a clearer view of the proposed process.)

Importantly, this bill requires the activities of the commission to be subject to the rules which govern open meetings and access to public information. The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation and requires that governmental bodies protect citizens' right to know by giving adequate notice

of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible. The presence of this transparency requirement increases our confidence in this proposed process.

We would like to see Maryland lead in the movement for reform that is already sweeping the nation by enacting this bill, and taking a meaningful step toward fixing our broken redistricting process. Passage of this bill would demonstrate to all Maryland citizens that their representatives respect their right to have an equal voice in our democratic process, and they are proactive about protecting that right.

We urge a favorable report on HB 356.