

Tame the Gerrymander



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF MARYLAND, INC.



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TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE RULES AND EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

HB 537 Potomac Compact for Fair Representation

POSITION: Support with Amendments

BY: The Tame the Gerrymander Coalition

DATE: February 26, 2018

The Tame the Gerrymander Coalition, made up of the League of Women Voters of Maryland, Common Cause Maryland, Represent.Maryland, and Gerrymandered.org, is a coalition dedicated to establishing a fair and open process for drawing election districts in Maryland. We believe that Maryland should lead in the promotion of democratic values for all of its citizens by adopting a redistricting process that gives every Maryland citizen an equal voice in electing their representatives.

We commend this bill which promotes standards for Congressional district lines, public hearings, and a commission of professionals dedicated to nonpartisan research and analysis. We appreciate the effort of this bill to ensure that the commission members will be experts in fields that will bolster their abilities to analyze and produce fair maps. Further, we appreciate that the process for General Assembly approval of the redistricting plan produced by the commission promotes the recommendation of the Maryland Redistricting Commission recommendations of a simple majority.

However, there are some changes we would like to suggest in order to ensure that it is a strong step forward for redistricting reform in Maryland:

- (1) Addition of the stipulation that the commission must have a bipartisan balance and be geographically representative of Maryland;
- (2) Selection of the commissioners should not be in the hands of just one person, but rather a bipartisan or multi-partisan panel of individuals far-removed from Maryland politics;
- (3) Extension of the timeframe for the restrictions placed on members of the commission to become candidates, elected officials, or an official subject to senate appointment to ensure they could not unfairly benefit from the districts that have drawn;
- (4) Addition of the stipulation for full transparency throughout the process, with public access to the maps once they have been drawn, but prior to submission to the General Assembly.

Further, Tame the Gerrymander thinks that Maryland need not wait for another state to act to make this move toward fair and equitable representation of its own citizens. However, if we were to support a compact solution, we would like to see meaningful outreach to a compacting state by Maryland legislators that has resulted in measurable progress toward the achievement of reform.

With the support 3000+ advocates, Tame the Gerrymander supports the intent of this legislation to make Maryland's redistricting process one that upholds the tenets of American democracy, and reinforces the faith of Marylanders in our elections and representatives. With specified amendments, we urge a favorable report.