



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS<sup>®</sup> OF MARYLAND, INC.

## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE RULES AND EXECUTIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

### **HB 1022 Congressional Districts - Standards**

#### **POSITION: Support**

#### **BY: Elaine Apter and Richard Willson – Co-Presidents**

#### **DATE: February 26, 2018**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) believes that districts should be substantially equal in population, compact, composed of contiguous territory, and give due regard to natural boundaries and political subdivisions. The standards proposed here satisfy these criteria and, accordingly, we support this bill. This bill would enact an essential piece of a comprehensive reform of Maryland's Congressional redistricting process.

Whatever process is used for drawing district lines, it is critical that the districts conform to standards that are both politically neutral and respectful of communities of voters, rather than subdividing neighborhoods to form oddly-shaped districts. Following the last redistricting process in 2011, plaintiffs before the federal court stated that the Congressional district map was so poorly conceived that it must be redrawn. The federal judge declared the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional district so misshapen it is "reminiscent of a broken-winged pterodactyl, lying prostrate across the center of the state", however, the court upheld the map because it had no legal basis to ask for it to be redrawn. That is why it is imperative that Maryland legislators enact standards that will encourage fair representation in Congressional districts.

The standards laid out in this bill are the same as those the Maryland constitution applies to legislative districts, and we believe that they are equally appropriate for Congressional districts. If enacted, they would limit the ability of either party to predetermine the results of elections by grouping voters from widely scattered areas while subdividing counties and neighborhoods. Compact and contiguous districts give the voters a much better opportunity to know their representatives and to engage in political discussions with their fellow voters. This will make for a healthier democracy.

We commend Delegate Malone, and the 62 co-sponsors of this bill from both sides of the aisle, for proposing these standards for Congressional districts. 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 1022.