

To: Montgomery County Delegation to Maryland General Assembly

From: Nancy Bliss, President, LWVMC

Subject: Statement of Support - Legislation to Reform the Redistricting Process

The voters of Montgomery County have spoken – more than 80% voted in favor of an amendment to the county charter to minimize the influence of party politics on the redistricting process for councilmanic districts.

- Polls have demonstrated that a similar majority of Maryland voters want a nonpartisan process for drawing congressional and legislative districts.
- Voters in other states have voted this year to enact redistricting reforms in Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, Utah and Ohio -- states for which the combined congressional delegation is several times that of Maryland.
- In Pennsylvania, litigation brought by the League of Women Voters and others resulted in the overturning of unfair congressional districts by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.
- The federal court has spoken – Maryland’s congressional districts are unfair and must be redrawn.

The excuse that Maryland should not engage in “unilateral disarmament” is no longer valid if it ever was. Far from being a defense against the effects of gerrymandering in other states, Maryland’s distorted maps are being cited by opponents of reform in Republican-dominated states.

Furthermore, gerrymandering in Maryland has undermined public confidence in our electoral system as voters perceive that the majority party has manipulated the process to their own advantage.

The claim that this manipulation was “necessary” to offset Republican gerrymandering in other states rings hollow given the results of the 2018 elections and the damage inflicted on the democratic process.

To ensure that reforms will be sustained regardless of changes in the status of any political party, the Maryland constitution should be amended to establish new procedures and standards. For an amendment to be submitted to the voters in time for the 2020 election, the General Assembly must act without further delay.

While the federal court’s order that congressional districts be revised before the 2020 election is on hold until the challenge to that decision is adjudicated by the Supreme Court, Maryland has been given a clear message that what the legislators did in 2011 is unacceptable.

Redistricting reforms bills have been introduced this session that the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County supports.

- These bills reflect the will of the large majority of Maryland voters who want a redistricting process codified that ensures that electoral maps are drawn free of partisan considerations.
- You have the opportunity to respect the will of the people and help achieve passage of a reform bill that best suits Maryland before you are forced by courts to act.
- The General Assembly should act now to enact immediate reform and to make such reform permanent.

We urge the Montgomery County delegation to take the lead in pressing for passage of redistricting reform legislation during this session of the General Assembly.

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