

LEAGUE EFFORTS REGARDING REDISTRICTING

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As further background, we offer some history and current information about the League of Women Voters' efforts regarding redistricting in Virginia and nationwide, including the actual position statements. LWVUS states the following on its website about redistricting:

Why it matters

Political and racial gerrymandering distorts and undermines representative democracy by allowing officials to select their voters rather than voters to elect their officials. When done for purposes of racial discrimination or to ensure the dominance of one political party, gerrymandering runs counter to equal voting rights for all eligible voters.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

We promote transparent and accountable redistricting processes and to end hyper-partisan practices that don't benefit constituents. We believe responsibility for fair redistricting should be vested in an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government. The League works in states across the country to pass ballot initiatives to institute independent redistricting commissions.

(<https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights/redistricting>)

Many state Leagues around the country have positions in support of nonpartisan redistricting practices with lines being drawn by entities, such as a commission, composed of people who are not elected officials (legislators). In 2016, the LWVUS Convention adopted an all-purpose redistricting concurrence statement based on various state League positions, so that all state Leagues would have a position to use for advocacy [see LWVUS position at end of this article]. First however, we want to mention the LWV of Virginia's (LWV-VA) long history on the topic.

LWV-VA

The LWV of Virginia's position on redistricting has existed since 1985 and was updated in 2007. As a result, the LWV-VA has been a leader in coalitions that advocate and lobby for **an independent redistricting process** in Virginia, the latest iteration of which is OneVirginia2021 (www.onevirginia2021.org).

The LWV-VA Redistricting Position specifically mentions our **support for an independent, nonpartisan or bipartisan redistricting commission** (not made up of legislators) **to draw compact, contiguous district lines that keep together communities of interest**. [See complete wording of position below].

Information on LWV-VA's efforts regarding redistricting dating from 2015 and earlier can be found on the LWV-VA website, Action & Advocacy/ Redistricting at: <http://lwv-va.org/action-advocacy/redistricting-in-virginia/>

LWV-VA Position on REAPPORTIONMENT& REDISTRICTING

From *POSITIONED FOR ACTION*, Spring 2017. (http://lwv-va.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/action-advocacy/positions_2017_04_29_fullwithhistory_schutz.pdf)

Position in Brief: Support for a decennial redistricting plan approved by the General Assembly, including establishment of a bipartisan commission to prepare a plan for legislative approval, and consideration of natural geographic boundaries, jurisdictional boundaries, communities of interest, and competitiveness in addition to the constitutional requirements.

The League's History [of the position]. Reapportionment and redistricting are an integral part of our system of representative government. As a result of the problems encountered in the reapportionment and

redistricting process in Virginia in 1981, the League adopted a study at its convention in 1983 on the methods and criteria for redistricting. Members agreed that a reapportionment commission should be established to prepare a plan for legislative approval because such a commission could be objective, devote its full attention to the task, and expedite the redistricting process. The criterion of competitiveness was added in 2007 after an update to this position was adopted as a two-year study at LWV-VA convention in 2005.

The League's Position

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports the establishment, in law, of a politically balanced and independent Reapportionment Commission for each decennial redistricting to prepare, with the Virginia Department of Legislative Services, a plan for submission to the legislature as specified by the Virginia Constitution. The Commission should be bi-partisan and be composed of individuals who are not elected officials; they should represent the geographical distribution and demographic diversity of the state, and consist of an uneven number of members.

In addition to the Virginia constitutional requirement of equal population, contiguous and compact districts and the Voting Rights Act requirements for protecting the voting strength of minority groups, the League supports the following considerations in redistricting:

- Natural geographic boundaries;
- Jurisdictional boundaries;
- Communities of interest; and
- Competitiveness

The League believes that the Virginia constitution should be amended to provide that redistricting will occur on a decennial basis only. (1985, 2007)

LWVUS

As stated earlier, the LWVUS believes that a reformed redistricting process nationwide is essential for a healthy democracy and has made the issue a part of the 2016-2018 LWVUS Campaign to Make Democracy Work®, recommending the Campaign continue to 2020. The LWVUS position, contained in 2016-2018 IMPACT ON ISSUES/ Representative Government/ The Election Process/ Redistricting reads as follows:

The League of Women Voters believes responsibility for redistricting preferably should be vested in an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups.

Every redistricting process should include:

- Specific timelines for the steps leading to a redistricting plan
- Full disclosure throughout the process and public hearings on the plan proposed for adoption
 - Redistricting at all levels of government must be accomplished in an open, unbiased manner with citizen participation and access at all levels and steps of the process, and
 - Should be subject to open meeting laws.
- A provision that any redistricting plan should be adopted by the redistricting authority with more than a simple majority vote.
 - Remedial provisions established in the event that the redistricting authority fails to enact a plan. Specific provisions should be made for court review of redistricting measures and for courts to require the redistricting authority to act on a specific schedule.
 - Time limits should be set for initiating court action for review.
 - The courts should promptly review and rule on any challenge to a redistricting plan and require adjustments if the standards have not been met.

The standards on which a redistricting plan is based, and on which any plan should be judged, must:

- Be enforceable in court
- Require:
 - Substantially equal population
 - Geographic contiguity
 - Effective representation of racial and linguistic minorities
- Provide for (to the extent possible)
 - Promotion of partisan fairness
 - Preservation and protection of “communities of interest”
 - Respect for boundaries of municipalities and counties
- Compactness and competitiveness may also be considered as criteria so long as they do not conflict with the above criteria
- Explicitly reject
 - Protection of incumbents, through such devices as considering an incumbent’s address
 - Preferential treatment for a political party, through such devices as considering party affiliation, voting history and candidate residence.

Statement of Position on Redistricting, as Adopted by Concurrence, June 2016. This position does not supersede any existing state League redistricting position.

http://forum.lwv.org/sites/default/files/impact_on_issues_2016-2018_full.pdf

OTHER LEAGUE RESOURCES:

Online League Redistricting Discussion Groups:

- 1) LWV-VA Facebook Redistricting Discussion Group: link on LWV-VA website, if you have a Facebook account, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1187015848066265/> Scroll through the list of groups on the website, and submit a request to join the group.
- 2) LWVUS Redistricting Google Group, <https://groups.google.com/group/lwv-redistricting>
To post to this group, send email to lwv-redistricting@googlegroups.com.
<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/lwv-redistricting>
- 3) LWV website/ Redistricting: <https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights/redistricting>