



Testimony on Congressional Redistricting Criteria
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Thank you Chairman Argall, Chairman Street and members of the Senate State Government committee for addressing the essential issue of congressional redistricting criteria.

As Vice President of Government and Social Policy for the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania from 2015 to 2019, and again from June 2020 to today, I've spent time with League advocates who gave testimony to this committee in 1991, in 2001, and in 2011. I've heard their reflections about how little their comments mattered, and their deep cynicism about the secretive processes that have historically governed the creation of district maps.

The League supported Representative Argall's redistricting reform bills introduced in seven successive sessions, from 1986 through 1998. None of those bills received a vote in committee, despite significant bi-partisan support in each session.

In 2007-2008, League members supported a bill introduced by Representative Steve Samuelson that built on some of the ideas of earlier bills. That bill, HB 2420, would have provided far stronger guidelines for both congressional and legislative districts. With help from League members across the commonwealth, Rep Samuelson's bill gained 95 cosponsors, with many from both parties, but was never given a committee vote.

I was present, in my League board role, when Senator Lisa Boscola launched a bipartisan legislative redistricting reform caucus in 2015, inviting legislators who had been past prime sponsors of bills addressing redistricting reform. That initial group included senators and representatives from both major parties, plus policy staff who had attempted for years to help put better rules in place. The League helped found Fair Districts PA just months later, in January 2016, to focus public attention on the issue so that bills introduced in that session would be finally given a vote.

I don't have time here to recount the sad history of those bills or bills introduced in the two subsequent sessions. What I do want to convey is the high level of public support for better rules, a more transparent process, and meaningful public input. National and statewide polling consistently show that 7 out of 10 voters are not happy with the current redistricting process and believe reform is needed. Together, FDPA and the League have invited resolutions in support of reform from municipal and county officials representing more than 70% of Pennsylvanians, with strong support from both Republican and Democratic commissioners and supervisors. Senator Argall, you had it right in your reform bills 3

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decades ago: you saw the need for clear, enforceable rules, and for a required report explaining when municipalities or counties are divided.

Fair Districts PA supporters and members of the League of Women Voters are very aware that public hearings are no guarantee that districts will be drawn to benefit voters rather than parties or incumbents. We have read the transcripts, studied the legislative record, and seen the way public input has been ignored.

Both major parties have made explicitly clear that redistricting is a high stakes game, with millions of dollars invested in both legislative and judicial races to control the redistricting process and thus control Congress. Pennsylvania has been identified in 2021, as in past decades, as a top target for partisan investment. We all lose when that takes place.

There is no shortage of good advice for clear criteria and ways to rank that criteria to protect voters and ensure fair maps. The LACRA bills we support include input and advice from national redistricting experts in LWVUS and other non-partisan organizations.

One quick technical point: exact population requirements are sometimes used as an excuse to justify distorted districts. From what we can tell, deviation nearing .1% is allowed when state law puts other priorities in place. Absent laws protecting precincts or municipalities, the exact equivalence rule takes precedence, one more reason to pass LACRA quickly.

Gerrymandering discourages voters and destroys trust. This legislature's consistent refusal to bring redistricting reform bills to a vote has further discouraged voters and further undermined trust. When we review the chronology of Senate Bill 1249, the congressional apportionment bill of 2011, we see cynical disregard for the public good and malicious misuse of the legislative process. While better checks and balances might be in place this year, there is still no real protection against the secretive misuse of data and deliberate partisan manipulation of district lines.

We are very aware that committees, and committee chairs, no matter how well intentioned, will not have the final word in this. We appreciate your time, but ask that you consider a vote as soon as possible on Senate Bill 222.