

Testimony before the Legislative Redistricting Advisory Committee

League of Women Voters of Queen Anne's County

League of Women Voters of Kent County

League of Women Voters of the Mid-Shore

October 18, 2021

Madame Speaker, Mr. President, Mr. Chairman, Honorable Commissioners. We appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of three Eastern Shore chapters of the League of Women Voters: Queen Anne's County, Kent County, and the Mid-Shore, which includes Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties. My name is Kathleen Bangert, and I am co-convenor of the MidShore League. With me are Barbara Flook, co-President of the Kent County League and Elizabeth Hammon, Vice President of the Queen Anne's County League.

The League of Women Voters is the nation's oldest non-partisan voter education and advocacy group. Throughout our 100-year history it has been our practice to take positions on public policy only after conducting thorough, fact-based studies. We are non-partisan and do not support specific political candidates or parties. We are fully committed to government based on diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice.

Our Leagues support a state redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation in the state legislature and House of Representatives with maximum opportunity for public input and scrutiny. We commend President Ferguson and Speaker Jones for appointing this bi-partisan Commission, and deeply appreciate the willingness of all Commissioners to take on the weighty and time-consuming responsibility of creating fair and impartial maps.

We have four brief recommendations to share with you tonight, and these echo suggestions you have heard from other League Chapters during previous hearings.

First, to promote transparency, we urge that the public be able to observe the Commission draw and evaluate proposed maps.

Next, it is important that draft maps be available for meaningful public review and comment prior to the special session in December, preferably not later than mid-November.

Third, as you draw lines for legislative districts, we ask you to maintain the flexibility of using both single and multi-member districts. It is our position that the right mix of the two helps to promote full minority representation, preserve political and community boundaries, and encourage a more diverse candidate pool.

Finally, please continue to remind the public that they still have time to submit written comments. The Eastern Shore is big! Many of our neighbors who would like to participate in person tonight cannot, especially those on the Lower Shore who have an hour or more drive.

In conclusion, those of us who make our homes east of the Bay count ourselves fortunate to live in a region of such rich natural beauty and cultural diversity. But too often it seems there are two Eastern Shores - - the one that Forbes magazine celebrates as the “new Hamptons”, and the one where poultry workers are at ground zero for the Covid epidemic. As you literally draw the map for our shared civic life over the next decade, you can help to bring us closer to the ideal of One Shore, where everyone, no matter their zip code, has equal representation in the halls of Congress and the corridors of the General Assembly.

Thank you again for taking on this important work.