



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.

Testimony: Montgomery County Charter Review Commission October 18, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on several issues that may be of interest in the Commission's deliberations on 2018 charter questions. First, please note that in 2005-2006, a League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) study on the **structure of the County Council** resulted in the adoption of our current position supporting a Council composed of **nine members, from a combination of members elected at-large and members elected from councilmanic districts**. There was no consensus on the division of at-large and district members.

The November 2005 study fact sheet and position questions are available on our website at http://www.lwvmocomd.org/fact_sheets

This study takes into account many of the topics currently under discussion. **Our members did not support (1) enlarging the size of the Council** (either to a finite number or based on specific population increases), **or (2) changing to all district representation**. We also reviewed having residential districts for members elected at-large -- like the current school board arrangement. Other study considerations included the financial and representation costs of running campaigns in a district versus the whole county.

District representation? The idea of having a single representative from a possibly more cohesive population in a smaller geographical district with lower campaign costs did not persuade our membership to change from supporting a position for continued representation of each individual by five Council members, four elected from and representing county-wide voters, as well as a single member from the voter's geographical district.

Besides the desire to maintain the chance to vote for a majority of the Council positions, League members also appreciate the chance to choose five people who might represent different ethnicities, gender, and political positions, governing interests and strengths, instead of just one person.

Although the 2005-2006 LWVMC study does not support adding residential districts for Council members elected at-large, this may be an alternative way of ensuring greater geographical representation for at-large seats (which is a current issue), instead of changing to an all-district Council.



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The geographical breadth of the current County Council at-large candidate field seems already to cover this issue, which may also be aided by the newly-available local campaign finance matching funds.

Our same study also supports **continuing to have a local commission draw the councilmanic districts**, with equitable redistricting so that each district will be compact, contiguous, and of approximately equal population.

In 2014, LWVMC testimony on the *County Council's Right to Vote Task Force Report Recommendations 40 and 41* supports the concept of a **fair and open redistricting process conducted by a neutral commission**. In view of the increasing number of county registered voters without a major party affiliation (currently greater than 20 percent and larger than one of the two principal parties), **we suggest that the process of appointing commission members better reflect our voters' affiliations.**

LWVMC testimony in 2014 also strongly supports the *County's Right to Vote Task Force recommendations (11, 12, and 13)* **proposing ballot referendums and questions "be stated in plain, clear language"** and "be reviewed by the Charter Review Commission or other nonpartisan citizen review commission, and/or provide for judicial review of ballot language," ensuring "that the ballot language is consistent with the intent of the petitioner."

The Task Force report is at

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/REPORTS/RightToVoteTaskForce/RightToVoteTaskForceReport.pdf>

Yours truly,

Nancy Bliss, president

Mary Lanigan, Making Democracy Work committee chair

Barbara Sanders, previous chair, Making Democracy Work committee and member of the *County Council's Right to Vote Task Force (2013-2015)*.