



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.*

To: Montgomery County Council
For: July 10, 2018 hearing
By: Mary Lanigan, chair, Making Democracy Work Committee

Testimony on Proposed Charter Amendment on Council Redistricting Procedure

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) (1) strongly supports the Charter Review Commission's unanimous recommendation to amend Section 104 of the Charter "Redistricting Procedure" and (2) urges the Council to approve placing this recommendation on the 2018 General Election ballot for the voters to decide.

The current procedure used to determine the councilmanic districts every ten years has been in place since the 1970s without revision. It stipulates that the Redistricting Commission be composed of a total of nine members, four from each of the two dominant political parties chosen by the Council from a list of eight individuals submitted by the corresponding central committees, plus a ninth member appointed by the Council.

The procedure was developed at a time when most voters were affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party. That is no longer the case -- with approximately 22% of Montgomery County voters now registered as Unaffiliated ([Maryland State Board of Elections, Voter Registration Activity Report, May 2018](#)). **The current procedure eliminates almost one quarter of registered voters from having a voice in the makeup of Councilmanic districts.**

In 2014, in its [testimony on the County Council's Right to Vote Task Force Report, Recommendations 40 and 41](#), LWVMC declared its support for a fair and open redistricting process conducted by a neutral commission. Polls have demonstrated that a large majority of Maryland voters do not want the redistricting process to be controlled by the political parties and prefer a system where districts are determined by an independent commission. Well-aware of this fact, many candidates for office in the 2018 Primary Election professed their support for such a system in response to the question on redistricting included in the [LWVMC 2018 Primary Election Voters' Guide](#).

A March 7, 2018 Baltimore Sun article citing a George Mason University poll found that statewide, 65 percent of respondents said they support a proposal to establish an independent redistricting board in Maryland. Only 19 percent were opposed and 16 percent undecided.

A February 2017 Goucher poll found "Redistricting reform continues to be popular among Marylanders. Seventy-three percent prefer a system where districts are determined by an independent commission, and 20 percent prefer a system where districts are determined by the state's elected officials."



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Restricting the majority membership on the Redistricting Commission to individuals nominated by the Democratic and Republican Central Committees – bodies whose mission is to advance their party's interests -- is inconsistent with good governance and does not reflect the current electorate, 22% of whom are Unaffiliated with any party and are thus precluded from membership on the Commission.

We are all too aware of news reports and Supreme Court cases demonstrating that partisan gerrymandering by both the Democratic and Republican parties has become the norm in an age of hyper-partisanship.

While this has not yet been the case in Montgomery County, we urge the Council to take a forward-looking step to preclude such practice and follow the lead of the states and municipalities that have successfully established nonpartisan redistricting commissions. Such action would set an example and may help pave the way for similar reforms at the state level and elsewhere.

The Charter Review Commission has outlined a well-thought-out revision of the procedure:

- Expansion of the number of members on the Redistricting Commission from nine to eleven registered voters who reside in Montgomery County.
This expanded number of members provides an opportunity for voters who are Unaffiliated or registered with a third party to participate and perhaps thereby interject a less-partisan perspective.
- Removal of the requirement that Democratic and Republican members may only be nominated by their respective central committee. Self-nomination rather than nomination by the party may result in participation by more civic-minded and less-partisan members.
- Introduction of more flexibility in the number of possible Democratic members and Republican members from a required four from each of the two parties to “at least one but no more than four members”.
- Addition of a requirement that at least one commission member reside in each council district to ensure needed geographic diversity and representation.

We urge the Council to vote to place the Charter Review Commission's unanimous recommendation for a revised redistricting procedure on the 2018 General Election ballot on November 6.

Submitted by
Nancy Bliss
President, League of Women Voters of Montgomery County