

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – March 31, 2015

Redistricting

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In December 2014, the 130th Ohio General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution 12. The resolution authorizes placement of an amendment to the Ohio Constitution on the November 2015 ballot, changing the way Ohio draws districts for the Ohio General Assembly.

The amendment would create a 7-person Ohio Redistricting Commission. It retains the Governor, Auditor, and Secretary of State as members and adds 4 legislative appointees, two from the both the largest and second largest political parties. The new proposal requires bi-partisan support to adopt 10-year maps for General Assembly districts. It strengthens the requirement that counties, municipalities, townships and wards not be split into more than one district, and provides strict direction on how to divide them if necessary, limiting the discretion of the Redistricting Commission members. It eliminates the criteria that new district lines follow those of the prior apportionment as much as possible. It requires more public input – three public hearings must be held after proposed maps are introduced. The Commission also has a set of secondary criteria. It won't draw a plan primarily to favor one political party, the partisan composition of districts should correspond to the preferences of voters, and the districts should be compact.

It also provides an impasse resolution mechanism if bi-partisan support cannot be achieved. If the impasse mechanism is used, a simple majority of the Apportionment Board could approve maps, thus allowing all of the necessary votes to be provided by members of one political party. However, other provisions are included to protect the minority party and provide incentive to get votes from members of both major parties to approve maps. If the impasse mechanism is used, the maps would be effective for only 4 years. During that time, another election would be held for Governor, Auditor, and Secretary of State, and that might change the political composition of the redistricting commission. The newly elected and appointed Commission would then draw maps that would be used for the rest of the decade. The amendment would also give additional direction to the Ohio Supreme Court if a plan were appealed. One criteria they would need to consider is the degree to which the political composition of the districts in the aggregate corresponding to the statewide preferences of the voters.

The proposal meets many of the criteria in the LWVO position:

- LWVO's position on redistricting calls for a bi-partisan redistricting board. The proposal calls for a redistricting commission made up of the Governor, Auditor, Secretary of State and 2 majority party appointees and 2 minority party appointees. There must be bi-partisan approval of any plan that is to last for the entire decade. This is a big step

forward because not only is the commission bi-partisan, but there is a requirement that both parties approve the maps.

- LWVO's position encourages citizen participation. The proposal calls for 3 public hearings around the state to seek input after the commission selects proposed maps and before it makes final selections. It also requires that all meetings be open to the public and that they be broadcast electronically in a medium readily accessible by the general public.
- LWVO's position calls for districts to be compact and follow local political boundaries as much as possible. The proposal strictly requires districts to be within a single county or to be made up of people in counties next to each other. If that isn't possible, the commission must respect municipal, township and ward boundaries. This should produce districts that make more sense to voters who are already familiar with the local political boundaries.

There is bi-partisan support for this proposal. The League is looking forward to working with traditional coalition partners, as well as other supporters of the ballot issue, in educating voters about the way this proposal could give us representatives who better reflect voters' political values.

It should be noted that Issue 1 only addresses how districts are drawn for the Ohio Legislature, not Congress. The League will continue to work for Congressional redistricting.