



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OHIO**

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Testimony on SJR 1, Redistricting Process
Before the Senate State Government and Reform Committee
The Honorable Dave Burke, Chair
Presented by Ann Henkener on behalf of the
League of Women Voters of Ohio
June 18, 2013

The League of Women Voters of Ohio has a long history of supporting reform on redistricting, regardless of which political party is advocating reform. Drawing lines for both Congressional and General Assembly districts is very important to all citizens. SJR 1, a proposal that attained bi-partisan support in the last General Assembly, is a vast improvement over our current systems.

The goal of drawing districts should be to provide an opportunity to voters to select representatives who, in the aggregate, fairly represent the political values of the voters of Ohio.

More specifically, the League supports a transparent process with robust public participation; compactness of districts balanced with competitiveness; protecting communities of interest; and, of course, adherence to all Constitutional and Voting Rights Act requirements. Neither political party should be able to manipulate the process to gain advantage disproportionate to its strength in the electorate. We believe in a process that does not involve “sweetheart gerrymandering” – a process by which both parties divide the state into a predetermined number of seats that are safe for each party. In that way shifts in the political will of the electorate will be followed by changes in representation to reflect those shifts.

This bill succeeds in achieving many of those goals. It uses counties as the building blocks for drawing districts, which provides a good way of maintaining compactness and honoring communities of interest. It contains a provision that no individual district shall be drawn primarily with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party. That goal could be strengthened by adding a provision that the districts in the aggregate will not favor a political party in a proportion that is dissimilar to its strength with voters. The League supports the concept that both political parties must support a districting plan before it takes effect. That provision could be strengthened by requiring 2 members of the minority party, rather than one, be needed to select a plan. In addition this committee could add a provision providing for more public input in the form of submitting proposed plans.

Taken in its entirety, SJR 1 is a substantial improvement over the current processes and the League urges this committee’s thoughtful consideration and support of the bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.