

**Testimony on SJR 5, Redistricting Reform  
Before the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Affairs  
Committee**

Presented by Ann Henkener on behalf of the  
League of Women Voters of Ohio  
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The League of Women Voters of Ohio has traditionally supported many of the concepts that are embodied in SJR 5. The League supports assigning redistricting power to an independent commission; public participation in the process; protecting communities of interest; compactness; performing redistricting only once each decade, after the census; and, of course, adherence to all Constitutional and Voting Rights Act requirements.

Any redistricting process should not permit either political party to manipulate the process to gain advantage disproportionate to its strength in the electorate. The process set forth in SJR 5 improves on our current process of one party gerrymandering by providing a division of power between the two major parties in the drawing of districts. The public interest is better served by this division of power, but care must still be taken to assure that the process does not benefit only the two political parties and become a process by which both parties divide the state into a predetermined number of seats that are safe for each party. Rather, the process should produce a plan that favors competitive districts, while still respecting communities of interest and compactness. The plan should also design individual districts that produce, in the aggregate, representative bodies that reflect the political attitudes of the voters – representational fairness. The League was one of the partners in the Ohio Redistricting Competition, which should produce results in the next several weeks. The League believes that the results of the competition will show that objective criteria can be used to draw fair districts that balance compactness, preservation of political subdivisions, competitiveness, and representational fairness. Objective criteria should also more effectively produce the desired results than discretionary statements of goals.

There are a number of concrete changes that should be made to improve this resolution:

1. More transparency should be written into the process to assure that the public has input and is well informed about why a plan was adopted.
  - a. A more defined structure for public input, including input after plans have been submitted, should be included.
  - b. The commission should document reasons for rejecting/adopting a plan at the time they reject/adopt a plan, rather than at some later time.
2. The plan should reduce partisanship of members of the Commission.
  - a. There should be a provision that the three members of the Commission selected by the initial four members have not run for elective office on a partisan basis for at least ten years.
  - b. A provision could be added that the three members selected by the initial four be independents.

This resolution provides a structure that can greatly improve Ohio's districting process, and increase the representativeness of Ohio's legislature and congressional delegation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

*The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*