

2020 ISSUE PAPER: REDISTRICTING

Position Statement

Summary: The League of Women Voters of Washington supports fully funded redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote timely, fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for participation.

The voting boundary drawing process, called redistricting, determines the political representation of all our communities. The formation of congressional, legislative and local districts is fundamental to the equity in our voting system. How and where district lines are drawn in 2021 will determine how strong a voice each voter has in elections through 2032. Stories of partisan and racial gerrymandering, of overwhelming majorities in districts and of “trifecta” control in state governments elevate concerns about how districts influence the effectiveness of our representative democracy. In addition, The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to avoid ruling on partisan gerrymandering in June 2019 means that effective state laws are critical.

Washington is one of only nine states that has a redistricting commission independent from direct legislative control. After decades of intense battles Washington State created a five-member Redistricting Commission in 1983. Our bi-partisan commission requires three of four voting members to agree. The four voting commissioners are chosen by the majority and minority caucus leaders in the chambers of the Washington State Legislature. These four then choose a non-voting administrative chair. The resulting maps can only be amended by the Legislature with a 2/3rd majority vote in both chambers and then only with a change that is less than 2% by population. The governor does not have a role. If the commission fails to agree on maps, then the Washington State Supreme Courts draws maps, usually with the help of outside experts. The Commission is appointed by January 15th and must be finished by November 15th of the year ending in 1.

Over the last three decades, this process has created many noncompetitive districts, seems to favor incumbents, and has resulted in close majority control in our legislative chambers. While our process eliminates extreme partisan gerrymandering, it seems that Republicans and Democrats are dividing up the state into easily winnable districts for each party. Only about 20% of legislative races are won with less than 55% of the votes. The process can be improved to increase citizen trust, transparency, representation and effectiveness.

With the goal of good representation, LWVWA seeks diversity among the members of the 2021 Washington State Redistricting Commission. A majority of past commissioners have been white males from the Puget Sound area with long histories with the parties. We implore legislative leadership to vet a wide range of people and increase the representativeness of the commission. By having women, people of color, LGBTQ-identifying people, and/or people from outside Puget Sound on the commission, we will increase the possibilities of creative solutions to a complex process and reduce the appearance of partisanship as primary focus. We want Washington to be a leader in fair, transparent, and representative redistricting.

Summary of Issues for the 2020 Legislative Session

1. Influence leadership to appoint women and people of color, LGBTQ people, and representation from regions outside of Puget Sound to the Washington State Redistricting Commission.
2. Pass a law that enhances the requirements of the Washington State Redistricting Commission by moving commissioner appointments sooner, requiring more public access and increasing transparency.
3. Introduce the idea of a true citizens’ redistricting commission by proposing a commission with additional members that are not affiliated with the major political parties.

Issue Details for the 2020 Legislative Session

We only have the 2020 Legislative session left to modernize the Washington State Redistricting Commission for 2021. The maps made by the next commission will be in effect until 2032. A lot of technology has been invented since 1983. Modern technology enhances the democratization of the process but also allows for consultants to bias the systems unfairly. We propose putting into law the known ways to use technology effectively and increase citizen trust. The following are ways we can modernize the redistricting process in Washington State:

Efficiency and Effectiveness increases with improvements to the administrative practices and processes:

1. Appoint commissioners earlier; require trainings and complete tasks earlier.
2. Prescreen staff applicants and set up website and physical offices earlier.
3. Include election officials from counties and municipalities earlier in the process.
4. Add a Communications Director who reports to the Chair

Transparency in the selection & map drawing process increases trust and encourages compromise.

1. Increase use of the official website, social media and streaming technologies.
2. Require a published declaration of intent that prioritize the map drawing criteria.
3. Require detailed reports on maps and public comments; include dissenting reports in the record.

Public Participation is enhanced by expanding previous public meeting process norms:

1. Set a mandatory number of public meetings in a variety of places throughout the state with greater outreach to diverse communities.
2. Require 14-day meeting notice and a 30-day review period for any proposals.
3. Increase specific technology requirements to allow greater access to public testimony and the map drawing submission process.

Representativeness improves when elected official understand peoples' values and experiences.

1. Work with community partners to understand needs of ethnic communities and other communities of interest and make sure those needs are reflected in the district maps.
2. Change commission structure via constitutional amendment to add diversity among members

Take Action

1. Influence Commission Appointments

Contact your legislators, answer LWVWA action alerts and sign petitions to request that legislative leadership put more diverse people on the 2021 Washington State Redistricting Commission.

2. Pass Redistricting Commission Modernization Bill

Contact your legislators, answer LWVWA action alerts and tell your neighbors to do the same—so that the legislature passes a bill to modernize the commission.

3. Discuss a True Citizen Commission for WA

Understand and talk about the reasoning behind a commission that would add additional members who are not party insiders and add those who are unaffiliated with either major party.

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