



Testimony on Redistricting
Sue Smith, League of Women Voters of Michigan
Senate Committee on Redistricting
June 22, 2011

On behalf the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sue Smith and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan and a member of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative.

As you may already know, the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative is a coalition of nonprofits from all segments of the community, including business, labor and public interest, that believe redistricting must be more transparent and open, with more involvement from the public. More than 40 organizations are members of the Collaborative, working together because we all believe that voters should choose their elected officials, not the other way around.

Unfortunately, Michigan, unlike other states, does not have a history of providing opportunities for public input on redistricting plans. On behalf of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, we urge you to provide more time and information to allow for adequate public comment on proposed redistricting plans.

We are glad to see, that unlike in 2001, maps have been released prior to a conference committee. And we are pleased that some level of data has been released to allow for public review. However, more time and information is needed to ensure voters can look at a variety of issues that matter to them more than partisan breakdown – communities of interest, competitive nature of districts, etc.

As part of the Michigan Redistricting Collaborative, the Center for Michigan recently conducted community conversations to inform Michigan citizens about redistricting, hear their views on it, and discuss how they can get involved in the process. Community conversations took place in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Livonia and Traverse City. More than 200 people voiced their opinions on the redistricting process by voting on questions posed to the group.

When asked about their priorities for how legislative districts are drawn, 88% said that transparency is very important to them. Another question asked participants what process would be best, only 3% said the current process is best, compared to 34% that indicated support for a new legislative system with more transparency, public hearings, clear map rationale and 63% that said they would prefer a non-partisan redistricting commission independent of legislature.

With public support for transparency, we encourage you to build on your action to date by:

- Posting redistricting plans (including data behind maps) to be available on the Legislature's web site for 30 days before passage.
- Holding at least two committee meetings (in each chamber) to receive testimony about the plan.
- Holding at least four public hearings around the state to allow direct comment by the public.
- Providing a statement for each district explaining how the boundaries were drawn and how the district has been changed.

Our request is simple. We are asking for meaningful dialogue on an issue that will impact communities for the next ten years. However, for meaningful dialogue to occur, the public must be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the legislature's redistricting plans. We are asking you not to rush this process.

These simple steps would allow for redistricting plans to be more transparent, open and accountable to the public. Other states already are taking the lead in this matter, and giving the people a bigger say in redistricting. Iowa and about nine others have taken steps to reduce partisan legislative redistricting. Now it's time for Michigan to take that step.

Considering the significant impact of these plans, there is no need to rush a process that happens only once every ten years and is not required to be completed until Nov. 1.