

**North Carolina Congressional Redistricting  
League of Women Voters Testimony  
July 7, 2011**

- Chairmen and distinguished members, thank you for holding this meeting.
- The League of Women Voters of North Carolina applauds the Senate and House Redistricting Joint Committee on its scheduling of state-wide public hearings to receive citizen input regarding how redistricting will impact them and their communities. But holding hearings is not enough; those hearings must give citizens effective opportunities to change parts of proposed maps that raise concerns under the Voting Rights Act and other issues.
- The League also applauds the Committee for honoring its commitment to post redistricting information on the General Assembly's website.
- In North Carolina and across the country, the League has worked for many decades to promote transparent and accountable democratic processes and has fought to put an end to the hyper-partisan practices that too often negatively impact the way our government functions. Nowhere is this truer than in the redistricting process that takes place after each Census.
- Redistricting is an issue that goes to the heart of our democratic system of government. Representative democracy depends on voters freely choosing their elected officials. When, instead, officials choose their voters, our system does not work as intended.
- The League of Women Voters of North Carolina supports redistricting of the Congressional and state legislative districts by apportionment primarily according to population. We believe that districts should be single-member, competitive, contiguous and fully reflect the diversity of the state as well as maintain communities of interest.
- In the short time since the Committee released its Congressional plan last week, the League and its partners have worked diligently to gain input from interested communities across the state.
- Based on that feedback and our analysis, the League must express its deep concerns regarding the proposed Congressional map.
- First, despite claims to the contrary, this map represents a dramatic departure from existing Congressional districts. Needlessly moving voters just to achieve partisan gain can create great confusion and instability to the electoral process. If adopted, it would dramatically shift partisan control in the state and all but guarantee Republican candidates' success while stripping many voters of their ability to truly influence the outcome of elections. This is a classic gerrymander.
- Second, as with the proposed state legislative maps, black voters have been placed into majority-minority districts at percentages greater than what is required by the Voting Rights Act for black voters to elect their preferred candidates. As a result, minority voters are packed into two districts where their votes are "wasted", whereas they could have been placed in adjoining districts where black voters could have been afforded an opportunity to elect their candidate of choice or play an effective or influential role.

- Overall, this proposed plan appears to have used the Voting Rights Act as an instrument to weaken rather than strengthen the ability of minority voters to elect candidates of choice. The proposed gerrymander will make it more difficult for minority voters in the state to make their voices heard in Congress and open the door for near-certain court challenges. For example:
  - The proposed plan significantly increases the black population in Districts 1 and 12, the two current effective majority-minority districts, but does not consider the creation of additional districts in which minority voters could elect a candidate of choice .
  - District 1 was a district that did not need to be changed very much to comply with the equal population (one-person, one-vote) requirement. Rather than maintaining the core of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District and modifying that district simply to meet the one-person, one-vote requirement, the new map takes significant population out of District 1 and extends the District west to Raleigh. In doing so, it leaves black voters from five Voting Rights Act-covered counties (Craven, Wayne, Washington, Gates and Beaufort), worse off than before by stripping them of their ability to elect a candidate of their choosing.
  - The proposed District 12, represented by Congressman Melvin Watt (D), increases the black voting age population percentage from 42.4% to 50.54%, even though the district was already providing black voters with an effective opportunity to elect their preferred candidate to office. This increase in black voting age population was not necessary to comply with the Voting Rights Act, and in fact “packs” black voters into the district and “wastes” their votes from playing an effective role in other districts. .
- By abandoning traditional redistricting principles to achieve African American voting age populations over 50% in Districts 1 and 12, it seems that the Committee has used race as an overriding factor in formulating the proposed map such that its proposal rationally cannot be understood as anything other than an effort to assign voters to districts on the basis of race.
- The League urges the Committee to more fully consider the impact of their proposal on minority voters and other communities across the state and provide voters with a full explanation as to how it arrived at this proposal and to further explain how the proposed map complies with the Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Constitution.
- Furthermore, we encourage the Committee to fully consider all citizen-drawn map proposals. Such maps improve the redistricting process by increasing public involvement, deepening leaders’ understanding of the communities they represent, and strengthening proposed plans so that they may better withstand legal challenges.
- In particular, we urge the Committee to consider the proposal presented by the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, which incorporates thoughtful feedback from community organizations from across the state and demonstrates how a final redistricting plan could preserve the cores of existing districts, avoid diluting the voting strength of minority voters, and also maintain partisan balance and fairness across the state.
- Understanding that the legislature is under tight time constraints to complete its work, the League nevertheless requests that you take the full breath of public feedback, including alternative map proposals, into consideration before adopting any final redistricting plans.
- Thank you for this opportunity.