



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS<sup>®</sup>  
OF VIRGINIA**

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Our Redistricting Committee has alerted us that a number of bills have been introduced in the General Assembly in Richmond on the topic of redistricting. We are asking League members to contact their Delegates and Senators to support reform of redistricting in line with the current LWVVA position on reapportionment/redistricting. It will almost surely take a lot of public pressure to move the General Assembly on this issue. Please call or email or write your representatives, bring up this issue if you see them in person, and even discuss it with your non-League friends and family.

The information below will help you to phrase your arguments in support of our position:

***Current LWVVA Position on Reapportionment/Redistricting***

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports the establishment of a Reapportionment Commission for each decennial redistricting to prepare a plan for submission to the legislature as specified by the Virginia Constitution. The Commission should be bi-partisan and be composed of individuals who are not elected officials; they should represent the diverse geographical interests of the state, and consist of an uneven number of members.

In addition to the Virginia constitutional requirement of equal population, contiguous and compact districts and the Voting Rights Act requirements for protecting the voting strength of minority groups, the League supports the following considerations in redistricting:

Natural geographic boundaries;  
Jurisdictional boundaries; and  
Communities of interest. (1985)

***Some Talking Points about the Need for Redistricting Reform***

- The League of Women Voters has a long history of fighting against attacks on the basic constitutional right to fair and equal representation guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution. Leagues have worked vigorously across the country to secure representative redistricting plans in their states after each census and are seeking reforms to assure that the redistricting process is nonpartisan, equitable and open. These are core rights for citizens of a free and democratic nation. They are core rights for the citizens of Virginia.

- The current system of redistricting in Virginia encourages partisan gerrymandering, which creates seats so politically skewed that the opposition has little chance of unseating the incumbent. This subverts the democratic system because it allows politicians to choose their voters, rather than vice versa. This turns representative government upside-down.
- As has been the case nationwide, partisan gerrymandering has severely reduced the number of competitive seats in Virginia. When legislators redistrict to protect incumbents, then challengers are reluctant to invest their time and money in a nearly impossible challenge. In 2003, the number of competitive seats in Virginia was four of 40 in the Senate and nine of 100 in the House of Delegates. Sixty-nine Delegates had no major party opponent. This means that more than two-thirds of the Delegates did not face any major party opposition in 2003. The numbers in 2005 showed only a slight improvement. More than half of the candidates (51) for the House of Delegates ran unopposed and in an additional nine seats, there was only minor-party opposition. Thus, three-fifths of the Delegates did not face any major party opponent. Only twelve of the races for the 100 Delegate seats turned out to be competitive (races won with 55 percent of the vote or less).
- In the 2004 and 2006 congressional races in Virginia, only one of eleven seats was competitive.
- The lack of contested and competitive districts has contributed to a decreasing voter turnout in Virginia. The voter turnout for statewide and House of Delegates elections in 1997 was 49.5 percent; in 2001, it was 46 percent. In 2005, only 45 percent of Virginia's registered voters participated in the statewide and House of Delegates elections, continuing a pattern of slow decline. The turnout in the 2003 House of Delegates elections, when there were no statewide races, was 31 percent. The 52.66 percent turnout in the recent 2006 heavily contested U.S. senatorial election is a marked contrast to the 39 percent turnout in 2002 when an incumbent U.S. Senator was contested by only two little-known candidates.
- One of most significant effects of partisan gerrymandering – in Virginia as elsewhere in the country -- is its contribution to the increasing polarization in legislative bodies. As quoted in *Does Your Vote Really Count*, “with little reason to fear voters, representatives increasingly cater to party insiders and donors rather than to the political center. . .; bipartisan compromise around moderate policies takes a backseat to party loyalty, resulting in historic levels of polarization.” This is certainly true of the Virginia General Assembly in recent years.